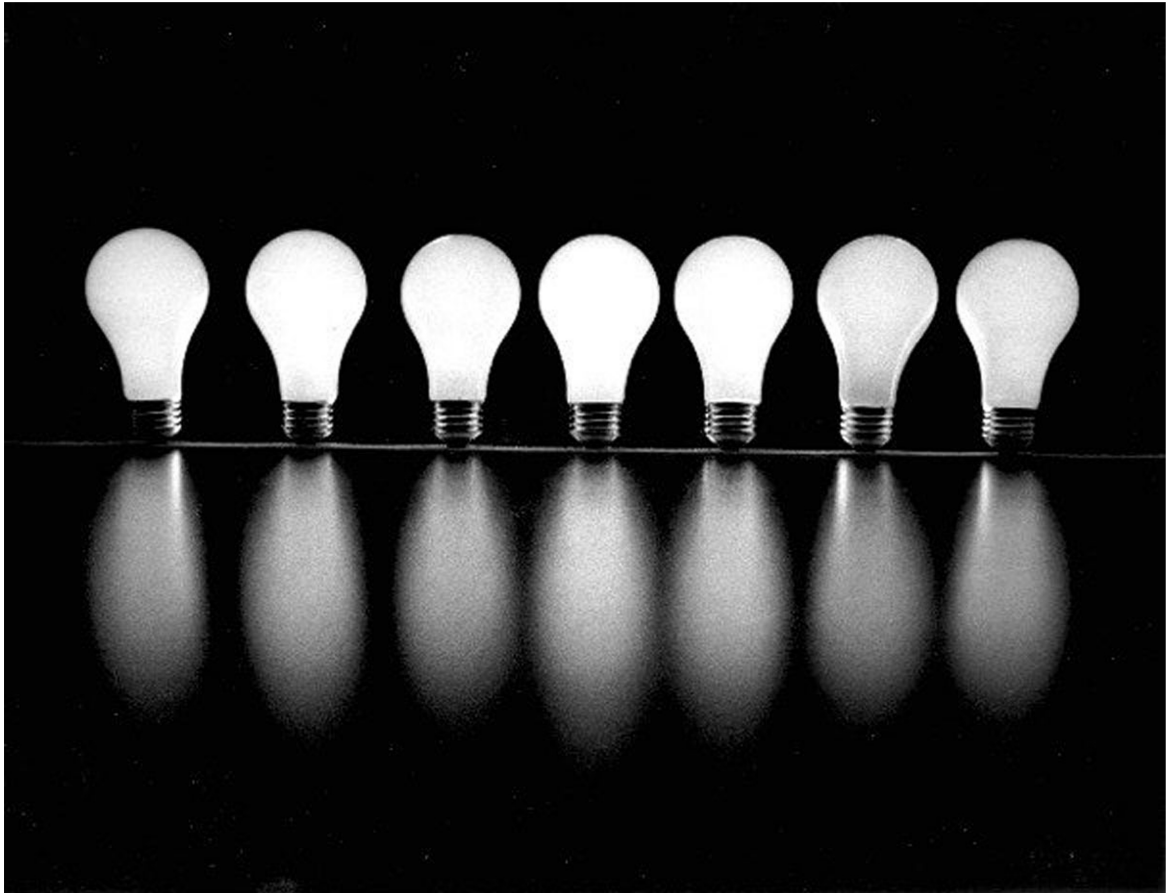


Prologue 2008



Untitled

Silver Gelatin Print, Ann Lawton

University of Wisconsin - River Falls

Literature and Art Magazine

Front Cover: Hand Series, Stone Lithography by Angela Young
Back Cover: Self-Portrait, Fibers by Julie R. Fischer



Untitled

Porcelain, Margaret Haden

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Prologue 2008

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The English Lounge: A Place of Lessons
Don Newman

The English lounge is full of Squirrels
who jibber and jabber like little girls
and frivolously chase one another's bushy tails
from couches to desks and along chalk rails.
They trip through their thoughts like a man down a stair,
aimlessly tumbling without any care.
You'll say something serious; they'll turn it into a joke:
These Rascals! These Jesters! These silly folk!
But through it all, one can't really blame them;
to shackle their minds would be like to maim them.
For it is this same childishness in which questions are posed:
like searching for nuts, answers are nosed.
And eventually we come to find their jabbering useful,
even if in the beginning it seemed quite abusive.



Phosphorescent Epiphany Austin D. Brigman

trebuchet
Lindsay Hutton

this growing river between our grounds
once tempted to drink and drive,
but self-destruction at its best
has weathered at my pride.
so as you sink beneath your welled
up pretensions and forgoes,
i reside so fine behind taped lines
and resign to viewed crimes of yours.
gather up the battered hearts
you strew about the floor,
as you slowly veered into the sign
that read "caution: courage road."
see how beer bought neon lights
look in those [broken glass]y eyes,
a pained distraction from the glare
of regrets and ticking time.
shake my head in pitied shame
of what i wished so much to save,
but you dashed beyond my yellow lamps
and threw around my name.
so i turn and leave your mangled scene,
and past the mess of flesh,
where the half-held words you swore to once
die rightly in your chest.

Death Smells Like Roses (segmented essay)
Annaka Isenberger

In the family business of flowers, death meant life. The end of their lives meant the stability of ours. Funerals were our bread and butter. To me, death smelled like roses.

“His name? Uhh . . . I don’t remember. But he’s the one that had the casket spray of all yellow and orange lilies, chrysanthemums, zinnias and orange gladiolas. Remember? We used the end of that strange orange ribbon that we thought we’d never get rid of in it.”

“How did he die?” I used to ask my mother as my tiny frame looked into the casket, staring at the chest of the body within it, swearing that it would rise with breath if I stared long enough. My mother never looked up from her work when we delivered flowers to the funeral home, but she listened to every word I rambled off. She knew exactly what questions were next: “What was his name?” followed by “Did you know him, Mom?” It was always the same set of questions even though the answers never made a difference in my naïve mind. I saw hundreds upon hundreds of dead bodies every year, but they all looked the same. As I grew older and began understanding the complexity of death, I started to remember the people, not by name, but by flowers we arranged for their funerals. People’s deaths became memories of living arrangements.

While the smell of death strikes fear in the heart of most, the calming, sweet smell of roses chases that fear from my own.

Each funeral that came to us came with the story of lives. They were told through family and friends, telling us stories about the departed as if talking about them soothed the deep wounds of grief. I heard the most heart-wrenching stories of their deaths, the funniest stories of their younger days, and the most inspiring stories of their lives. To the family, we were just kind strangers who listened—a dumping zone of memories—but what they didn’t know was that we were taking those stories and using them to make a personalized composition of flowers, ribbon, and words to echo the song that their spirit once sang.

Red

He was an army veteran, a man who knew the casualties of war firsthand. Having dodged the bullets and bombs and taking aim at the enemy himself, he lived through more fear and courage than most could imagine. He fought in World War II with the best of them. November 11th every year, he volunteered his time and talents to recite the epic poem “Flanders Field” at the Veteran’s Day program, adorned in the Army uniform that still fit snugly around his six-foot frame. During one specific line of the poem, he shed a single tear in memory of his friends, fallen in combat, the thought that he had made it home while their bodies had been laid to rest on the battlefields still resting heavily in his heart. Red. They wanted blood-red roses to drape where his crippled legs lay. The flag of the nation he fought so valiantly for veiled the deep cherry wood casket. The flowers that made up the large casket spray arrangement were to be pure red. The family also wanted a form of a cross to be coated in white carnations, Casablanca lilies, and blue delphiniums along with rusted roses, a beautiful montage to celebrate his loyalties to his country. The only thing that did not drip crimson was the Purple Heart medal, enclosed in a symphony of deep purple irises, violets, and a single sounding trumpet of a white lily. He was a man of great conviction, a provider for his family and his nation. Although he had survived the battlefields of the 1940s, he fell victim to the war that is cancer.

Pink

She was to be a mother first and foremost. After discovering a baby was on the way, she put her education aside. Having a family was her first priority, even though her husband objected. A baby girl was ripped from her womb after twenty-six hours of tumultuous labor. Mother and daughter fought for life, but both lost. Pink. They wanted the gloriously feminine shades of pink roses to cascade across the mother and her still infant that lay in her arms. Sprigs of lisianthus and the softest heather were to fill in between the cotton-candy colored Bianca roses. A large heart of star-gazer lilies and a multitude of amaranth roses stood beside the head of the casket with a miniature version of the same heart and same flowers huddled close to it. The softness of the pink heather and the rose petals mirrored the soft blush of her face. She was a mellifluous and kindhearted woman who put others before herself. That was her cause of death; she had tried to save the baby instead of herself, leaving them both cradled in the arms of danger.

Yellow

He was a man who worked the fields with pride, planting a rotational horde of sweet corn, hay, and oats. He was never one for flowers, save one, the sunflower. He had a secret love for that flirtatious outsized face. Instead of corn one year, he decided to grow a field of sunflowers. Yellow. They decided to have him bask in the sunlight of antique gold. Sunflowers, daffodils, ranunculus, and chrysanthemums shone brightly over his cotton shirt and overall covered body, mimicking the cozy warmth of the sun one last time, even though it was late winter. In the midst of the goldenrod blanket was a cornucopia spilling out gourds and vegetables. Even in death, the old man's skin displayed a distinctive farmer's tan across his upper arms and circled his creased neck. His hands, holding a yellow-gemmed rosary, were still stained from years of working the land. The earth was his friend. When he fell, it caught him. That's where they found him. His heart lay in the fields that he left behind.

Orange

She was a tomboy, filled with the strength and will of an Amazon. She wore her school colors with as much pride as the scars that stretched across her eighteen-year-old skin. Scars were her trophies. Basketball was her passion and the entire town knew of it. Although her talent was not as great as others, the fire in her eyes blazed the same color of orange that shaded the number 17 on her jersey. Orange. They wanted an array of orange flowers to harmonize with the basketball that lay under her left arm and the school jersey she wore. A shocking hue of that color was to divert the attention from the gruesome and poorly covered scars from the car accident. A jumble of Asiatic lilies, orange roses and alstroemeria were arranged to lie over her petite casket. Even though she was more interested in mud than flowers, the young girl was surrounded. Every inch on the floor around her athletic body was crowded with arrangements, each fighting for a space to honor her memory. A young life, not ready to live by other's rules and stipulations, ended in passion. She was fervent towards her goals. So when she was ordered to stay away from the girl she loved, she got behind the wheel of that orange car and drove it into a stranded oak tree. Her fiery-orange passion drove her to the end of her life.

Purple

She was as unruly and as extroverted as they come. In conversation a person would never guess that she was over ninety years old. She spoke freely on any subject without reservation, especially on the color purple, her favorite. Even her everyday perfume was lilac. She wanted that color to be spread everywhere, believing it spread joy to the world around her. Although her mouth ran a close second, her most distinctive feature was that eggplant-colored hair that grew as uncontrollably as the wild lavender that sprouted around her home. As a

teacher in her younger years, she taught her students more than reading, writing, or arithmetic; she taught them how to live vibrantly, like the color purple. Purple. They wanted her funeral flowers to be exactly what she would have wanted; nothing but the vivacious shimmer of amethyst to surround her one last time. A plethora of soft lavender roses, intense violets and irises, African daisies, lilacs, and lisianthus were arranged in a collection of assorted shapes and sizes. Her wisteria blouse and orchid-colored suit jacket harmonized with the soft purple lining of her lavender casket. Her surroundings were as lively and as sweet smelling as she once was. Her death was the only peaceful thing that ever happened to her.

Everything

She lived for her family. Seven children over the span of twenty years kept her busy, but she always had time for her garden. Her patch of fresh flowers was just an extension of that big country family that she helped grow. Whether she was in the kitchen or in the garden, she wore the same salmon-pink dress and a homemade apron. After her husband died, her garden grew. She spent more and more time in the vast rectangular patch of black dirt that her husband had created for her. She grew everything that there was to grow. There was not a flower in existence that she did not love. Everything. They wanted an entire garden to be around the fragile frame that the Alzheimer's Disease had left behind. Instead of the usual casket spray to cover the bottom half of the honey-oak casket, they chose to have one of the many quilts that she had made over her lifetime and have a long, narrow pot filled and arranged as wildly as possible. Nothing was to look uniformed or planned. No tags. No cards. No ribbons. There were no exceptions on what flowers to be used. They wanted anything that could be seen in her garden: Gladiolas, lilies, delphiniums, sunflowers, daisies, alstreomaria, tulips, hydrangeas, morning glories, and of course, the roses. Every flower in every color was mixed in a beautiful and uninhabited form as if growing back in the soft dirt of the country home where she had lived for over fifty years. Although the disease had left her mind blank of the names and memories of her life that once filled her, the knowledge that she was surrounded by the sweet memory of her garden soothed the stinging prick of despair for her family. Her mind may have been void in her last breaths of life, but her death was bounteous.

Nothing

She was a woman with nothing. No husband. No children. No home. She had been living in the nursing home for the last six years of her life. The only visitors she ever had were members of the private school's choir when they came to sing for the residents at Christmas time. Nothing. There were to be no flowers at her funeral. There was to be no funeral. There was no grieving family or friends to order anything in her memory. There was only one small plant ordered; a request by a nurse who had taken care of her. But since there was no family to claim the small token of affection, it in turn was donated to the nursing home. How could she have died? She never lived.

Through the deaths of many, I became educated in life. Every story that came with an order turned into a vivid memory of my own. As I reached adulthood, I began to focus more on the lives of the dead while the families and friends were consumed by their deaths. While they were grieving, I was learning. I was being taught how to live with the kind of qualities that people not only remember, but revere in high esteem.

I want to live red, courageous and full of honor. I want to live pink, kindhearted and willing to sacrifice my life for another. I want to live yellow, full of pride and hardworking. I want to live orange, bursting with passion and ready to fight for what makes me happy. I want to live purple, vivacious and vibrant, ready to teach the world how to live life to the fullest. I want to live with the appreciation of having everything, even when I feel as though I have nothing. I swear by the light, I will live with color. I will live with color . . . for them.



Hands

Stone Lithography, Angela Young

Zombie Apocalypse (short story)
Matt Loosbrock

It wasn't how the living room looked that bothered her. It was the smell. Claire tried to ignore the dozens of odors lingering among the stacks of Domino's Pizza boxes, white boxer shorts, or within the brown plaid couch in front of her. Mold, sweat and body spray fused together in a storm of tainted air. She sneezed, bringing her small hands to her mouth and dropped her purse. Lipstick, cash, and credit cards spilled onto the shag carpeting where she stood, blue waves of fiber swallowing the red handbag, something bought a few months back in a bargain bin to use tonight. It matched her dress. Carefully, she put her belongings back in the bag, avoiding too much contact with the ground.

"What are you doing?" The voice startled her. She dropped her phone again, the jewels decorating it lost their sparkle in the carpet. She rose to see a shirtless man looking at her across the room. Really, she wanted to laugh. His frail, pale torso didn't impress her and matched the cigarette hanging out of his mouth.

"I'm waiting for Todd," Claire said, brushing her amber hair out of her eyes.

"Oh yeah, the blind date," he said. He inhaled his cigarette, pink lips hugging the filter like a twelve year-old boy sipping through a straw, and tipped his silver Detroit Lions cap up, trying to peer through his shaggy red bangs.

"How'd you get in here?" he asked.

"I knocked several times, but know one answered," said Claire. "It's raining." He kept staring at her, or at least she thought he was; his hair covered his eyes like a visor, the kind a quarterback would wear to keep his focus a secret.

"Todd's in the shower, probably masturbating. He'll be done soon," he said. He walked toward her, but plopped onto the sofa and clicked the TV on. The couch looked like it was swallowing his small body, a mas-

sive brown beast eating a white man in blue jeans. Claire remained in place, her hands clutching her handbag, scowling at the stranger. Who was he? She assumed a roommate, or a brother. He hadn't introduced himself.

"I'm Claire," she said.

"Hey Claire," he said, eyes unmoved from the TV screen. She decided to forget knowing his name. He flipped through the channel for a minute before settling on a *When Animals Attack* program.

"So," he said, without moving, "you excited about your date?"

"Yeah," said Claire. She wasn't. Her Aunt Judy had set her up with Todd, a nephew of a friend. In fact, she denied her aunt's proposal several times before giving in, if only to stop her aunt's nagging. The stranger chuckled. Not like a full blown laughter, but more of a "Huh."

"What?" Claire asked.

He turned and looked at her.

"You're not excited. I don't blame you. What are you, like a size four?"

"Excuse me?" she said.

She was a six.

"I'm just saying," he said, "you're way out of his league. I'd be pretty pissed too."

A slight grin emerged on Claire's face.

"You know," she said, "smoking will kill you."

He lifted the cigarette to his mouth and inhaled, keeping his gaze on her. He breathed out his nose, allowing a stream of gray smoke erupt from his nostrils.

"It's all right," he said, "I'll quit when the zombie apocalypse arrives. That way, I'll have enough lung capacity to outrun them."

Her smile ran away. The half-naked creature switched his attention back to the TV, showcasing a polar bear lunging at an old woman. Decayed remnants of Chinese take-out boxes lined the entertainment center, lo mien noodles oozing over the sides. And he laughed. He sat forward with his elbows on his knees watching animals snarl and tear through flesh. Claire stood in a strange land, closing her eyes. If her date was not wearing a buttoned shirt, she was leaving.



Unravelled

Wood Cut Relief, Lauren Fechner

Cigarette Community
Sara Allsop

A quarter hour break from Hello Dolly practice leads
to the tunnel under the highway.
A dingy, dark and secluded garrison.
It's almost dress rehearsal and costumes adorn the leads.

The sight of Dolly flirting with Cornelius
while Horace lights Minnie Fay's cigarette might
be too much for the blue-haired women who live
across the street. The sanctuary for uncool high
schoolers, made slightly more popular due
to leading roles. Horace's dreadlocks don't look quite
as cool as he wants them to and Dolly knows
she looks awkward smoking, but
they do it anyways.

James Dean would feel at home.
Irene would light his cigarette.
If James didn't have one, hands would come out offering
Marlboro 100's, Camel Turkish Gold, Luckies.
Irene has stopped bothering to offer her Menthols.
Our *Rebel Without a Cause* star is the only one
who really looks the part. Funny;
the angst ridden high school kids look unrelated, fake and strange
beside the black and white image of a martyred movie star.
A cigarette dangling from his lip,
a drop of spit is the only thing holding the dry
rod from gravity's tender pull.

Dolly stubs out her cigarette on the wall.
She writes a short word with the ash.
Why she wrote "we" she doesn't know.
Horace, Irene, Minnie Fay and Cornelius add
more letters with their finishes cigarettes.
"We're Real."

Dolly pushes up her ruffled sleeves,
looks at her Timex watch,
"It's time to head back in."
They follow and Dean stays behind.
He reads the note with petulance.
He gets in his fast car and drives away.

Miles Away
Shannon Knutson

Tucked away
She can hide there
To think of the memories
And the one she lost
Only in this place, she lets herself remember
No one will know
No one to stop her from walking backwards
There is comfort in the past where she lives

He buries himself in his new life
And tries not to think of
What he left behind,
Thoughts distract him
The more he tries to forget,
He runs from the past but
Never finished letting go,
And the house is empty
When he comes home

He goes to sleep every night
On the right side of the bed

Miles away
She sleeps on the left.



A Light Chicago Walk Peter Odlaug

All to Hell (short story)
Christie Washam

He woke up.
The ceiling was leaking.
Drip.
Drip.
Onto the cot just next to his head.
His breath hung in the air as if it were frozen there, clouds building on clouds with each exhale.
He shivered, pulled his jacket—what was left of his jacket—tighter to his body, crossed his arms over his chest and brought his knees up as though he were a baby lying in cold, damp, hell of a womb.
This was not new.
He had already survived four years of this.
A *bang clang clunk* erupted in the hallway, an invisible noise but he knew what it meant. Another *bang clang clunk*. Then another. The noise grew louder, more intrusive, until a pinhole of light appeared on the

wrought iron cell door. An eye, grey, demure, past its prime, stared in at him before the *bang clang clunk* routine was performed. The door opened; a tray of stale bread, molded potato and cheese, and a half a link of blood sausage was left on the floor followed by a tin cup of brownish water. He didn't move until the door had shut again, then he slowly unwound himself, opened his eyes, and sat up.

He stood, shivered, tip-toed to the tray, bent, picked it up, returned to the cot, sat down.

Stale bread, molded potato and cheese, and a half a link of blood sausage.

If he had been properly Irish like the others, this may have been a sustaining meal.

He may have even had cause to look forward to it each morning. As it were, he was not properly Irish. He was Caribbean Irish. Blood sausage was to him as foreign as maize to the others. He had been raised on guava, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, shrimp, and chili peppers. Beggars cannot be choosers though, can they? he thought to himself bitterly. Four years of the same breakfast and one learned to get used to it. It was either that or starve.

He may have done himself more favor to starve.

It seemed so long ago now. Ten years since he'd seen the place he grew up. He could barely remember what the warm salty air felt like and the blue, blue Caribbean Sea looked like, could barely remember the sensation of hot, white sand between his toes on Sunday mornings when Mass was held on the beach, held there because the plantation owners had outlawed Catholicism. Himself and the other children, African converts and others Irish as he, running in the surf, playing hide and seek, being children, if only for one day.

He had been born into slavery. His mother was Irish, from the fatherland, stolen off the road between Killybegs and Donegal in plain daylight. She'd been just a girl of eleven or twelve at the time, barely old enough herself to remember the land she was born of. She could teach him little of what it meant to be Irish. His father was an enigma. She told him when he was a child that he had died; when he was older she told him he'd been sold to a different master. The truth, however, revealed itself when it could no longer be kept secret.

It had happened during a hurricane and the slaves had been allowed to seek shelter in the house cellar with the family while outside the wind ravaged the island. She was young with orange tresses and snow white skin and though she'd been only a child when she was taken from Ireland her rebellious Celtic fire was still pronounced. The master had been making eyes at her since she'd turned sixteen, since she'd grown into herself. He asked her to come with him up to the kitchen to fetch some water and whiskey to keep everyone calm that night. Amid the torrent, the children had started to wail. She followed diligently, thinking nothing amiss. When they were out of earshot of the crowd in the cellar, in the darkness of the house, lightning flashing and thunder rolling and menacing wind whistling through the seams in the doors and windows, he pushed her over the table. He told her she was the prettiest girl he'd ever laid eyes on.

And he raped her.

Nine months later she gave birth to a small baby boy, just five pounds. She named him Seanan, as close as she could figure to the Irish word for lightning bolt.

He was the spitting image of his father, of the Lord. They shared beech wood brown hair and eyes as blue and shining as the water in the cove. As he came of age his face angled more sharply in nearly the exact same way as the Lord. Both had arching brows and narrow chins, with effeminate but slightly knocked noses.

He was half Irish, half English, and all Red Leg.

He had been lucky, though, if luck is what you would call it. The Lord was a kind enough man to bring his mother and him out of the fields where nothing but death for the white slaves was waiting. He gave her a job as a housemaid and Seanan a job in the stables. He never claimed the boy, however, and in time Seanan became consumed with the need to prove his worth to his father. Upon his eighteenth birthday he was awarded his freedom and he immediately went to the town hall and enlisted with navy, with the East India Company. And he set sail around Cape Horn to the Far East.

To make a name for himself and make his father proud.

It was a world away now, maybe two.

He was in London now.

He was in prison with little hope of ever going back to Antigua to collect the plot of land he'd been entitled to when he was set free. There was little to go back to there, but even something small was more than he had now. His mother had died of disease not long after he set sail and the plantation house had been destroyed by fire, the Lord and Lady deciding to migrate north to America.

Seanan was a survivor.

That was his curse.

"O'Daire," a thick, low, heavily accented voice which made his surname sound like Ah Dahray instead of Oh Dahrah, growled through the pinhole in the doorway. "Up with you. Clean out your pail."

Seanan got to his feet without saying a word and picked up his waste pail. The door opened. He avoided eye contact and followed the guard down the corridor to a draining spot where he was to toss the waste and wash out the pail. He did so and slogged back to be locked into his cell for the remainder of the day. Tomorrow he would have time in the yard, but today he would sit on his straw cot and count the bricks until the light dimmed and uneasy sleep washed over him.

He was doing just that, his knees pulled up to his chest, his arms wrapped around them in an effort to keep at least some warmth in him, his chin resting on his arms, cocked slightly to the side when the door opened unexpectedly. Two men in uniforms bearing the insignia of the East India Company appeared.

"Seanan O'Daire, on your feet."

He got up, his hands manacled, and he was pushed out of the cell and shuffled down the opposite corridor than the one he'd traversed to clean his pail. He knew better than to ask what was going on; he knew he wouldn't get an answer. He knew there were two directions a convict could go from this end of the wing. To the underground chambers where the torturing was done—he could hear moans of anguish echoing through the corridor now. He had only had the misfortune to be taken that way once, upon his arrival in London from India, when they thought perhaps he was privy to a mutinous plot against the Company. The scars from the leather whips were still prominently etched into his back, but he could consider himself lucky that was all he had been forced to endure. The other direction was the Governor's office. He had also been there on one occasion, on his second anniversary of his arrival in the prison. The Governor had wished to hear his tale of his time in India, but Seanan did not divulge much.

He was led down the latter path, toward the Governor's office though he got the impression that this would not be a cordial meeting between himself and the Warden. That would not require the presence of the chaps in their EIC uniforms. In the Governor's office the Governor himself was nowhere to be seen, instead a man in a commodore's costume lounged behind the great wooden desk, examining with what looked like amusement a small figurine of an elephant.

"Sir, the prisoner you requested," one of the EIC soldiers announced. The Commodore looked up; his face was not familiar to Seanan. It was tanned from long years in the sun, and the white powdered wig was cropped close to his head in tight curls, a short ponytail trailing down the back. His eyes were dark, like holes, like the prison cell where Seanan had spent years. His lips were thin and pale against the tanned skin.

"O'Daire," The Commodore spoke, his accent ringing of the gentry. "My name is Commodore Athens. I am commander of three ships, including one you may recognize the name of, *The Ariana*. That was the ship you were registered to, was it not?"

"Aye sir, it was indeed," Seanan answered quietly, keeping his head down but glancing around the office nonetheless. The Governor had been a collector of Indian goods, figurines, art, books—and his office was full of all of these things and more.

"Your captain was Sir Ralph Hensley?"

"Aye sir."



Bundle of Jugs

Ceramics, Timothy Luedtke

“Captain Hensley was murdered last week in India. Do you know what that means?”

“No sir.”

“It means that you are the last surviving member of your crew. The twenty-seven others have been killed intermittently in the last four years. Strange, wouldn’t you say?”

Seanan lifted his eyes when he heard that. He stared the Commodore directly in the eyes and saw what it was the man wanted. He would not get it.

“Sir, it’s a dangerous job, sir.”

“Indeed. I was mulling over Captain Hensley’s ship logs when I came across a peculiar morsel of information. Four and a half years ago your ship was caught in a storm and washed up on an uncharted island. Most of your crew was killed by savages, but twenty-nine of you were spared. Why was that?”

“I don’t know sir.”

“You are being dishonest with me, boy. You know perfectly well why your lives were spared then. You discovered something, did you not? Something of tremendous spiritual value to the pagan savages and of tremendous worth to us civilized men.”

“We did not find anything but blood on that island, sir, and that is the truth.”

The Commodore sighed and studied the convict who stood before him. He was a small figure compared to the officer. Undernourished, dirty, teeming with lice. His hair was a shaggy mess of greasy brown tied back into a ponytail. His chin was covered in immature stubble. His eyes stood out most, permanently squinting from years under the Caribbean sun. His skin was tanner than the Commodore’s but appeared pale and blue at current-

his clothes were rags and he was visibly shaking in the chill of the London winter. He had undoubtedly not been in the company of direct sunlight in some time.

"You were born in Antigua, were you not?"

"I was, sir."

"You are Irish."

"Half, sir."

"Indeed, your mother was a slave and your father the plantation owner? It must have been difficult for you. And then to serve your sentence here—you are not acclimated to such weather, are you boy?"

Seanan did not reply.

"If you tell me what you found on that island and how to get there, I will personally see that you are pardoned, that you are put on a ship to the West Indies a free man. I will also remind you that I do not have to be enticing you. There are other ways of making men talk as I am sure you are well aware."

Seanan blinked and shifted his weight. He looked to the large window that let the overcast light in and framed a view of the smog-ridden London and the black Thames below. What was he protecting? Anyone with half a will to survive would have divulged the information the Commodore was seeking in an instant. He knew this was his opportunity to be set free, his only opportunity. He knew in his heart he would not survive another winter. The words to voice the information would not form in his head, would not roll from his tongue. There weren't words for it, what they found out there in the middle of the ocean. There should never be words for it. He stared at the Commodore, his mouth hanging open dumbly.

"My patience is waning O'Daire. I will give you until tomorrow to give me an answer or I will show you the other side of my personality." The Commodore stood to call for his men. Seanan floundered for words, no longer a matter of whether or not to tell the officer about the island, but a matter of how to get it out.

"Wait," he said finally. "I'll tell you, but I want to see a signed pardon first."

"Very well. I will have one ready in the morning. I am glad you are not as ignorant as so many of your kind."

Seanan flinched at that implication but did not linger on it. He did not associate himself with the Irish population. When it came down to it, he did not associate himself with any ethnicity, Irish, Anglo-Saxon, Caribbean. He associated as much with the African slaves as he did his EIC comrades.

The Commodore called for his men to escort Seanan back to his cell; however, it was instantly clear that his cell was not the destination they had in mind. For the first time in a long while, he struggled. Where were they taking him? Why? There was only one reason and it was an unfathomable one to him. He would rather die a slow and lonely death in jail.

He twisted and fought, but after years of malnourishment he had little strength in him and was easily restrained by the fit EIC soldiers. They bored of his struggling as they reached the front entrance and one of them gave him a blunt knock to the head, sending his spiraling into unconsciousness.

His dreams had grown hazy over the years. Four years in the grey monotonous jail with little contact with other prisoner leaves you numb. The first year or so the nightmares run high and vicious and every night you'd wake up sweating, your heart trying to escape your body, your lungs short of breath. Slowly the nightmares fade into a continuation of your waking life. He had had dreams at least twice a week of himself counting bricks for what seemed like hours on end.

Now however, for the first time in years, he was having a dream of a different sort. He was on a small sloop, the familiar smell of the ocean heavy in the air while the warm breeze touched his face like his mother's soft hands. On the horizon an island came into view, Antigua. Home. A feeling of mirth, of well being, of contentment, of relief built inside of him, sending a shiver of happiness down his spine to the very tips of his toes.

Home.

"Delouse him, cut his hair, put him in proper clothing. No one on my ship looks like a convict," the Commodore's voice dragged him from his slumber and reality drifted back into his consciousness. Where was he?

His eyes blinked several times, trying to focus. When they finally did, they found him in a room with thick floral wallpaper and an undisrupted bed. An inn no doubt. Hands wrapped around him, lifting him, stripping him of his clothing, lifting him again before dropping him in a metallic tub of steaming water.

"Christ, bloody Red leg paddy. Didn't think they could get any worse. 'parently I was wrong," a younger male voice than the one belonging to the Commodore said heavily as Seanan drifted back into unconsciousness, refusing to believe that this was reality and not just another dream. Give me that blue, blue sea, he wished as his eyes closed again.

This time the sensation of being on a ship was not just a figment of his imagination. Up. Down. Side to side. A seagull cawed in a discontent voice, loudly, nearby. He pushed his head back, leaning it against a wooden pillar connecting the floor to the ceiling. The staircase leading upwards to the main deck was aglow with sunlight. The offending seagull sat on one of the steps, staring at Seanan with beady black eyes. He found his arms were tied behind his back, around the pillar. He found that the familiar feeling of lice crawling and biting all around his skin was gone. He felt a wind blow across his face, his scalp surprisingly chilled, signifying that indeed, they had cut his hair. His clothes were not new, but they were not rags either. They fit on his small frame, slacks and a billowing cotton shirt.

A figure appeared at the top of the steps and the seagull took flight, disturbed. The figure sauntered closer and it was the Commodore.

"O'Daire, awake finally I see. I do hope you forgive me but once it was clear you did know something, I could not afford to wait a moment longer," the Commodore explained, stopped in front of Seanan, squatted, reached behind the young man and undid the knotted rope.

"Where are you taking me?"

"My boy, you are the only one left alive who has seen that island. The only one who knows where to find it."

"I'd rather you kill me sir," Seanan stated, running a hand over his head to see just how short his hair was—only a centimeter or two—now that his hands were free. The Commodore stood; Seanan followed him with his eyes.

"Yes well, unfortunately I need you alive. We've left London so I see no point of keeping you locked up. There is no escape from this ship but please, I am not a jailer, I hope you will find yourself comfortable while on board. Put on some weight, gather your strength. You will need it in the coming months."

Seanan said nothing. The Commodore reached down a hand in offering but Seanan rejected it, getting to his feet on his own accord, touching the sore spot on the side of his forehead where he had been hit. The Commodore retracted his hand and motioned instead for Seanan to proceed him out of the lower deck. The young man obliged and took the steps, letting the sun hit him gradually to allow his eyes the chance to adjust. The music of waves colliding with the hull of the boat, seagulls, the footsteps and chatter of the crew, all of it familiar and welcoming at first. Was he still on the Ariana? Captain Hensley, was he calling for extra rations of rum? Was that Wilkes singing a tune about a pretty whore he'd met in Portugal?

As his eyes adjusted he found an unfamiliar crew staring at him. Their voices were foreign, their mannerisms and demeanor unlike his old comrades. At the helm he saw a bespectacled grey man where Captain Hensley should have been standing. He blinked.

That's right.

Captain Hensley was dead.

They all were.

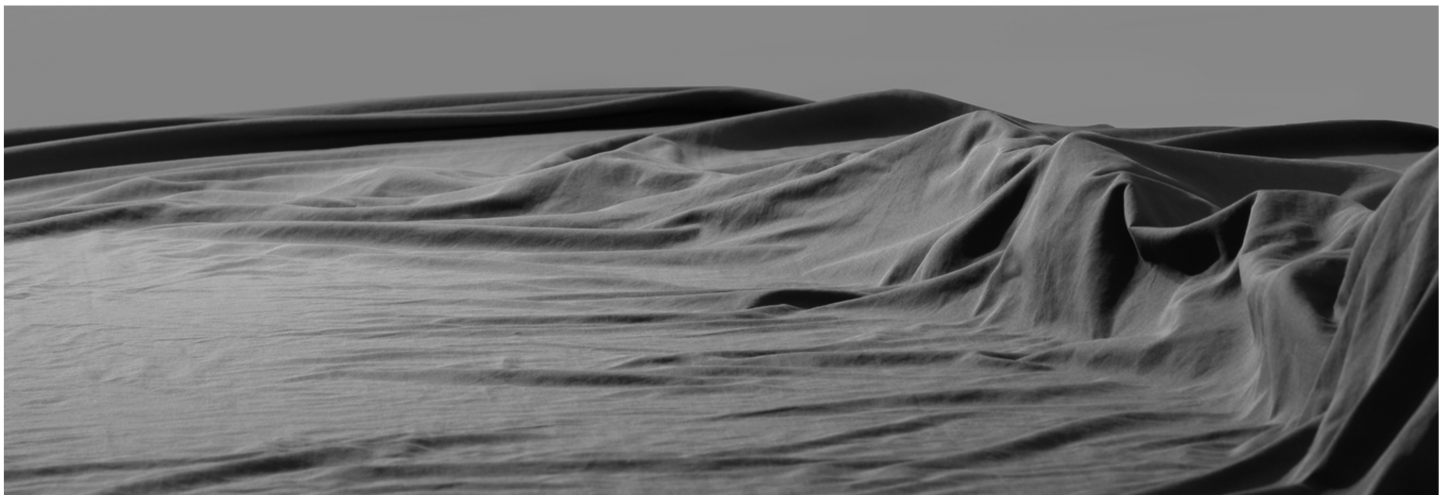
And now he was among strangers.

More dead men who didn't know it.

Sailing straight to Hell.

Watching From the Shore
Anita Lampert

Watching from the shore
The old hunched man's boat floated and danced
on the sea's waves like dry spring leaves
that were stiff from leaving the tree.
His hands pulling in the line shimmered
like the surfaces of dried fruit, the line pulling
through a crease in his hand that ran straight
when he curved his fingers into his palm,
a water-worn groove in bedrock.
The bobber he threw out, chipped and half sunk,
pulled heavily on the water, dipping on the waves
as the old man's head bobbed with the boat. The
wrinkled leather bootskin of his face split into shudders
of coughing, shaking the rod in his hand.
The drops of water from the sea slicked off his line,
some falling back to the sea, but others disappearing
into his dry porous skin. Even when he pulled the boat
onto the beach, the water fell off like loose clothing,
the wood looking as dry as it was that morning against his dry skin
The surface of the water swallowed his limp line
like cough syrup, viscous and lingering,
and the old man hunched again on the plank seat
of his boat. The bobber nudged the tip of his oars
as though grasping for life. A small bubble rose
and the bobber sank.



Sweeping Landscape

Photography, Joel Thorson

No Cars Go (short story)
Matt Loosbrock

It was after the main theme of Mozart's *Symphony #40* when Brian awoke to his phone's ring tone, a re-envisioned masterpiece of techno beats and electronic strings. He hated it, ears wincing when he received calls, especially at six in the morning. After suffering fifteen seconds longer, he threw off his bed sheets and went to answer it. It was cold for an August morning, although Brian was sleeping in his boxers, black ones spattered with yellow fortune cookies. Dirty laundry littered the ground, causing him to stumble as he reached his dresser. His hands found his glasses first and he put them on before picking up the phone. The blue screen read the name "Mom."

"Hello?" he said.

"Hi Brian," his mom said. "Did I wake you?"

He rubbed his eyes.

"Yeah, but it's okay. What's up?"

"It's grandpa," she said, "there were some complications with the surgery." Her voice drifted off, he could hear her trying to compose herself.

"What happened?"

"There was internal bleeding near the brain stem, he . . . he's brain dead."

His teeth clenched his lower lip. Moving backward, his legs found the bed. He sat down, rubbing his forehead.

"Brian?" his mom said. "Are you still there?" The phone was clammy and warm by his ear, like he'd been talking for hours

"Yeah," he said. "When?"

"Around midnight. I wanted to call, but I didn't want to wake you."

"Yeah, okay. What happens now?"

Silence. Brian hunched over, arching his back, and hugged himself with his free hand. He wanted to stay there, curled in defense, like a worm. But he knew better, straightening his back and combing his hair with his fingers.

"Mom?"

"You know him, he never liked being useless. Can you come down to the hospital? Are you working?"

"No, I mean, yeah. I can make it."

"Good," she said. "Good. He's at St. Andrew's, room 357."

"I'll be there."

The phone clapped shut, as did his mind. He sat there, tapping his fingers on knobby knees, a random, non-sense rhythm prodding in his head. It didn't make sense; the surgery was to prevent things from going wrong. He stood, stretching his arms until his back cracked and walked to the closet. There weren't many clean clothes in there, but he found an unrecognizable black sweater and took it off the hanger. It was soft, obviously not worn often, but he could not remember where he got it? An aroma hit his nostrils and provoked his memory. Stetson Sierra. His grandpa's favorite cologne.

It was Christmas morning, a few years back when Brian received it in a white box.

"That stuff will have you swatting girls off with a stick," his grandpa said. The black sweater sat at the bottom.

"I've never worn cologne before," Brian said. His grandpa touched his back. His paws were warm, and Brian could feel their roughness through his shirt.

“Well, it’s about time. You’re seventeen now, I think it suits you.”

“Thanks.”

Brian took the sweater off its hanger and put it on. The cotton caressed him, each thread lightly brushing his torso. It felt good. He turned to the mirror on the closet door and studied the reflection. He looked like a child; the sweater drowned him in over-sized blackness. The color only enhanced his pale skin, and the size exaggerated his skinny legs. The strong fumes of the cologne made it hard to breathe.

He took the sweater off, exchanging it for a green polo, and threw on jeans that were laying on the ground. Heading out of the bedroom, Brian walked into the kitchen and took the last clean glass out of the cupboard. Beneath grew a pile of dirty dishes from the past week. He opened the refrigerator, pushed aside a few beer bottles, and grabbed a half-empty carton of orange juice. As he poured himself a glass, he thought about something his grandfather had told him about oranges.

“The peel of the orange has the most nutrition,” his grandpa had said. It was ten years ago, Brian was eleven. He watched his grandpa peel the orange, his knife effortlessly tearing through the skin. His eyes were wrinkled, appearing as though his skin was cracking, but they were focused. And blue. Brian’s mother would often compare them to his own. When the orange was peeled, his grandpa cut a small piece of the skin and gave it to him.

“Gorillas love this stuff. Try it,” his grandpa said. Brian put the orange flesh in his mouth. It was bitter and chewy, like old bubble gum.

“This tastes bad,” Brian said, spitting it out in his hand. His grandpa smiled.

“Sometimes good things leave a bad taste.”

Brian smiled, remembering the orange his grandpa had given him then. He swallowed the juice, allowing its sweet flavor to touch every taste bud. When he finished, he put the glass on top of the unclean dishes, and put on shoes. He tied the laces, double-knotted, to avoid tripping on them. After brushing his teeth he went outside to his car, a blue Accord parked under a pine tree. Sap had fallen onto the windshield, making it sparkle under the sunlight peeking over the horizon. He cleaned it using glass cleaner he kept in the trunk, and when it was clear enough he got into his car and left the parking lot.

The roads were populated more than Brian had thought. Cars sped to and fro, passing as he traveled. He didn’t typically drive early on a Saturday morning, although he would occasionally wake up and visit a nearby park if he had difficulty sleeping. Aside from working at a local grocery store, Brian did odd jobs, mostly painting. He skipped going to college all together, unable to decide what he wanted to do after high school, and at times it kept him awake at night. Thoughts of going nowhere and growing deep roots into the present scared him. It seemed strange, considering that his grandpa had already enlisted in the Air Force at Brian’s age. Planes were his grandfather’s passion. Brian would think of him when a plane would fly overhead or if he saw one on TV or a movie. His grandfather’s den was decorated with models, photos, and books on aircrafts. When Brian was seven, his grandpa gave him a wooden plane he had crafted from scratch.

“Wow! Thanks Grandpa!” Brian had said. The wood was smooth in his small fingers as they grazed over it. Shades of light and dark brown streaked across the wings, making it appear like the model was flying standing still. His grandpa only smiled.

“I wish I could fly a plane,” Brian said. “I could go anywhere!” His grandfather’s smile left and he turned his head, revealing the thick lenses of his glasses.

“I know a place where no planes go,” his grandfather said.

Back then, Brian had not understood what his grandfather meant. But he did now. Dropping bombs in Korea is not a place anyone would want to go.

The hospital towered over as Brian approached it, a giant, modernized cathedral with a parking ramp. The mortar-like walls cracked and split, revealing layers of white paint and cement coated on top of one another. It appeared out of place with the rest of the city and its glass-fortified buildings, sky scrapers and neon lights. A billboard advertising Coor’s Light stood close to the hospital. The bikini models had their backs turned to it,

ooking outward and smiling. They faded out of view as the parking ramp swallowed Brian's car. He parked it in the ramp, within the sea of trucks and cars, and left for the elevator. The smell of medicine lingered as he entered it, stale and pungent, like iodine. He pushed the button to the third floor and leaned his body in the corner. The lights slowly moved from one floor to the next, like an old, rusted watch. The elevator beeped when he reached his floor.

The hallway was blank, tile and ceiling a glossy white, while pink and green scrubs crossed in front and back of him. They didn't know his grandfather, only what brought him, what medication to give, and Brian hated them for it, jealous of their ignorance. At the end of the hall was his stop. Giant letters reading "357" hung overhead. When he entered the room, sounds of heart rates, radiators, and pressurized air clogged his ears. The perimeter was packed with machines and equipment, most of which looked old with their green screens and yellowed plastic. In the center, on a flat white bed lay his grandpa. Nearing it, Brian noticed the life support machine, breathing heavily. It looked like a big slinky or an accordion, only silent. He saw a bag of urine hanging next to the bed, and a plastic container hooked to a tube that gathered feces. Brian closed his eyes. He did not want to be here. He wanted to run far from the hospital and pretend things were fine, things were decent, like they used to be. And with his eyes closed tight, he heard it.

"Brian . . ."

It was his grandpa's voice, not aloud, but in his head. It was six months ago, right after his grandfather's stroke and the news about the aneurism. They sat in his mom's living room, on a red sofa, Brian's right hand resting on his lap, his grandpa's on a black cane.

"It ain't easy, you know," his grandpa said.

"What's that?" said Brian.

"Growing old. It ain't for sissies."

Brian laughed, sitting forward with his elbows on his knees.

"Then again, not much is," his grandpa continued. "Don't worry too much. You'll figure it out."

Brian opened his eyes. His grandfather relaxed on the hospital bed in a white gown. Though his eyes were shut, his mouth hung open, like he was trying to speak. The silver hair was whiter than Brian remembered, as were the ones on his chest. His grandfather's hands were clasped together on his stomach. Brian touched his grandpa's elbow, slowly tracing his way down to his hands. They were warm and hardened as he put his underneath, his thumb massaging their palms. He thought about everything they had done, from building decks to giving bear hugs. And Brian's grew smaller. He pulled his arm back, put his hands in his pockets, and walked away.

It was mid-morning; the sun was reaching its highest peak as Brian hit the country roads back to his apartment. A cross road approached, the yellow traffic light turned red. With both hands on the wheel, Brian looked toward the open road. The empty horizon emitted a haze, warping the black pavement into a solid fire. He looked to his left and right. Cars were vacant, leaving Brian alone and waiting for his turn to go. In that precise moment, each traffic light flashed red, a freeze frame in time of one passage being given to another. Above him, in blank blue skies, a red plane flew with wings spread. As it passed over Brian's car, its shadow coating him in a lunar eclipse, it roared a lion's battle cry, and dusted the sky with jet stream ashes.



Dance

Photography, Alli Malkmus

A Microbiologist's Plate
Brittany Kershner

I need to move
To a new lab.
I gather
My tools for spreading bacteria
My lab book with my life's work
And most importantly,
My plates.
Colorful bacteria
On most.
The sustaining fruits
Of my labor.
I have a hard time
Juggling all of my plates,
As I move to my new lab.
I look at the floor.
Someone has dropped one of their
Plates
on the floor.
It looks like a
Myxobacteria or
Azotobacter.
Slime gobs and
Oozes,
Like the runny
Boogers from the
Nose of an
Infant.
Someone dropped their bacteria.
Someone with different priorities.

Now I will have to juggle
Extra plates to make up for the
Dropped plate.
My hands are already full
Of plates.
I dropped one yesterday
When arranging my priorities.
It wasn't a plate of bacteria:
They are too precious.
It wasn't the china plate
I use for entertaining
When I'm not in the lab.
It was a small, plastic plate,
With Winnie the Pooh on the
Edge.

It has a matching tippy cup.
Somewhere.
It shattered on the floor,
Destined to break long before
Yesterday.
It was brittle from
Sitting so long in the
Back cupboard, gathering dust,
Never used.
I look at
My plates.
In my new lab,
I will work with
Genetically altered
Bacteria,
That don't
Reproduce.

An Eclectic Liar (excerpt from a novel)
Aaren Manering

Chris sat at the edge of the cliff, breathing in the salty ocean air.

Why are there so many clichés? I breathe in the salty air. I hear the gulls squawking over the ocean. The waves crash against the cliff face like a ram smashing his head against a brick wall. What is the use of trying to write a brand new creative piece when all I can think of are these metaphors that everyone has thought of and written? There's nothing new. I have no experiences in feelings that someone else hasn't already had. The only thing that everyone hasn't experienced is death and I can't write about that because I want this to be fiction, not a lie. It's . . .

"Chris?"

"Yeah?"

"What are we doing here?"

"Well, I'm trying to write and you are following me around. Just like you've been doing since I picked you up in Nevada."

Chris looked up at the speaker. She was leaning over next to him.

"I thought we were going to do something fun." She pouted, "Go to the beach, go rollerblading, maybe even go to a bar and you know... have fun. We've been here for hours and the sun is about to set. You've been staring at that rock out there for so long, I'm just waiting for you to jump off this cliff and make love to it. I wanna leave."

"It's called Bird Rock, Suzy, and these," Chris flourished his arms to each side, "are the Sunset Cliffs. And I think I'll go."

"Great, let's go. I'll just go grab my towel." Suzy straightened up and started walking to her towel. "You're gonna love this little bar I know. It's got plenty of cute girls for you to pick up."

Chris stood up and took off his shirt. He threw it into his car that was just parked on the side of the road. Cars were driving past not a foot from them.

Cars... another reminder that it's hard to escape the grasp of humanity. These people fly past my car within inches, ignoring everything around them. Forever traveling on the brink of death we go on ignoring it, until we slip up. Only then do we realize the folly of our ways, but it's too late then, everything fades to black. Chris began unbuckling his belt. By this time Suzy had grabbed her towel and turned around. *The only way to separate yourself is to do something reckless, stupid, or as I like to call it, free-spirited.*

"Chris . . . what are you doing?" Suzy froze in place. Lines creased her face with worry.

"Just what you said, jumping off the cliff. Although, I'm not going to make love to the rock... that would just hurt. The salt would almost make it unbearable." Chris smiled and winked at her. His pants were off and he was standing at the edge of the cliff in his boxers.

"You're fucking insane. This is a cliff, Chris. A cliff. Do you know how much water hurts when you hit it from this height? Plus there could be rocks under the water."

"Well, looks like I'll find out. I'll tell you what it feels like when I get back, ok?"

As a wise man once said, "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much room." Someone can hold my place here on the edge for a moment. I don't need it right now.

With a final smile Chris jumped off the cliff. His body hung in mid-air for a split second, then tumbled towards the water. Time did not slow down. His body hit the water with a smack. Surprisingly there were no rocks, just copious amounts of seaweed.

Chris swam out to the rock, the salt water stinging the small cuts in his chest from the seaweed. The ocean was seething, blowing spray into his face, defying him with every stroke of his arms. Chris paddled on catching gulps of air when he could. He was soon within a couple feet of the rock, reaching out to snag a one of the jutting spires. A wave came and smashed his body against the rock.

“Shit!” Chris said to himself as he slowly pulled out of the water. He climbed to the top of the rock, safely away from the crashing of the waves. Grinning with triumph that he made it, he turned back toward the cliff, waving and smiling up at Suzy. She was just a short way off, but the wind and crashing of the waves were loud enough that he couldn’t hear what she was shouting at him. She was doing some sort of frantic wave and a motion for him to come back inland.

Why would I want to go back inland? I just got out here. I didn’t go through all of that effort to just go back in. I’m gonna enjoy this, Chris thought as he turned back around to face the fast fading sunset. As he was sitting down on the rock he glanced down at his chest, burning from the small encounter with the spires at the base of Bird Rock. A small cut was running diagonally across his chest with some blood oozing out of it.

“Tis’ but a small price to pay for such an extravagant prize as this.” Chris chuckled, *I hope it scars up, then I can get a real good story out of it.*

The sun was peering one final time over the rim of the ocean as Chris watched lazily and drew circles on his chest with the blood that was seeping out of the wound.

Now that I think of it, how am I going to get back up there? Chris leaned his head back and looked at the cliff, now with Suzy sitting atop looking quite angry. *Well, no better way than straight up, looks like there are enough handholds and crevices that I can make it up.* Chris looked up at the clear sky and saw the stars starting to appear. It was as if they had all come out to say hello, tease fantasies, and impose a sense of wonder about the world.

I love the stars, just to look at them makes a person get lost. Who needs to travel to the stars when sitting here on earth? One can have far better adventures in their mind. To see something as beautiful as this makes a person grateful for being alive and being able to view its majesty.

Chris laid there lost in the heavens for a short while, the sound of the waves crashing back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, creating a rhythm to the wanderings of his mind.

My vision was full of a white light, then my senses began to filter in. I was laying on my back in the middle of the playground looking into the almost cloudless sky except for the one cloud that I had been watching for the past ten minutes. That’s how clouds were here. I could go to school in the morning and the same cloud would greet me as I left school later that day. It was a comfort to have something stable. I could feel the sand creeping down my shirt and seeping into my hair. I was about six years old. I remember that a black shadow had suddenly appeared above me, blocking my view of the lazy cloud.

“Chris, Chris, you’re it!!!” *I felt a poke on my forehead. It was Suzy. “Chris is it!!! Chris is it!!!”*

It was a different Suzy. She had blonde hair and was far more innocent than the one I know now.

“I’m not playing. I don’t wanna play.” *I said back. It was no matter. It started out like this every time: she’d poke me and taunt me until I would get aggravated enough to chase her.*

“But you’re already it. You can’t not play if you’re it.”

“Can too.”

“Cannot.”

“Can.”

“Can’t.”

“Can.”

“Can’t Infinity.” *That was it, she called the trump card. By this time I was already standing and starting to chase her. We’d run around the playground several times until I finally caught up to her and tagged her, then I would turn and run away from her as fast as I could. It would go on like this until we were both too tired to run anymore so we’d call a truce and decide that seeing who could swing highest on the swings was more important.*

“I bet I can go higher than you, cause I’m smarter” *Suzy said.*

“Yeah right, I’ve gone so high on the swings that I’ve spun all the way around, so you can’t beat me.”

I normally resorted to all sorts of wild things that I had supposedly done, just so that I could win an argu-

ment against her. *Ah, how things will never change, trying to win an argument against a girl, pretty much impossible.*

That was usually how our morning recess would go. For the midday recess I would normally be in trouble and writing something like, 'I will not call Ms. Phillipson an old toad' a hundred times in a row. I still feel that it shouldn't be my fault. I was taught that if it sounds like a toad, looks like a toad, and walks like a toad, it was probably Ms. Phillipson. She was also like twenty-eight which in a kid's mind is ancient. I was punished with writing so many different things a hundred times in a row, I was able to figure out that if you wrote up and down, I I I I I, it was faster than writing 'I will...' Pretty soon the person whose job it was to watch me caught on and made it so that if I wrote the stuff like that I would have to write it all over again the "proper" way. Schools, always trying to limit a kid's creativity.

The years progressed and pretty soon girls were something that boys needed to fear and that if you got too close to them they might try to kiss you. The kisses were the worst. They would get on you and you couldn't just wipe them off. You could feel it burning on your cheek for hours. It became increasingly fun to figure out ways to gross girls out and make them scream. A hidden snake in the lunchbox, a frog let loose in the classroom, and spiders were the top three things that you could do to make a girl shriek. I never did any of that to Suzy. As a matter of fact, from what I remember none of the guys ever did any of that to her. I don't know why, in my mind now I think it's because I had the equivalent of a childhood crush on her.

I remember the day of my first kiss from a girl. We were walking home from school (she lived a block away from me) and I saw a honeysuckle growing over a power box on the side of the road. I ran and plucked four of the flowers off the plant. I handed her two of the flowers and told her to do the same thing I was doing. I grabbed hold of the base of the flower and grabbed with my other hand the petals of it, then I pulled the two apart slowly. The bottom section pulls off and a long string is left in the middle that I put in my mouth and sucked on. The taste is of sweet sugar and you can only get a small drop from each flower.

I tried to get her to do it but each time she messed up and the flower ended up mangled and destroyed. So I took my remaining flower and pulled it apart for her. She smiled and put the piece in her mouth tasting the sugar. I remember her eyes lit up at that second and she smiled profusely.

"So that's why they call it Honeysuckle," she said.

I laughed at this and I was midway through my laugh when she rushed forward catching me off guard. She pressed her lips against mine and our teeth clinked together because of her hurriedness and then we stood there for a second with our lips still barely touching. She took a step backwards, blushed, and ran off to her house. I remember standing there for a little bit, trying to process what had just gone on. Not knowing what else to do I just walked home.

When he came back to reality, the sun's rays had completely disappeared and it was quite dark out.

Man, Suzy's gonna be pissed, I'd better get back in. It was a good dream while it lasted though. Chris stood up and took another glance at the cliff; Suzy was still sitting there watching, now with a blanket wrapped around her.

"Hey! I'm coming back in now!" Chris shouted. At this Suzy glanced up, shrugged her shoulders, and promptly gave him a one finger salute. Haha, I love that girl.

Chris took a couple steps down towards the edge of Bird Rock and began his descent into the water. The water was ice cold now that the adrenaline from the jump off the cliff had left his body, and the salt water burning on his chest was now making him regret his stupidity. In short order he reached the face of the cliff since the waves were pushing him directly toward it.

Chris was shooting toward the wall of rock at an alarming speed. Each push from the waves brought him yards closer. When he was within arm's length of the cliff he reached out to grab a hold.

Another wave came crashing in, smashing his body against the cliff. Quickly Chris clung to any handhold he could. Another wave came in, smashing his body, clawing at him, trying to reclaim him as its own plaything. Between each wave Chris would take a single step up the face and then brace for the next barrage from the ocean.

Like this Chris slowly made it up the cliff, until the waves were just nipping at his heels. Then he rested for a short while to catch his breath.

"You're really really stupid!" Suzy yelled down at him. She was laying down on her stomach extending her hands out at him. "When you get up here I'm gonna throw you off this damn cliff."

Chris looked up at her.

"Well that's not much incentive. You want to go get a drink instead? I know a pretty good bar just down the street." He grinned.

"Go to Hell."

"Love you too." Chris chuckled and began the final leg of his climb.

Chris slowly made his way to the top and took Suzy's hand. Suzy stood up and pulled him the rest of the way to flat ground. Chris stayed on the ground and rolled over to lay on his back.

"Oh man, my body feels like it's on fire."

"Well yeah, you just spent a couple of hours getting your body cut up and then bathed in salt water. Isn't exactly what I would call smart."

Chris looked down at his body. The gash across his chest had opened up again and now was accompanied by many more cuts up and down his arms, legs, and torso. None were bad, luckily.

"So what are we doing next?" Chris said. He stood up and began walking toward the car to retrieve his clothes.

"You should probably go to the hospital. You do have a lot of cuts." Suzy walked over and stood next to him as he put his pants on. "You could bleed to death or get an infection. Maybe even gangrene if you're lucky."

"Nah, I'll be fine. The cut on my chest is the worst one and that sealed up while I was laying on the rock. The salt probably killed any germs and no one's had gangrene since the Civil War," Chris said.

"OK, well let's go get some bandages and put something on them at least." Suzy stepped up to Chris and gave him a big hug.

"Hey, be careful. You don't know what diseases I have." Chris held her for a moment and ran his fingers through her hair. The scent of honeysuckle tinged his nose.

They stood there for a moment just enjoying the sound of the waves and the warmth of each other's bodies. Chris closed his eyes and breathed in the sweet scent of her hair again.

This is where I want to be. I can't believe it took me so long to realize this. I started this trip trying to find a new experience, but in reality all I wanted was to regain a feeling that had left me.

Suddenly all the sounds disappeared, the honeysuckle was gone, and the warmth of Suzy's body left, replaced by cold. Extreme cold. Blackness enveloped him.

Chris opened his eyes and a bright light flooded his vision. He held his hand up to shield his eyes until they adjusted. When he brought his hand down and was able to see where he was, he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

He was standing in a large ravine. A huge water fall cascaded down from what seemed to be the heavens the craggy walls were so high. The sky was a deep blue with clouds hanging elegantly. Sun rays peered through the clouds streaking across the sky almost as if the sky was a shimmering lake. At the floor of the ravine ran a small river that flowed away from the falls. It churned wildly at first, but then settled into a bubbling stream that twisted its way out of sight. Stretched out in front of him was a green pasture in which the grass and clover swayed back and forth while the wind toyed in it. The air smelled of moist fresh cut grass.

Chris then noticed a small table with five people sitting around it. As Chris got closer he could see now that there were two women and three men. Their skin looked like porcelain. The beauty of these people was unmatched; it was as though they were gods. They seemed to be enjoying a feast. The table was adorned with a white sheet with fine crystal glasses and white china. All along the table there were small platters filled with some small morsels. The people at the table seemed to be feeding each other, each one taking a small bite and then in turn feeding another person. Each bite was savored and each motion was fluid, almost sensuous. Chris

walked towards the table.

“Um, hello? Hello?”

At the sound of Chris’s voice a man at the end of the table glanced up at him and smiled a brilliant white smile. He picked up a napkin off the table and wiped the chocolate (Chris could now see what they were eating) off of his mouth. The chocolate smudged across white napkin in stark contrast. The man stood up and motioned to him.

“Ah, you’re finally here. I thought you would be here earlier than this, but whatever, the point is you’re here now, yeah?” The man walked up to Chris and shook his hand. He was wearing a black silk suit and seemed very lithe in body build.

“Yeah, I guess so. I don’t mean to be rude or anything, but where am I? I thought I was with Suzy and then I was suddenly here. My name’s Chris by the way.”

“Oh, don’t worry about Suzy, my boy. She’s down in the pits,” the man smiled, “and I’m Mephistopheles. Over there is Pestis, Fames, Bellum, and Morte. If you want you can just call them Peter, Felicity, Bella, and well Morte is just Morte. And in case you haven’t noticed, you’re dead.”

“Now let’s get down to business Chris. You’re in Hell and I have a deal for you.”

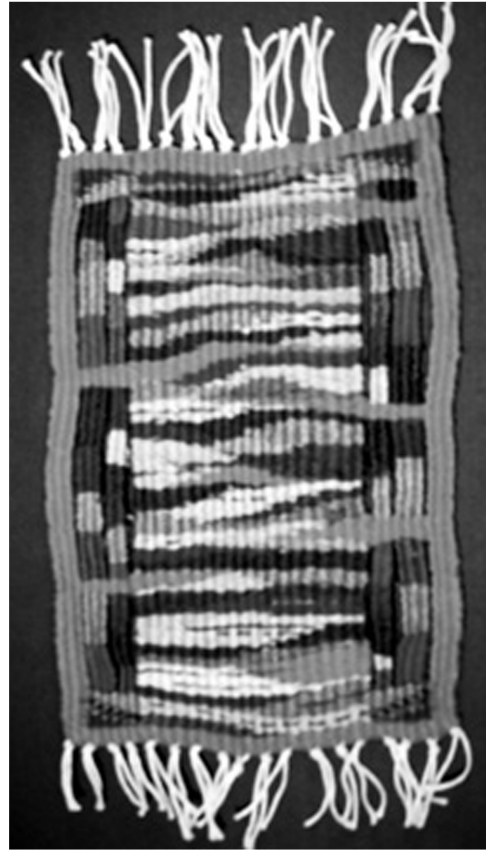


Lindau Statue

Photography, Peter Odlaug

Denial
Annaka Isenberger

Immersed are the feelings of the past,
hidden deep in shame.
Every memory of pain and hurt
is buried like ancient tombs.
Bury it deep—
deep—
deeper still.
Shovel the rationalizations on top,
make the ground look untouched.
If a question arises,
Avoid it.
Dodge it.
Ignore it.
LIE.
Say the ground is pure.
Ignore the throbbing heartbeat
that pounds beneath your feet.
Preach the lies so often
that you start to believe them.
The ground is pure...
The ground is pure...



Magic Carpet *Kathy Gaffer*

Song
Brett Kroska

I imagine now a heron with that stone,
clutching it, steaming, as he flies at night
over the pond and park trees and the bright impacts
of the lampposts along the streets.

Near the wet pond shore I was picking stones,
unclumping them from mud dents that pasted their bottoms
with wet, soft soil. On one mud and stone
complexion, shapes, faces like small wounds,

old brown women with brown necks and veins
and sloughing brown cheek skins. I touch
one face, feel her damp song, stone song,
tooth-wailing inside this small loaf of minerals.

The rock's skin was a searing bulb
and steam rinsed out between my fingers,
rising, brushing wet on my cheek and throat,
and I threw the stone at the sun.

A Field Where No Dandelions Grew
Nate Kitzrow

There was a field there once
-A field where no dandelions grew-
Filled with parched, brittle grass
Trampled by the shoes of the young.
The warm summer breeze
Rippling over the children,
Twisting their brown and blonde hair together.
Their mistakes-
Only forms of stains on the cuffs of their jeans.

I, too,
Would roll throughout each blade.
Some of the earth clinging to me
As I clung to some of the earth.

There was a field there once
-A field where no dandelions grew-
And now concrete lies.

The fall leaves
Staining imprints of themselves on the
sidewalk
Amongst the gravel and dirt.
The laughter of the young
Only echoes inside homes.

My heart, the open flame,
Igniting the remembrance of a time.
Each memory of various lengths
Slowing, dimming
Before flickering to smoke
Into the back of my mind.



Haybine

Copperplate Etching, Margaret Butler

Four Lit Matches (segmented essay)
Colleen McMillan

"Burning is no answer." Camille Desmoulines to Robespierre, 1794

Lighter fluid sprayed on the paper and vellum covers, an arching rainbow in the air, intense in spring sunlight. Dark ink lines ran down the sodden pages, but even the smeared messages contained meaning. So the townspeople lit matches or snapped on plastic lighters. The raspy bark of a match head echoed as it scratched across the red studded field on the side of the matchbox.

A spurt of flame flickered before my eyes, dark blue in the center and bright yellow on the edges. The light slunk down the wooden length of the match, nearing the thumb and pointer finger.

Long dead primal remembrances flashed and darted with the fire. The longing to burn and be caught in the trance of the bonfire remained, but I felt a jolt when the lit match fell upon the books lying on the dirty asphalt.

When I was in high school, my mom and I watched the movie *Footloose*, in which Kevin Bacon wrestled tradition in a small town whose residents banned rock music and dancing. One scene stayed with me more than others. Kevin Bacon's high school class was reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* with its edgy, provocative World War II stories. Well-intentioned townspeople staged a pile of books in the library parking lot, including Vonnegut's masterpiece. The match did not fall, but it could have.

This was not my first encounter with book burning; in junior high I read Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the temperature books burn at, but had never seen fire engulf a book. The feeling of that scene from *Footloose* followed me as I went to school the next day.

I entered the library: the two rectangular windows near the ceiling emitted faint light, so the rooms gleamed from fluorescent bulbs. The filtered yellow light showcased walls and rows of books; some smelled like cinnamon or foreign spices, while others were shining in new laminate. The withering beige pages of an Oxford Dictionary dominated a podium near a bank of computers. Our library still had its mammoth cedar card catalog. The dusty maroon carpet spat puffs of chalk and fibers as I crossed the entrance, guarded not by a person, but a security door you might find in an airport. These metal and plastic sentinels allowed me in, and I marched to the librarian's desk. From my position in front of the cluttered desk, all I could see was the pinnacle of her head.

"Are any books banned from this library?" I asked, placing both hands on her desk.

The librarian, I cannot recall her name, spun away from her blue computer screen and peered over oval spectacles. Her frosty hair hung in two lengths on both shoulders, and a pilled cream sweater covered her maroon and white South St. Paul Packers t-shirt. She stared at me for a moment before turning back to her computer. "What book were you looking for, and I can tell you if we have it."

I kept my hands in place but leaned closer to gaze at her face. Thick red hair fell into my eyes, so I brushed it aside. "Nothing in particular. I was just curious if the community thought that any books weren't appropriate for high school students. Perhaps some of them contained scenes or language that were unsuitable."

Her scalp twitched, but she gave no answer. I stalked away from her desk and looked to the shelves, hoping to find a classic like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* omitted. The numerous metal and wooden shelves seemed heavy with literature, so I abandoned my search.

I later discovered that numerous books had once been banned from the South St. Paul, Minnesota schools, *Huckleberry Finn* and the works of Stephen King among them. Some adults felt those books were dangerous for children, but who had the say on which books were wrong and which were fine?

"Where books are burned, human beings are destined to be burned too." German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, 1821

The history corridor lounged on the third floor, seeming to melt into the second floor language hall. Footsteps ricocheted off abandoned maroon lockers, the ancient sort with padlocks dangling from the doors. Scuff marks littered the floor, black on speckled linoleum. Scents of chalk and mold wafted from the classrooms.

Inside the third room on the right sat Mr. Conrad's advanced history students. Some slumped in their desks while others posed with hands clasped in front of them. One boy leaned his head back and breathed on the chilled window behind him. A foggy mouth-shaped circle bloomed on the glass, and he stenciled a stick finger with an arrow through its head.

I daydreamed in history class. A lot. Our teacher stalked the blackboard with a slash of chalk in one hand, the other raised and pointing at the ceiling. A sweater vest clung to his body, and white dust gathered on his slacks. He told anecdotes about World Wars, mentioned Inquisitions, and garbled on about Otto von Bismarck, his personal hero, and German unification for hours.

One day, he announced the atrocities of the Nazis by ticking examples off on his fingers, as if checking items off on a grocery list. Pointer finger: crossing into the Rhineland, middle finger: breaking the Treaty of Versailles, ring finger: fire-bombing Great Britain, pinky finger: burning books. Oh, and the Holocaust. While he pierced the blackboard with his chalk-rapier, I stared at his collection of history books and wondered what it might have been like to see the bonfire of Berlin. . . .

I stand on the outside of the circle—the mob—sweaty tear trails standing out against my freckles. A simple black wool skirt and white button shirt drench me, and a tattered navy gabardine coat brushes the tops of my hips. I cling to the package.

Goebbels's arrival was planned for months, and the students are restless. My roommate Elaine was taken for hording English and American books in the giant oak trunk at the foot of her bed; "Miss Streudel" the perfect prefect squealed. But I wasn't arrested.

The coat's seam rips as a small boy pushes past. In front of a massive pile of books stands Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's Propaganda Minister. His toad mouth is thin and stretched across his face. A wide monk's forehead and protruding ears cannot hide under the cap. The huddling mass of students and Berlin residents hush when he raises his hands, and a sigh slinks across the lot.

In the quiet, I hear every other sentence, fingers straining to keep hold of the package. I see my roommate, head held high, walking between two mountainous men in ash trench coats. Two of the house porters carry the offending trunk behind the trio, shuffling from side to side at its weight.

"The future German man will not just be a man of books, but a man of character. It is to this end that we want to educate you. As a young person...thus you do well in this midnight hour to commit to the flames the evil spirit of the past . . . strong, great, symbolic deed . . . here the intellectual foundation . . . is sinking to the ground, but from this wreckage the phoenix of a new spirit will triumphantly rise. . . ."

The crowds of sweaty, pungent Germans cheer, reach their arms back and hurl whatever they are holding onto the pile at the center of the lot. Uniform-clad soldiers race about, pushing wayward items to the greater mound with long-handled push-brooms. I back away from the gathered students, fleeing, shadow stripes running down my side. I hide in the baker's doorway. Shoulders trembling, the coat tearing on the right side, I push the package down to my stomach and hold it there. A belly pregnant with pages.

A boy in a bowler hat covered with holes and striped suspenders holding his trousers up spies me in the doorway and yells, pointing, "Oy! There's a hurt girl over there!"

A broad-shouldered soldier pauses in his efforts to break to the front of the mob and gazes at me, then down at the bulge in the coat. His face is murky. Smoke eddies and scarlet flames spin into the sky. He stoops to grasp my arm: cold blue eyes, mousy hair, and a thin mustache. A few hairs sprout from his chin, no more than nineteen, my age. A pistol is secured at his side. The rough bricks of the doorway jab my side.

The fire has grown to ten feet.

The soldier finds it difficult to make me stand; I slouch, like a drunk, to the ground. So he hauls me through the mass of perspiration, my feet dragging white patches in the ash, and pushes to the front. I lean against him, this book thief and think, who gave him the right to do this? The soldier rips the coat, fabric falling. Who told him what books were good and which ones were abominations? The left coat sleeve billows past the gang of human hyenas behind me. One man hoots and snatches at the air, grabbing the sleeve. Only the back of the coat remains, the buttons on the front falling to the pavement, shattering.

The soldier's face is a cigarette burn. He tries to take the wrapped package from me. The seesawing motion is followed by the front row of spectators.

"Why are you burning books?" I bellow into the soldier's face as he tears the package from my hands. He staggers at the force of my voice and drops the package at the edge of the mass of blazing pulp. So close to the fire, yet my fingers are blue, icy antennas searching for brown paper.

"Care to join us, Colleen?" Oh crap. Mr. Conrad must have asked me something. He loomed next to the blackboard, chalk raised, one eyebrow seeking his hairline.

"Sure. What was the question?"

"Why was Otto von Bismarck not to blame for the German politicians' actions in World War II?" I hoped that question wouldn't appear on the final.

"Books won't stay banned. They won't burn." Alfred Whitney Griswold, 1950s

Have you ever wondered what Martin Luther was thinking when groups of people called him a heretic and doused his translated Bible with flames? Although many Germans destroyed his works during his lifetime, Pope Urban VIII ordered Luther's translated Bibles to be burned in 1624, long after the former monk's death. Bibles translated into English by John Wycliffe and William Tyndale were also demolished in the fourteenth century by King Henry VIII.

Our question should be, "Why wouldn't a person want to be able to read the word of their God?" A controversial question in the fourteenth century, Christians today could never fathom not having the Bible written in their native language. My grandmother recalls Latin services in the rural town of Wells, Minnesota, but those services were saved for special occasions. Even my great grandmother would not remember an all-Latin mass.

The Bible at my grandma's house is a staple, like fresh-baked bread or Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. It has a navy blue cover and loose pages; she has had it since she was a girl. It rests on her bedside table on a lace doily along with her reading glasses, green glass rosary beads I bought for her in Prague, and a vial of blessed water from Lourdes. The beads are worn from the pads of her fingers rubbing them, and the book smells musty, but these are her treasures. She wrote notes and passages within the bindings of the Bible, thoughts and interpretations. I could not picture my grandma without that book.

Then I imagine someone setting a Bible on fire, all because it happened to be written in English. My grandmother may believe that some books are evil, like Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, but when I told her stories about the Bible burnings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, she had to take off her reading glasses. She massaged the bridge of her nose and gazed out the kitchen window. Warm sunlight poured through the glass and illuminated the table. Strewn across it were the newspaper, glass coffee mugs, and the weekly church hymnal. She turned her head to look at me. Her fist trembled on the table, a staccato rhythm.

"Why would someone want to burn the Book of God?"

"Because it was written in English, Grandma. Or German or any language besides Latin."

She shook her head and stood, shuffling to the refrigerator. As she opened the white enamel door and pulled out a jug of two-percent milk for her coffee, a rush of cool air seeped out.

Her cigarette with the ruby lipstick stain lay smoldering in the crystal ashtray on the table, forgotten. Its thin, filmy smoke circled in the air and collided with the ceiling fan, sending it flying about the room. Grandma said, "Well that's just plain silly. Why would anyone be so silly?"

"Every burned book enlightens the world." Ralph Waldo Emerson

The highway stretched out before us, a never-ending gray snake with neither head nor tail. On one side, the Salt Flats of Utah rolled by, white against tawny sand and dirt. On the driver's side, Matt hummed along to Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary," not noticing the long-dried lakes. Every so often he would sing, "Rolling. Rolling. Rolling on the river," and I rolled my eyes. I lounged in the passenger seat, a fluffy pillow behind my back and a book nestled at my side.

The date was July 18, 2005. My brother and I were on our way to San Francisco to see the play *Les Misérables*, because he had to leave for military training in Mississippi, and he refused to take a plane. He also declined to book hotels for our stay in California and had no idea where we could stop in between Minnesota and San Francisco. He said, "Colleen, you should stop being a wuss. We can sleep at those rest stops off the highway." To which I answered, "And what about when we're in the city? Do you expect me to sleep in the car?" He did not answer. I felt like tearing out chunks of my hair, but I would have settled for his.

We traveled in his 1998 Chevy Lumina, the windows rolled down to save gas, its faded gold paint dull in direct sunlight. Matt tapped his hands on the leather steering wheel when he drove, either humming, whistling, or singing random phrases from *Les Mis*. My fists would clench occasionally. He had a good baritone voice, but I could stand listening to snatches of "Do You Hear the People Sing" for so long. And he never sang the bits in order but compiled his own version of the song. While I followed along in my head, he got most of the verses out of synch and sang the chorus in the wrong key.

When he sang or turned on classical music, I pulled out my new book, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. It was my second reading, having finished it on its publication date in fourteen hours. Some people called me obsessive, but I tended to ignore them. Matt asked me to bring it along so he could read it too. I rarely share my books, and I threaten bodily harm on those I lend my books to, but I made an exception for Matt. I read in the car, and he picked up the heavy, hard cover tome when we stopped to rest.

We spent one night in a cramped motel room with dingy burgundy sheets on two twin beds, and Matt read three-fourths of the book. Its luminous green and black cover crinkled as he twisted on the bed, tinkling bed-springs keeping me awake.

I was annoyed with Matt on occasion, but the trip would be one of the last times we spent together before he left for Mississippi and later, Iraq. The deserts of the American Southwest would be different from the Middle East, and I was glad to be traversing the Great Salt Flats in the Lumina.

On the way home from California, Matt and I talked about the book; how it related to others in the series, our continuing admiration of the author, and whether or not the "villain" was truly wicked.

"There's no way Snape's evil!" I yelled, flailing my arms and hitting the carpeted roof of the car. Matt smirked, bobbed his head to the radio, and said, "Well, you're the expert, but here's the evidence I found to both debunk and accept your theory."

After discussing his ideas, I asked, holding the book on my lap, "Did you know that people burn Harry Potter books?" He fidgeted in the seat next to me and said, "Yeah I think I heard something about that. What about it?"

"I just remember reading about it when *Order of the Phoenix* came out."

"Why would they burn a kid's book? Sounds stupid."

"Something about it encouraging children to practice witchcraft. I'll bet those people never even read the books." Matt shifted again and rolled down his window. A breeze drifted through, ruffling my hair. He switched on the radio and asked, "Well, do you feel like starting up some witchcraft? Now that you've finished the book and all."

I smiled and said, "Oh yeah. I've had a hankering to buy some eye of newt, a cauldron, some oregano and just see what happens." Matt couldn't contain his laughter, and the car swerved onto the shoulder. "Don't kill us! I want to be around when the last book's published!"

“I seem to recall your driving record is far more blemished than mine.”

“Yeah whatever. Stupid snowbanks.”

The book linked Matt and I on that trip, so it is my favorite in the series. I admire Rowling for reaching millions of people worldwide with her stories, for making kids put down the video game controller and read, but they mean the most to me when I remember talking about plotlines with Matt. And he doesn't mind if I leak him a few spoilers.



Untitled

Porcelain and Brass, Margaret Haden

In His Grandfather's Basement
Anita Lampert

In his grandfather's basement, after the funeral
Old rotary phones, yellowed
from fingerprints, keyboards with light blue keys
from two decades earlier. The broken electronics
he thought to keep and figure out
lay in sections on his long white wooden
workbench. The bench hid the blank concrete.
To the left were stacks of dusty magazines,
read once and saved for later ideas, more
comfort than reference. They lay now
in a recycling center and are already probably
a piece of something else.
Many heavy drawers lined the underside of
the bench, not full of nails but instead
filled with complex circuit boards and black tools,
short scraps of wire gleaned
from old rotary phones and computers.
He wore metal frame glasses with a bridge
across the top, a relic that seemed to fit him as though
the lenses needed more support, and the flesh
colored buds of hearing aids in his ears were made
by him, no doubt on the surface of the white wooden
bench with his black tools and scraps of wires.
Dust lay on the wood, next to and underneath
the wire stripper, stenciling his projects
and the rescue of a radio from a garage sale,
though the pieces were removed to be sorted
into who-gets-what and what the garbage man would take.
His grandfather slowed in the last days and worked upstairs,
the valuable scraps of copper, circuit, and plastic
from an old telephone on a metal tray
that he had once used for lunch.
A telescoping magnifying glass hovered above
like the missing end of a bottle, circuits looking
like little emerald cities. He kept searching,
though he had lost his talent to diagnose.



Granma

Etching, Shelby Sand

Decomposed (short story)
Lindsay Hutton

Chopin's mother named Chopin after the Polish composer. which was all well and good for the educated and versed people in the world. But for the semi-illiterate bartender, "Bob," who was trying to identify her by the name on her credit card, the pronunciation came out sounding like a rudimentary kitchen task. Sometimes she would correct the error with snub exactness ("Show-pan"), or sometimes she would just wince and bear it (at those moments, completely loathing her mother's ambitious attempt to track her daughter on an elevated intellectual path).

It did not help either, that Chopin's best friend's mother had decided to name her daughter Mozart.

The friends had heard all of the witty and less-than-witty remarks upon introductions. And it, to say the least, got old. Chopin and Mozart, however, bore the names fittingly. Both girls were so indistinguishably similar, and were probably born on the same moon date or were lovers in a past life. But, to Chopin's occasional mindful misery, Mozart had the more recognizable namesake (that "Bob" never mispronounced) and accordingly, she, of the two, often was acknowledged more by the world.

Mozart never seemed to notice the attention. She constantly expressed insecurity about her masculine naming and attributed it to her feelings of ugliness and manliness. But Chopin thought Mozart was sophisticated and high fashion-like the lankawitch goddesses lit up on billboards along Ventura Boulevard. Mozart moved like a snake, and when her long raven hair fell in front of her face when she danced, Chopin could not help but notice the things that the dirty minded frat boys around Mozart saw, the sly twinkle of the eye, the mystery, and the luster of a sex kitten.

Chopin never would have this. Chopin felt boyish and clumsy around Mozart. Chopin's style was not like the consistent Hollywood socialites', but always changing. It never stayed the same. Because she never was quite sure about who she was, she expressed that with her choice of clothes for each day. If Chopin felt dreamy and carefree, she would adorn worn and feathered bell bottoms. If angsty and dangerous, she would line her eyes in a thick black ring and slip into shirts with jagged stars (that would punch holes through men that tried to touch her). Her hope was that the boy who was destined to love her would recognize her heart through her clothes and fall deeply in love, being able to see right through her.

But this had not happened thus far. Chopin would leave Mozart at home and go sit on the dunes at the shore. On these days, usually wearing the bell bottoms, she would smoke hippie grass with the surfer boys and beach bums (who sold their souls to the sun for twenty-five cent beers and sunburns that hurt Chopin's eyes to look at). The blond, salty-haired boys would crash next to her in the sand with their hazy eyes and twist Chopin's white hair around their weathered fingers, softly speaking about how God was in the waves

Chopin would smile and listen, but they mistook her careful gaze into their faces as attraction, when in reality she was searching for some hint of inner wisdom. She would rarely let on, and only let them continue, but she often grew bored with their talk

God was not in the waves. God was around, but he sure as hell was not around this town, she would think with disgust. She was tired of the pseudo-philosophers. You live on a god-damned beach.

And so instead, she would leave the surfboards and towels and wander over toward the cliffs. There was always some bohemian wanderer sitting on a rock with coal and paper, sketching the sea foam and wisping sky. She preferred their company. They never complimented her like the other boys did, nor did they acknowledge her as special in any sort of way, but she felt special enough just residing in their presence. Perched at their feet, observing, she felt like a muse with a glimpse into a secret world of poetry and light. The boys on the cliff would always say less than the others would, but they held more up in their heads. This was evident through their drawings and paintings and colors. Chopin saw it. She saw the way the lines creased, and ebbed, and flowed onto, and off the pages and papers. Their minds worked in the same way that Chopin thought, with careful insight into their surroundings. Particular notice of certain aspects into the way reflections hit the water. Or how the smallest

shift of the lip was so telling into a person's intentions. They would see these things and put them down onto their canvas, and she would take the eyes and hands that saw and put, home with her.

She knew boys like those on the cliff could never be kept. Their destiny was for the world, to spread their beauty around. Chopin never expected them to stay in the area for more than one week's time. And they never did. Days later they would be wrapped around some other beautiful girl, and Chopin would be curled underneath her clean white sheets with thoughts of perfect moments and paint. Sometimes they came back after the seasons had changed over. And they always thought that Chopin was still theirs. And although her heart stuck like paste to their heels, she belonged to no one -- only to the ideal, to the art, to the spirit of summer, where nothing was real and everything was temporary.

Hearts broken and desires misplaced, Mozart would take Chopin into her arms, and they would laugh through their tears. Two strange girls in a world where they felt like isolated angels. With the potential to save the world, but not enough faith in themselves or strangers to do so.

An All Too Brief Meditation on Sleep
Brittany Kerschner

In blissful, reclined, contented pose,
The beat of heart so quickly slows.
Neurons with previous firing fury,
Ease their release, and breathing very
Quietly obtains the meditative pace
At odds with active rushing race
That common rules the lighted day.
As night arrives, the sun's last ray,
Winks to sleep and body adjusts
To feathery soft, and reverently trusts
The gaze of Time to allow repose
And lead the dreams where e'er She goes.
Oblivious bliss the mind does reach
Through sanctuary the heart does teach
To sigh away all earthly care,
And embrace the peace that subsists there.



Mountain Night *Joel Thorson*

long, all over the place, and slightly challenging
Abby Maliszewski

i've always been lucky.

i've gotten used to good things happening to me. somehow everything always works out. i don't mind it at all .
. . but it's gotten me thinking

what about those people that aren't so lucky? i never worried about it.
ever.

but then i climbed a fence and tore my hand open and it's kind of put me in check. something i've definitely needed, i think.

a person's hands are an important part of daily routines. you use your hands as a tool, whether it's to perform simple tasks like opening doors or buttoning your jeans or tying your shoes. athletes use their hands to play basketball, volleyball, baseball . . . or even tossing around a football or frisbee.

musicians. artists. writers. outdoorsmen.

hands.

without your hands you kind of become . . . a waste of space . . .

until you figure it out.

i once read a book about a lady who had a prestigious job and loved her life. she then dove into a shallow pool and became paralyzed. neck down. forever.

and although she learned how to do daily tasks with the help of technology, she learned something greater: how to paint with her mouth. and so even though she didn't have her hands, she found a way to do something she liked. and she became really good.

there are success stories like this everywhere. what makes them successful is that these people find a way to make things happen.

and guaranteed they call themselves lucky, too. because if they can find a way, they will. and it always could have been a lot worse.

adjustments don't occur until an individual genuinely understands the need or the importance for change. and although physical changes are more obvious, they're the least of my worries.

mental changes.

personality changes.

habits.

you are the way you are, because that's what you've done for a long time.

habits.

but when do you recognize that a change is in order? and how do you know that a change is required? should anyone really change something as unique as their personality? are habits part of their personality?

if someone is described as “honest,” what usually comes to mind is that the individual analyzes each situation and responds with honesty. they’ve probably been doing this for a long time.

if someone is described as a “liar,” . . . they’ve probably been practicing the art of lying for a long time, too.

are personality traits then habits?

i don’t know how i got from luck to personality traits... but now i’m wondering if there could be a correlation between the two. maybe i’m just over-analyzing the text that i’m authoring. . . . maybe?

. . .

it’s funny . . . throughout this entire note i’ve been using my left thumb to hit the space bar. something i never did until three weeks ago. it’s tough to change habit. since fifth grade i’ve been hitting the space bar with my right thumb. something you’re probably thinking isn’t a big deal. well, try it once. and while you’re at it, try opening a medicine bottle [push down and turn] without using your dominant hand’s thumb. or buttoning your jeans with your fingers only.

or writing.

what if it’s tough? find alternatives to get the task done: if you can’t get the medicine bottle open, wedge it between a door [hinged side] and wall and close the door, bending the bottle. then pry the cap off with your teeth. buttoning your jeans is difficult, not gonna lie. and as far as writing . . . become ambidextrous.

it’s tough to change habits. probably why there’s all that stuff to assist smokers in quitting. but like smoking can lead to death, habits can lead to disappointment. always being quick to judge can come back to slap you across the face after you’ve missed out on a great opportunity. same with suffering from indecision [i have a bad case]. or spending too much money. or always wanting more. or letting people walk all over you.

habits.

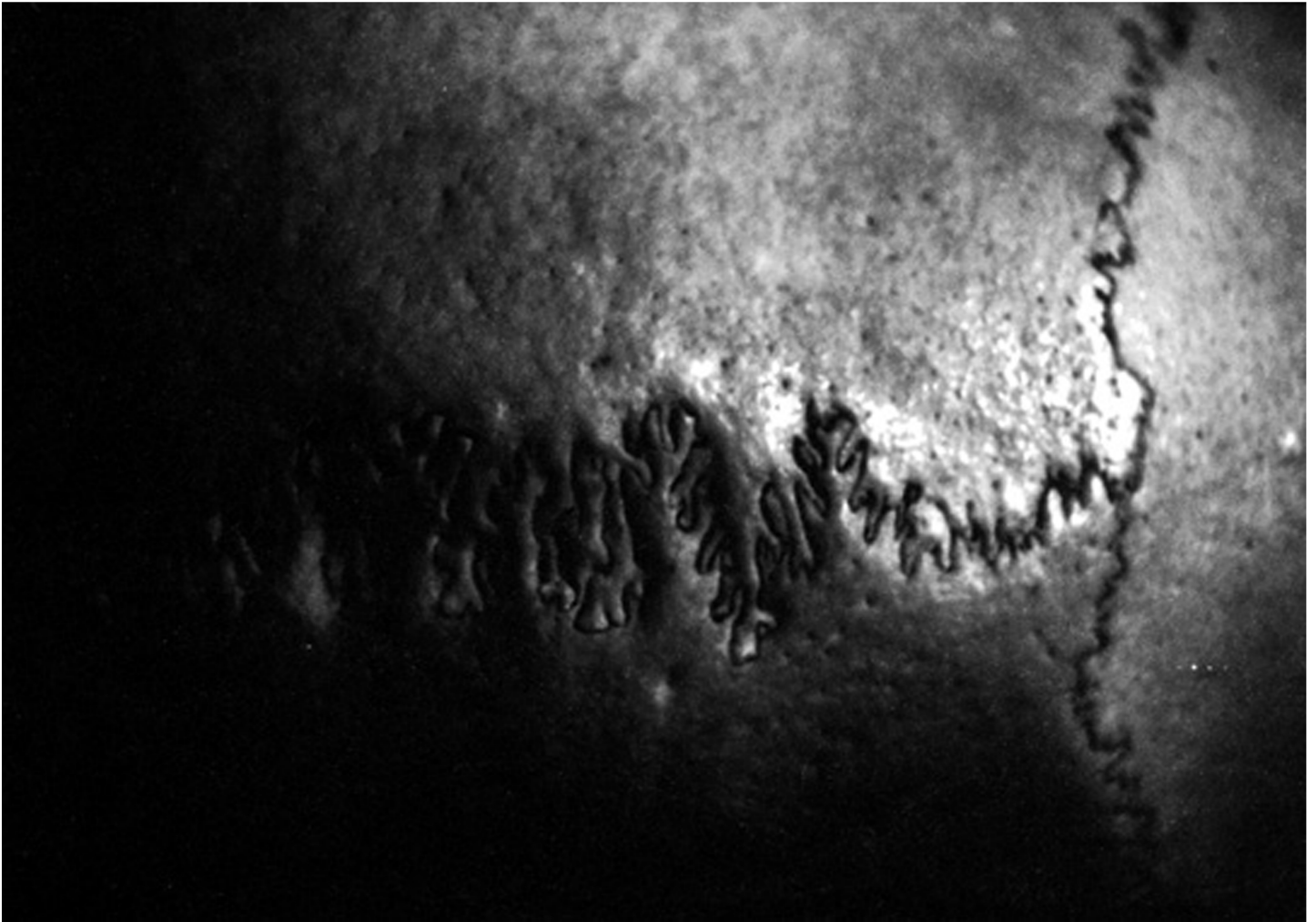
alter them.

edit them.

expand.

you’ll look at things differently. more openly. you’ll be more appreciated. you’ll get farther. you’ll be added. you’ll be requested.

and you may get lucky.



Fissures

Platinum Palladium Print, Ann Lawton

There is a Light that Never Goes Out (short story)
Matt Loosbrock

The fading sun along the horizon reflected a pink haze off the snow layered around dead trees. Their dry bark cracked and split, making long veins streak through the trunk and into roots, buried under dirty white powder. Along the parking lot, bits of ice glistened in the waning daylight, melting under warm January skies. Chris clutched the steering wheel in his black Camry. He didn't know why he sat still, staring at trees, but he did not intend to move. He took his leather gloves off and combed fingers through his straight black hair. Sweat ran across his hair line, irrigating toward his forehead. Wiping the moisture, he realized the car was still running and he killed the engine. He set his gloves by his black briefcase, filled with documents and accident reports. As an insurance agent, Chris fell into a daily routine: Alarm. Breakfast. Shower. Drive. Meeting. Phone. Meeting. Lunch. Client. Meeting. Phone. Drive. Dinner. TV. Bed. And then it began again.

As cold air invaded the car, Chris grabbed his things and left. He looked to his second floor apartment and the iron bars surrounding the balcony. Dead vines strangled them, choking a cold, lifeless object. They had climbed the brick wall of the building until winter frosts had stopped them. He had neglected to toss the vines out and torturing grasp. Jenny planted them last spring.

“Your hair looks so nice when it’s long. Why don’t you grow a pony tail?” she said on an evening in July. She and Chris were on the balcony, in fold out chairs they bought together, sipping wine and breathing the evening air. The stars were hidden. Chicago city lights had drowned them out, but the moon was perched in the sky, a thumbnail, struggling to remain seen.

“A ponytail? What am I? A pirate?” Chris said.

“It doesn’t have to be a ponytail. I just like feeling your hair in my fingers,” she said. He grabbed a wine glass. Bitter flavors of Chardonnay coated his tongue.

“Do you like the flowers?” she asked. Wrapped around the black iron bars of the balcony fence were deep green vines. They barely started to stroll up the gate.

“I don’t see any flowers,” he said, swallowing his drink.

“They’re morning glories.”

“Which means?”

“It means they only bloom in the morning,” she said. Chris set his glass down and smiled.

“That sounds like a lame flower. What color are they?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” I asked.

“Nope.”

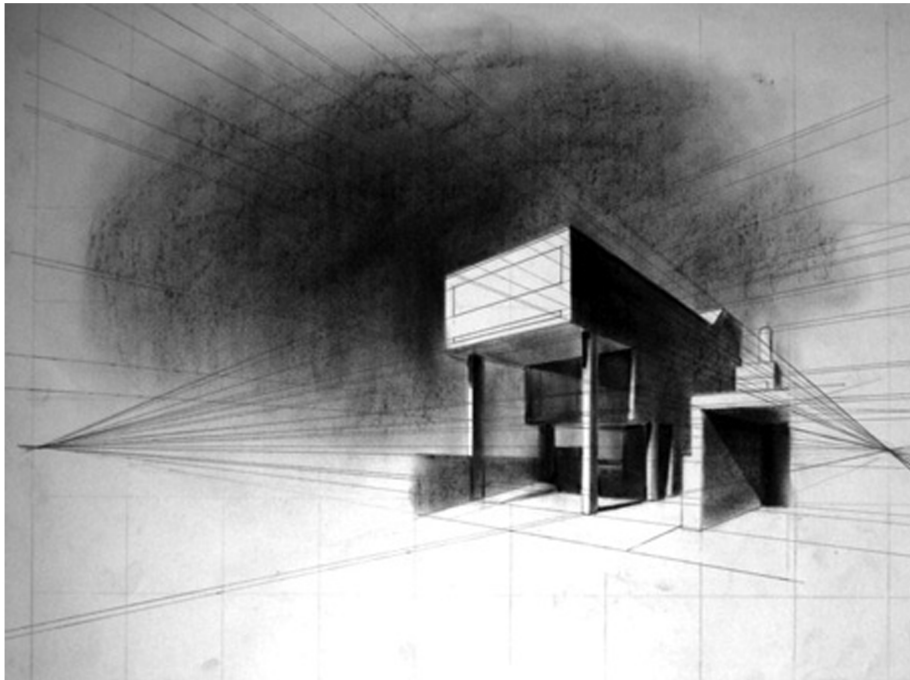
“Did you plant them blind folded?” She gave a weak smile and squinted her dark eyes at him. Deep red hair fell across her face, making her brush it behind her ear.

Boxes littered the inside of the apartment, coded in black and blue marker. Dishes. Clothes. Books. Art supplies. Décor. It was their first night living together. Jenny had made the suggestion months before, arguing that couples dating past three years were supposed to live together.

“Say, honey?” Jenny said.

“What?” Chris said. She paused, opening her mouth, but slowly closing it. Chris was swallowing the last of his drink.

“This stuff’s pretty good,” he said. He turned to Jenny who was staring through the bars into the parking lot.



Perspective

Charcoal, Seung Joo Lee

“Were you saying something?” Chris asked. She looked at him and placed her slender hand on his.
“Do you want to have dinner at Andrelli’s Friday?” she said.
“Yeah, maybe, long as I don’t have a late meeting.”
“Okay,” she said. “It’s a date.”

* * * * *

The remaining days until Friday saw boxes unpack and dwindle until all were emptied and thrown away. Jenny’s paintings perched on the walls, each one colorful and vibrant. A small garden and pond was placed in the living room. A pale cherub in the bathroom. In the bedroom, a large mural of the Chicago city skyline, a project she finished for her senior capstone. With the paintings, picture frames decorated the apartment, placed on every surface. Most were photos of Jenny and Chris, but there were several of her family too. Jenny set vases filled with various flowers around too. Lilies. Gladiolas. Daisies. Roses. Chris did not understand the point in keeping something that was going to die, but Jenny was convinced they brought the apartment alive. By Friday, they officially lived together.

The lighting at Andrelli’s was dim. Chris would often joke that dim lights made ugly people look good. “Think about it,” he would say. “Two ugly people eat together. The wine sets in, and bam! They’re banging each other like rabbits.” She would smile and shake her head. Their waiter approached them with a couple of glasses, a green bottle, and their menus.

“Welcome to Andrelli’s. Can I interest you in some wine this evening?”

“Yes, we’ll both have some,” Chris told the waiter.

“No thanks,” Jenny said.

“Just me then,” he said. The waiter set his glass and poured the drink. Chris took a sip and turned to Jenny. She was staring at a menu, tapping her fingers on its spine. Her hair matched the color of her dress that hung off her shoulders, just below the silver necklace he bought for her birthday earlier that year.

“Well now I look like an ass, ordering for you. You love Merlot. What gives?”

She lifted her head. There was something on her mind, and he feared the worst.

“I was going to wait, but I may as well say it now.”

“Tell me what?”

“Chris, I’m pregnant.” He didn’t speak right away, but continued to look at her, his mouth slightly open. A red rose in a crystal vase on the table looked on fire in the candle’s glow.

“How?” he asked.

“Are you trying to be funny, because you’re not.”

“No, I mean, you’re on the pill. Isn’t that supposed to stop that from happening?”

The candle’s flame flickered.

“It’s only about ninety-nine percent. It can still happen.”

“Way to go one percent,” he said.

“Stop with the jokes.” Her face was stern, more so than he had ever seen.

“Sorry,” he said. “How do you feel?”

“I’m . . . happy,” she said. “What about you?” Chris paused. He had thought they were just going to have dinner and catch a movie. The news was still settling in.

“I guess I’m still confused. How did you find out?” he asked.

“I’ve been feeling sick lately. I missed my period. I took three pregnancy tests. All positive.”

“Are those ninety-nine percent accurate?”

“Chris, we can do this,” she said, ignoring his comment. “You’ve been with the insurance agency for a year now, and with the money we’ve saved and the paintings I’ve sold, we can buy a house.” She stopped speaking and looked off to the side. Other couples in the restaurant were leaning close to each other, deep in conversation. The roses on the other tables were in full bloom.

“This is real. Everything we’ve done leads to this,” said Jenny. He was silent, rewinding everything and playing it back.

“Chris . . .”

“Can I teach him a swear word?” She smiled at him. He reached across the table and took her hand.

“You don’t know if it’s a boy.”

He smiled.

“I love you.”

* * * * *

A month passed and shifted into a warm August. Chris had been working long hours, arriving home late in the evening, after the ten o’ clock news. This caused arguments but would end for the sake of the baby.

“You can’t continue to stay there so late,” Jenny would tell him.

“I don’t want to,” he would reply, “I hate it there.”

“Then why do spend more time with your clients than with me?” She would ask. She always apologized after snapping like that, and he would put his arms around her. She had become strained; her paintings were not selling, and she had difficulty making new ones. They realized they may not move into a house as soon as they wanted.

* * * * *

Chris entered the apartment on a cool September evening at 9:30 p.m. Jenny was sitting on the living room couch, knitting a small blue hat. She was listening to Debussy, concentrating on yarn. When he took off his shoes, she set the hat on the blue sofa.

“Chris, it’s past ten,” she said.

“I told you I might be home late,” he said.

“I know, but you didn’t call.”

“Oh, sorry. I stopped at a bookstore.”

“Bookstore?” She said, “Why were you there?” She rubbed her fingers.

“I remembered a book my mom used to read to me.” Out of a plastic bag, he pulled out a small book. On the cover was Mother Goose, Humpty-Dumpty, and various sorts of nursery rhyme characters smiling and laughing.

“You went to a bookstore to get a book your mom read to you?” She looked at him, her eyebrows raised. Chris opened it and handed it to her.

“Yeah, this was the one.” Jenny glanced over the pages.

“Oh God, ‘Rock A-Bye Baby?’ This barbaric rhyme?” she said, scowling.

“Yeah, what’s wrong?” Chris asked.

“It’s terrible. The child falls off the tree top. I don’t want you reading this to them!”

“Stop saying ‘them!’ Makes it sound like you’re talking about aliens.” She closed the book and smiled.

“Fine,” she said. “As long as you don’t make up your own stories.”

* * * * *

Green trees began to fade; color was slowly blowing away as November arrived. Chris was driving home from work when his cell phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Mr. Boytan? This is Dr. Namels from St. Andrew’s Hospital. We have Jenny admitting with us.” His heart jumped. Coolness flowed through his blood.

“Okay.” Silence clouded his ear. He thought he lost the connection when the doctor spoke again.

“It’s probably better if I connect you to her directly. Please hold a moment.” There was a click, and then more silence. Chris found himself speeding, narrowly rear-ending a truck in front of him. Another click.

“Chris.”

“Jenny! Oh my God, are you all right? What happened?” Silence. Her breathing pulsed through, almost inaudible.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Inhale.

Exhale.

“Jenny?”

“We lost the baby Chris.” He felt something he never felt before. It wasn’t feeling, really; just nothing. His hands were shaking, barely keeping the phone to his ear.

“What? But how. . . .”

“There is no reason, Chris. It just happened.” She said nothing else. There were no more words to say.

“No.”

* * * * *

Jenny sat in the passenger’s seat, arms crossed in front of her, her pale skin flushed with shades of red and pink. She gazed out the window, looking at the houses and driveways, filled with minivans, speeding past. Chris’ hands sat white-knuckled on the steering wheel. The hospital gave no definite answer. They explained it happens to a third of pregnant women and are few signs to predict it. They left the hospital after a day.

“You hungry?” he asked, glancing over. She shook her head.

“Do you want me to get you some new clothes? You’re still in the hospital scrubs they gave you.”

“No.”

He looked out to the window. A “V” of geese flew south. They honked and hollered as they passed over the car. There were children bundled in thick snow suits jumping on mounds of snow and peeked their heads over fences. They watched the car drive by.

“Honey, please talk to me.”

She looked in his direction but not as the woman he knew. There was no expression in her eyes. Her mouth remained straight, like a barbed wire fence.

“What do you want me to say?”

“We can’t just sit and forget about this.”

Her plain expression formed into stern, cold eyes.

“Forget? How could I forget? I bled all over the bed sheets, Chris.”

“We can get new ones.”

“I don’t care about fucking bed sheets! I feared for my baby, while you sat in your office, fixing other idiots’ problems!” She was trembling, her body shaking all over. He went to put his hand on her knee.

“Don’t touch me. Just drive.”

“What do you want me to say? What do you want?” His voice had risen, but she didn’t flinch.

“That’s the problem. You never know what to say. I don’t even think you know me anymore.”

“That’s not fair.”

“Nothing’s fucking fair, Chris. What do you expect me to say? You’re gone all day. I’m stuck at home worrying about how my baby was going to grow up.”

He said nothing. There were no kids watching them, only empty yards with clean, untouched snow laid across.

“Just stop the car here,” she said.

“What? Why?”

“I’m going to stay with my mother for a while. She lives down the block. Stop the car.”

“Jenny.”

“Stop the fucking car!” Chris skid the car, tires screeching. Jenny left and walked the opposite direction. Chris remained motionless and watched her leave, not sure whether to go after or let her leave. He did nothing, watching her figure disappear from his rearview mirror.

* * * * *

The snow was different now, dirty and polluted. Chris turned his gaze from the balcony to the building door. Up vacant stairs and into his apartment, he set the briefcase on the white carpet. The room was dark. Nothing stirred, only sounds of the heater rattling. Faces and portraits were gone and vases had left months ago. In the kitchen, Chris turned on the fluorescent light to see everything clean; a spotless steel sink, crumb-free counter tops, and a refrigerator bare of debris. The bathroom remained void of any dirt, scum, or paintings. In the bedroom, he plopped down on the bed and turned on the television. The empty wall above him loomed. After flicking through nature programming and sports highlights, he surrendered and turned it off. He reached to the mahogany nightstand near the bed and turned on the black lamp. Pulling out the nightstand drawer, he took out a small book. Mother Goose smiled at him on the cover with her other lullaby friends. It opened to a familiar rhyme. The yellow pages were illustrated with a baby boy lying in a small, white crib on a tree top, the dark branches struggling to grasp it against harsh winds. The baby laughed at blue birds gathering and decorating the crib with blue ribbons. The thick branch where the baby was placed began to crack.

August Everlasting
Christine Carlson

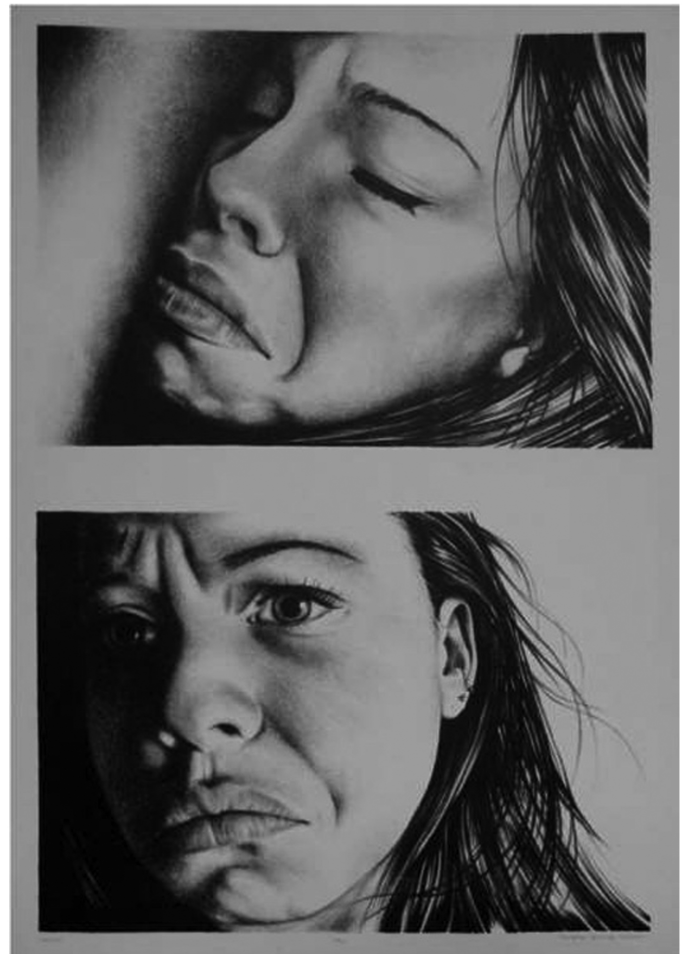
Late August hit me at the very end of summer –
This, the most painful of summers,
Like a punch in the gut from a prize fighter.

The weeks that came before were empty;
A deserted arena;
And the weeks that followed
Were only a prelude
To the rainiest autumn on record.

It was hauntingly quiet, too,
With windows shut tight against the daylight
And screams that had turned to echoes
And I missed most of the sunsets.

At night there was a sort of softness
That wrapped itself around my slumped shoulders
And often, on my dark walks,
The lightning bugs flashed their promises.

There were no more truths;
No other feelings but pain.
They were flat and desperate days,
Tennyson's "In Memoriam" days,
And I could not be held responsible
For what came after



Sorrow

Angela Young

Untitled
Joe Lande

A sighed hum,
With a blessed burning door—
Crashing into red-stained pews,
While the fallen eyes sink wayward
With a chilled hush.

The tricycle screeches past
the pews of angry eyes.
And the white-capped master rises—
With a fixed stare.

But these sockets are empty,
Cursed and bloodshot.
And the sighed hum,
Succumbs to silence—
With a sizzling grasp.

The handle bar bell stings the silence,
and the white-capped eyes open:
Full of bloody tears and
mangled veins.

And the wayward gaze sinks slowly,
Towards the burning pile.
Meeting the origins of fire;
A whisper of saints appears,
And the silence glows—
in cross-barren symmetry.

Adventures in Character
Lindsay Hutton

I hate the break of October -- the speed of hours without product, and the technicolor twilight slur I gladly would give up. But Andrew fights the street sign, as Alice calls the cops. One push for direction, three numbers for surrender, and I feel the need to watch. Margret sinks into the couch, and we all sing in praise, to the drunken poets who pour their wounds to words and dread the onset of better days. Outside the porch is hanging by one nail and some egg-shelled faith: "Four at a time, only four may stand," or our bones and our will, will break. And Pallus wrecks the shower as he attempts to cleanse his hands, for the party is concluding (and then he must contend with what it means to be a man). This winter sets my bones in (it sheds leaves as I shed ideas of home). Although inappropriate to discuss with them, all I need is one turned corner to cut across this cold.

The Truth of Love
Amorett Kummer

I see the Grecian Warrior,
Standing tall and unafraid.
I see the world atop your back,
Though you struggle there be no strain.
I see your words come out as song,
Double negation sounds less wrong.
I see mischief in those eyes,
All in good fun, you would not lie.
I see perfection as I gaze,
I confess no fault is seen unto you.

Snow
Amorett Kummer

The snow flakes drift softly to the ground
The same cold place the body is bound
Innocence of twilight float without a sound
Down to the dark where the flesh is bound
A star shines through as bright as the sun
To show where the soul has ended and begun.



Cordova

Graphite and Ink, Marilyn Buckvold

James Micheal
Angela Nadeau

“I found the one whom my soul loves”- Song of Solomon 3:4

Our vast farmland glistens as the sun disappears.
At the top of a rise, as peaceful as can be,
My full lashes gently close over my hazel eyes.
The wind combs my long strawberry hair.
He appeals to every one of my senses.
He is the deeply rooted, solid oak tree my delicate back leans upon;
Safely supporting my body and sheltering my soul.
The chill of the winter wind blows hard.
He holds me as a mighty brown bear holds her cub.
I feel his massive paws wrap around my slender shoulders.
Heat radiates from his cozy fur coat,
Saving me from the cold outside air.
His warmth comforts my entire body.
Colors of red come before my rested eyes.
I can see our tall red barn, and I walk inside.
He is in the heavy metal tools hanging on the wall;
The very same tools in which he built our lovely home.
Oh, our beautiful blue country home.
I stand at our doorstep, glazing at the cherry red door;
Fixated on the clean white shutters.
My fingertips run along the dark mahogany porch,
Ending at the amber bricked driveway,
My eyes spy his gorgeous red 69' mustang.
My hands grasp the rich wooden steering wheel,
My small foot presses the gas.
The wind gusts through my hair.
I can hear his masculine voice in the breeze.
He whispers “I love you” in my ear,
And tickles my skin with his kisses.
Excitement runs up my lean arms.
My heart pounds as loud as the roaring engine.
My racing chest awakens my heavy eyes,
And I look up at the evening stars, shining bright.
I see the emerald green twinkle of his eyes.
Always and forever, glittering down on me.

The Prize
Don Newman

It's like that sunfish we caught once;
Do you remember?
Purple, jade, and bronze scales
twisting and spinning on the line
like a shiny medallion in the sun.

You said that if I let it dangle that way too long
It would die,
But it didn't seem to mind.

I felt like Robinson Crusoe:
Grasping it by the slimy underbelly,
Pinching its razor sharp tail,
Gaping at its shimmering plated sides,
as one would a Christmas decoration.
I was fascinated
as it dangled.

I told you I wanted to keep it and
Show it to all my friends,
And you looked at me with sad, resolute eyes
And I didn't know why.

It was like David vs. Goliath
The way it tugged.

And then you ripped the lure from its mouth,
The jaw coming with it, and
dropped it to the aluminum deck with a "thunk."
It lay twitching at the bottom of our boat
its pupils moving in and out in rapid jerks,
the blood from its mouth mixing with the water at our feet.
It lay there, flailing, and then stopped.

I didn't want it anymore.



Frank

Intaglio, Shelby Sand



Red Converse

Acrylic, Seung Joo Lee

Out of Her Hands (short story)
Annaka Isenberger

Month 9

"I'm on my way. Yes, Jack. About twenty minutes. I know, I know, stay away from Clarendon Street. I'll take Berkeley, ok? Ok. Bye," Paige said, hanging up the phone. *It's time. This is it.* The pain in her belly was growing by the second. With her turquoise leather bag in hand, she walked down the three flights of stairs, switching from one shaky leg to the next, leading to the front door of the apartment building where she lived alone for the last four years.

"Where you headed at this time of night, Miss Walker?" the doorman asked, looking up from his silver wristwatch.

"The hospital," she replied while she burrowed through her bag, in search of nothing in particular, a habit of hers to keep her nervous hands busy.

"Right away," he replied, leaping to hail a cab for her. As she stood behind the tall, slender man in the grey and red coat, the colors around her began to blur.

This is happening too quickly. I'm not ready for this. I can't do this. I can't... she chanted in her mind, staring at the old, cobblestone sidewalk of Louisburg Square. The smell of the city, a mix of day-old newspaper and overflowing trash cans, was nauseating her.

"Ms. Walker?" the doorman called out, holding open the abrasive, yellow taxi door. Paige looked up from the intricate red stones, realizing time was moving much faster than she was.

"Thanks," she muttered as she leaned into the back, letting gravity pull her to the dingy, slate-colored seat. "Boston Medical Center on East Concord Street, please," she uttered through the plastic partition. As the cab picked up speed and found its way into traffic, Paige's mind began to spout memories like a sparkler on the Fourth of July. She was flooded with thoughts of the last nine months, each memory a spark flying into the stale, taxi-cab air.

Month 1

Negative. Negative. Negative. It has to be negative, she thought in rhythm to her rocking on the floor of the bathroom. The cold tile against her bare legs kept her alert, unable to drift off, thinking that this was all a nightmare. The night of her attack played like a horror movie in front of her closed eyes. She ran her hands over the discolored, healing bruises on her olive skin. *Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse...just be negative. Negative. Negative.* She held her knees tight to her chest, trying to force the shaking under control. But with every flash of his face in her mind, those dark brown eyes, that thick goatee with flecks of red, the heavy smell of whiskey oozing out of his pores, she flinched, releasing a jolt of pain in a burst of violence against the air. The ticking of the egg-timer, the only sound keeping her attached to the present, grew louder by the second; tick...Tick...TICK...TICK. DING!

The out-of-tune ring startled her. From the floor, she looked up the body of the porcelain white sink. The basin looked like a monster, long and lean and a face eight times the size of the body, the pregnancy test teetering on the edge was a cigarette in its mouth. Paige closed her eyes tight, face still tilted towards the fluorescent light, and reached for the piece of plastic that held the answer. *Do I look at it fast like pulling off a band-aide? Or do I brace myself?* But before she had time to reach her verdict, she had already opened her eyes.

Two strong blue lines.

Positive.

Paige grabbed the pink and white swirl-designed box, hoping she had read the results key wrong. Her green eyes darted from side to side. But unfortunately, her memory had served her correctly. She sat in silence, eyes turned back towards and glued to the result she was dreading. Positive, she thought, not wanting the word to pass her lips. If she said it out loud, it would somehow seem more real. *I can't do this. Not by myself. Could I give it up for adoption? I don't think I could carry it for nine months and give it up. Oh, but if it had his eyes. I don't think I could look into those eyes. Who would I give it to?* Her thoughts stopped for a brief moment, but only long enough for the feeling of guilt to swell up behind her ribs. *Oh my God, Serena and Jack.* Paige's head fell, her pointed chin hitting her chest as if her neck was giving way. The picture of her best friends flashed in her memory. *They try for five years to have a baby and nothing. They try to adopt and nothing. Then here I come ...they'll never talk to me again. Oh my God, they'll never talk to me again. I can't tell her. I can't tell her until I figure out what I'm going to do. But...what if I?...no. Could I? Could I really give my child to my best friend? Could I hear its voice call her 'Mommy'?*

"Mommy," she said aloud. That two-syllable whisper alone made Paige exhausted. Her eyes stared at the lavender wall of the bathroom. "How long do I have?" she muttered, quickly counting out days and months. June. June 10th if her calculations were correct. For anyone else, June seemed like a month still ages from October. But for Paige, it felt like it was right around the corner. *Can I decide by then?* For as much tension that had been held in her body, it was time for it to give up. Feeling as if an extreme weight was pushing hard on her shoulders, Paige's body gave way, curving her torso and inching her way closer to the floor. With the bad news still clutched in her right hand, she laid on her side, arms wrapped around the bruised and scraped knobby knees that were pressed against her chest and laid her head on the cold, October tile. *Sleep. Just sleep.*

Month 3

"Man, Paige. You haven't even touched your salmon. It's your favorite! You feel all right?" Serena chuckled as she cleared the black and silver plates from the table.

Paige watched the massacred fillet that she had torn apart with her fork, every bit of it still on her plate. She responded, "Everything else was just so delicious, that I got too full!" She didn't want to tell them that the smell of the pink fish was making her sick.

"Ha, that's a good one, Paige. You and I both know that Serena's experimental cooking is something that belongs in a lab . . . in Russia," Jack chimed in, dodging a towel-snap from Serena's hands.

“Even lab rats have standards, Jack,” Paige said, trying to laugh convincingly without rousing her gag-reflex.

“See if I ever cook for you guys again!” Serena scoffed like a child pouting after being denied a piece of candy.

“Promise?” Jack and Paige said in unison. Jack turned and looked Paige in the face to show his childlike surprise by their synchronized thought. But his gaping open smile melted when he saw how pale Paige looked. “Seriously, Paige, you ok?” he asked, looking into her eyes as he reached for and cleared away the pile of uneaten food.

“Me?” she began, happy to see the plate go but still having to swallow hard against the urge to vomit, “I’m fine.” Paige cleared her throat. “I do, however, have something I wanted to tell you guys.”

Serena and Jack both returned to the table, both carrying something in their hands. As Serena set a thick and slightly burnt attempt of Yorkshire pudding down on the table and Jack placed three small plates on the round table, they looked at each other with small smiles on their faces. “We have something we want to tell you too,” Serena finally said.

“You first,” Paige said, relieved. She folded her hands and rested them against her mouth, hoping it could hide her discomfort. She rested her elbows on the wood table and leaned towards the two.

“Ok, well,” Jack began. “our adoption agency called us last week.”

Paige’s ears burned. Her stomach turned from feeling queasy to hollow. Her eyes widened.

“They found us a baby!” Serena shouted, not able to wait for her husband to get the statement out. Paige’s jaw began to fall and her breath caught in her throat. She could not breathe. She could not speak. All she could do was sit facing the two, with her hands in front of her face and her eyes wide, darting between Jack and Serena.

“There’s a girl who wants to do an open adoption and we had our second meeting yesterday. She chose us, Paige! It’s finally happening!” she said, barely getting the last words out as joyful tears began to gather in the corners of her eyes. Jack reached from his chair and put his hand over his wife’s which was gripping aimlessly on the table. Paige stood up, pushing the chair out of her way, and went over to her best friend. Bending down, she wrapped her long arms around Serena.

“I’m so happy for you guys,” she began. She pulled away, looked into her eyes, and said, “You are going to be the best Mommy in the world.” That two-syllable word sent her heart racing once again. Paige took the familiar, overwhelming sense of exhaustion and pushed it back into her belly as she pulled her friend in tight once again.

“Wait a minute,” Serena said as she pulled away from Paige’s firm hold. “You had something you wanted to tell us too!”

Paige’s lips spread in a fake smile but kept pursed together. She blinked hard, shook her head, and said, “It’s nothing. Just some news from work,” she lied. “Now tell me, when is it due?”

“June,” Jack said.

Month 9

“That’s \$16.50, Ma’am,” the cab-driver said as he whipped around, his belly pressing hard against the wheel after a ride that only felt like seconds.

“Oh—uh, yeah. Um, here’s a twenty. Keep the change,” she said, flailing the crisp bill from her organized billfold through the partition. Paige opened the door, scooted her body and let her right leg drop from the floor of the cab onto the street. Never had she felt so many struggles getting out of a car. With what felt like fifty-pound weights in each foot, she stood in front of Boston Medical Center’s Emergency entrance. The glass sliding doors opened automatically, catching what little movement she made, but open they stood. Paige could not move her feet. She looked up, taking in the sheer size of this enormous building. Six stories, she counted. But looking to the right then left, it seemed to go on for the entire city block. The two black, circular satellites positioned on the indent of the fifth floor stared down at her. Its rows of glass windows were a toothless grin, having only a few rooms illuminated. *This place is going to eat me alive.* The pain in her belly did a somersault. She couldn’t wait any longer.

Getting into the elevator at the end of the entrance hall, Paige pressed the number six button and leaned back against the side wall, glad it was empty. *A few seconds to breathe.* She had only traveled fifty feet, but she immediately felt exhausted. She closed her eyes, hoping to rest for the short elevator ride, but the pain of discomfort was growing. *You have to do this. It had to happen sometime. But why today? Why now?* The doors opened, chanting an arrogant ring as it reached its destination. Paige lifted her head. The ride was not long enough. She pushed off slightly, peeling her limp frame off the small wall. She felt the glue, a mixture of condensation on the old vinyl and perspiration, pull apart from her arms. Even her skin wanted her to stay a moment longer.

Taking a deep breath, Paige walked onto the floor that smelled like baby powder and sanitation. As she walked down the long, taupe corridor, words like *Mommy, Pregnancy, and Birth* flashed past her in vibrant colors on oversized pieces of art; each one brought on a bigger pain than the last. But she stopped at the black and white photo of a pregnant woman hanging by the nurse's station. Dressed only in her porcelain skin and a drape of white chiffon, the woman sat on a bare floor, serene and wistful. Her dark hair was a severe contrast against that colorless fabric that covered her chest and pelvis. Her exposed, swollen belly looked so uncomfortable to Paige, but the woman's face read no discomfort. Her face read *love*. A tremble beneath her chest began, spreading quickly to her bottom lip, but she held her breath and forced it away, continuing down the hall. Stopping right outside room 626, she once again took a deep breath to muster up all the strength and courage that she had. Paige stood in front of the oversized oak door, and stroked the length of her long black pea coat from her chest to her knees as if the nerves were resting overtop her like flecks of lint.

She knocked.

Month 4

It was a Thursday. The clouds, thick and white, rolled in heaps of unthreatening billows, but hid the sun perfectly, not too unlike a normal December day. What it looked like didn't matter one bit to Paige on this Thursday. She sat in the back corner of her walk-in closet, her secret place of comfort, rocking back and forth on the floor in a slow but steady tempo among her rows of clothes hanging from white plastic hangers. It was over. No more worrying. No more planning. No more soul searching. No more gut-wrenching angst. But after she started to bleed, there were also no more baby clothes. No more fantasies of spur-of-the moment picnics at the park. No more thoughts of hearing the word "Mommy," a word that she secretly wanted to hear, breathed through a tiny squeak of a child's voice.

The pain had begun two days prior. The tightening and contracting of the muscle above her pelvis and the severe sting that shot through the middle of her back told her something was wrong. Her doctor had sent her home. It was already too late. The baby was gone.

She sat there on the wood floor, clutching the mint green little newborn-sized t-shirt that sparkled the letters that spelled out *Momma's Little Angel* that she had bought from the baby boutique on her walk home from Douglas Park two weeks earlier.

She knew that she would have kept it.

Month 9

"Come on in," the muffled voice echoed through the heavy oak door. Paige held her breath as she pushed down on the dulled silver handle, pushing her way into the room. She ducked her head down low as if trying to find her way into enemy territory.

"Just me," Paige whispered as she peered around the door that she was still half-hidden behind. Her eyes scanned the room, finding Jack walking towards her and Serena sitting in an old rocking chair by the oversized window, holding a pink bundle. Still moving forward, her eyes became transfixed on that mound of pink fluff in her friend's arms. She quietly set her bag down next to a chair, making sure not to stir any unnecessary noise.

“Hey Paige,” Jack said, wrapping his arms around her. He had never held her so tight. When they separated, Paige noticed how red Jack’s eyes looked. She had never seen him cry before. “Here she is,” he gestured, one hand on the small of her back, leading her. She was glad he helped guide her to the infant; she didn’t know if she could have made it on her own. Every movement was a hard one to make. Serena looked up into Paige’s face. Looking back, Paige recognized that expression; it was the same as the poster in the hall. *Love*. Her face read nothing but love.

“I’d like to introduce you to Kaitlyn Paige Burroghs,” Serena said as she peeled the satin lining of the blanket away from the rosy-skinned, sleeping child. Then she glanced back down to the baby, “Kaitlyn, this is your Godmother, Paige.” Serena stood up gently, stiffening her arms to make sure the baby wouldn’t slip. Her awkwardness eased after she stood.

“Do you want to hold her?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know. You look pretty content. I don’t know if I...” she responded.

“It’s ok, really.” Serena added, starting to lean in to hand her the baby. Paige’s heart jumped. She wasn’t prepared for this reality to be shoved upon her this quickly. But then there she was, being eased into her arms. Paige was taken aback by the way her body so easily formed into the required stance to handle a baby and how comfortable it felt to have her resting there. As the baby situated itself and snuggled into the crook of her arm, Paige felt it, the pain of grief that had been buried in her belly for the last five months arose.

“Look, she’s a natural,” Jack said. It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it?” he added. Just as Paige was about to respond, three loud raps hit against the outside of the door. Before a word was said, a nurse came walking into the room.

“Mr. and Mrs. Buckland? Is there any way you could come with me to sign some papers? I can have a nurse come in and stay with the baby.”

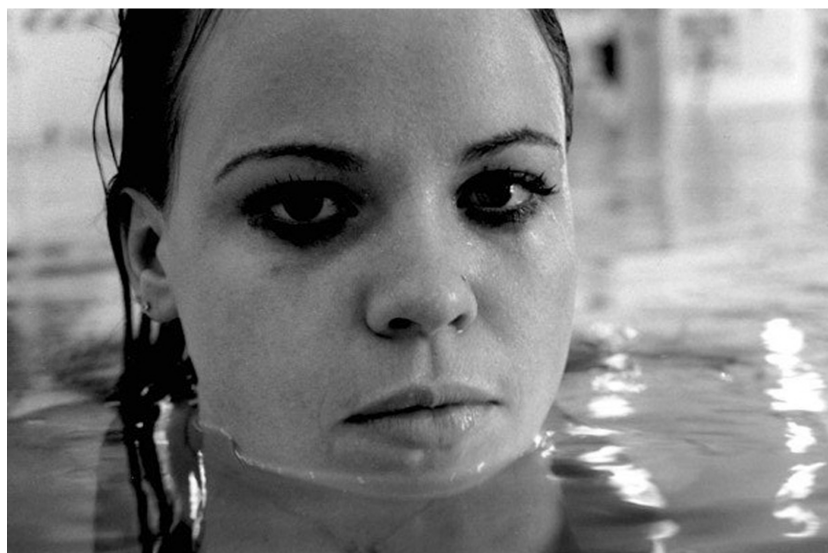
“Actually, if it’s ok with you Paige, could you stay with her?” Serena asked as Jack and she walked towards the door.

Surprised by this request, Paige responded “Uh, yeah. Not a problem. Go ahead. We’ll be fine.”

“Thanks,” they chimed in unison.

Paige moved towards the rocking chair as the door squeaked its way closed. She eased into the chair and leaned back hard, sending the two of them into a simultaneous motion. She took her left hand out from beneath its tiny frame and took a hold of the corner of the blanket, softly grazing it against the virgin skin of the infant’s cheek. The silence of the room was broken when Paige gathered her courage to speak.

“The two of you would have been the best of friends.”



Ambivalence

Silver Gelatin Print, Ann Lawton

Mission
Kyle Brager

The wind is crisp,
Gliding across the marshmallow-white snow-covered ice.
My peripheral vision is at the peak of its capability,
With each stroke of my feet I feel so free.

Everything seems so surreal and reminiscent of past experiences,
Days where Dad had to help me lace up my skates so they were just right.
Seems like so long ago mostly cause so much has changed since then,
It's been over a year since he's been in my life.
Now he's nothing but a ghost.

Darkness engulfs the rink as if the world was ending and I'm the only one left standing,
The only way I can distinguish the image of the puck is the two small lights.
Feeling the smoke of my breath as I exhale I take off,
Skating harder and harder until I finally connect the puck to my stick.

I have a flashback as I'm closing in on the empty net,
I remember what was whispered to Charlie Conway in *Mighty Ducks*.
One....two....three....triple deke,
The puck soars quietly through the cold night until I hear it hit the net.

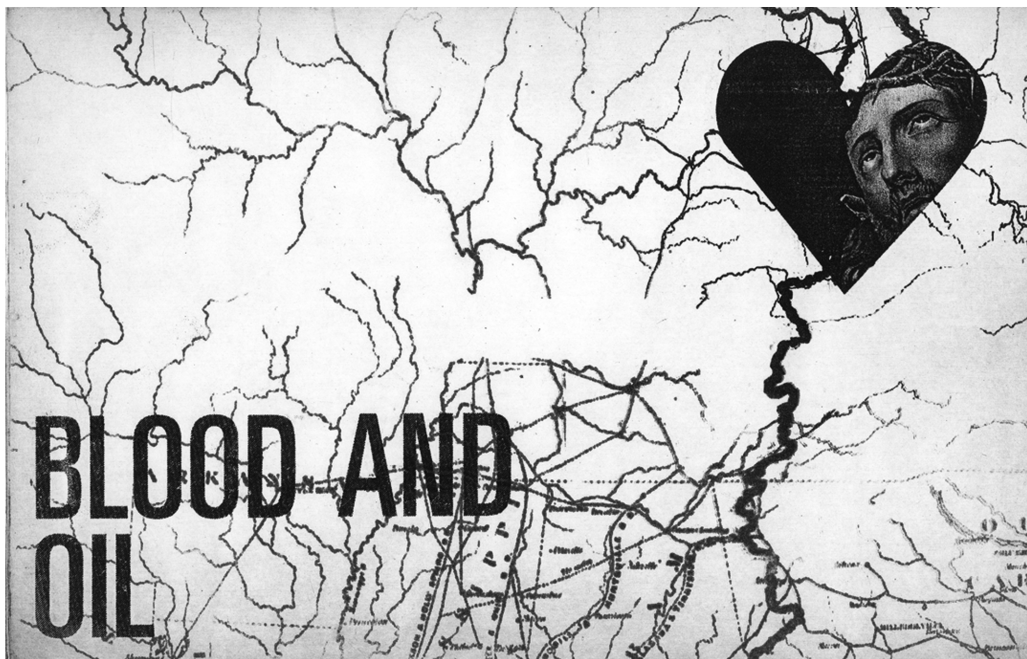
Goal accomplished. . . .

The Voice
Emily Syring

I am a cold shower in the morning, bringing you back to life after a deadening sleep. I am the buzzer that rings at six a.m. and bolts you out of a peaceful dream. My purpose is to keep your life on task and focused centrally on what you need to do. I am the realization that we don't live forever. All of us are mortal and will eventually leave this earth. I demonstrate this on a daily basis whether you want to believe it or not.

I illustrate merely the facts. There is no glory or fame about what my job is. On any given day I will wrench your mind when I strike. Many times you don't like me—the truth can be excruciatingly difficult to handle. I understand this but it doesn't lower my significance. My presence can be hard to handle. Many times the naivety of young minds is disillusioned and refuses to see me for who I really am; however, it is not only the young minds who fail to recognize me. It is grown men who drink and beat their families. It is adult children who take their elderly parents for granted. It might be the teenage girl who thinks she'll live forever when she drinks and drives who fails to see me. These people refuse to see the importance of those around them. They don't want to see me so they don't. That's all there is to it.

I am often not a likeable idea. I am necessary, though. I help get life started again after a loss. I help people to move on when they think they cannot. I show the way things actually are. I am all fact and no fiction. I tell no lies and illustrate only the truths of this world. I am a smile on a youngster's face as they look up to you in perfect admiration, as they giggle and give you a big hug you appreciate me fully. See, I am not always bad. I am just real. I am reality.



Blood Jesus 1

Solar Plate Etching, Nathaniel Swanson

Model Citizen
Matt Loosbrock

Spread like mold,
 perched on rotted log shelves, and
 hammered to dry white walls.

One dyed red, two combated with double propellers,
 Landing gear in tact
 peacefully, post-war.

Crafting the final one, time unnoticed,
 cementing each part, plastic surgery. I
 wanted to be a craftsman too.

Leaving the table,
 parts spread like motor shells, waiting
 pieces jigsaw puzzles.

I picked the cockpit glass,
 but my fingers were rusty, and nails like claws,
 and clear, blue plastic snapped.

Sirens fired off, piercing cries, and
 I ran, a P.O.W. under a wicker chair,
 sheltered from dropping bombs

Orange Peeling
Anita Lampert

We stood outside near the bike rack and as
 an offer of friendship, he handed me the orange.
 I had seen him peel it at the round disc of a
 lunch table, his thumbnail chipping the orange
 peel away like chipping wood with a pick,
 uncovering the insides of the orange like the
 whittler might uncover the bull or eagle
 from a piece of driftwood. I remembered that
 as I took the orange, but my fingers turned
 white and two halves sat in my palms, tendrils
 of juice leaking through the slits in my fingers.
 The little hanging shards of orange were little pods
 layered like muscle inside, as though
 it were a living thing I had just ripped
 open, beating in time with my pulse.

A Lullaby: Flying at Night
Brett Kroska

Think of flying.
Think of flying at night
with your short wing, your grey
wing stretched across
the night.

Think of sleeping.
Think of sleeping with a glass
of water on your stand at night,
the water gone, sleeping you, and then
that empty water glass.

Think of waking.
Think of waking with the shatter
of that glass, the prisms breaking
empty water, shaking from your sleep you see
them shatter.

Think of seeing.
Think of seeing water breaking
on your wooden floor, painting
glass and water, you were sleeping,
see the floor.

Think of walking.
Think of walking to the door
and there an owl in the tree,
feel you certain he was there, you were
sleeping, he was gliding
from his tree.

Think of sleeping.
Think of sleeping through the night,
the night the water gently breaking
broke beside your sleeping dream, but
you are
seeing, owl is flying, almost you can
see the dream.



Plant Study #2

Photography, Joel Thorson



Jason

Lithography, Shelby Sand

Interview (short story)
Sara Allsop

Mark leaned against the park bench, stretching his legs and leaning his arm against the back of the bench. The bus wasn't due for another twenty—he looked at his wrist, twisting his watch around to face him—four minutes. Dressed to impress, he wore a dark navy suit and a royal blue power tie, black hair slicked back from his forehead with just the right combination of youthful innovation and executive pomade. A briefcase rested next to him on the chill metal bench.

It was ten o'clock on a Thursday, a quiet time when the gainfully employed are already at work and the unemployed haven't left the house for the day yet. Mark glanced up at the sky, watching the naïve, translucent clouds float towards the beach. It was a day made for elementary school field trips and Frisbee at the park and lunch outside the cafe. The sun was bright and inviting while a cool breeze would keep it from getting above seventy-eight degrees, or so the weatherman had said that morning. Looking down the street Mark watched the palm trees sway gently, making him think he was sitting in a romance novel for a moment.

The street ended in the Pacific Ocean and a line of beach houses, a vacationer's dream. The beach had soft white sand, the kind that inspired tourists to take it home with them, as though they could take back to their jobs and mortgage payments nothing but swimming and sunbathing.

Mark shivered just thinking about the beach. He hated most of the things surrounding him. He hated the sun, the breeze, the water gently lapping against the sandy beach, the children playing with one another, laughing and screeching; the sounds almost crawling up his spine as he sat there, a quarter mile away.

Mark detested the striking lines and swirls of red and pink and yellow during the sunset, ice cream melting against a warm birthday cake, a child sitting on an old Shetland pony while it eats daisies in a sunny field and worst of all—worst of all—puppies, a golden retriever puppy playing in lush green grass jumping after butterflies.

Mark pulled out of his jacket pocket a tiny sculpture of a puppy. He had stolen it from a souvenir shop down the street earlier that day. The puppy, apparently named Snickers, was surprisingly well crafted, each line of fur distinct against its chubby body. Snicker's eyes were bright and a paw reached up to bat at its nose where a butterfly sat. Mark studied the insect. Its wings were colored simply, red yellow and blue, perfectly symmetrical and as fragile as a real butterfly. Mark felt the wings gently, expecting to feel a dusting of pollen on peach skinned wings. He took one wing gently in his fingers and snapped it off. He snapped off the other wing and held them in his fingers for a second before dropped them to the ground. He leaned back and lifted slightly the heel of his Doc Martins to grind the detached wings into powder, watching their destruction with intensity and a lop-sided smile.

"Pardon me, are you taking the 10:35 bus as well?" A tiny old woman settled down on the edge of the bench farthest away from Mark, careful not to disturb his briefcase. Puffy white hair topped a thin and boney, four-foot-nothing frame. She held her woven purse upon her lap and pressed the heels of her size four feet together.

"Yes, yes I am." Mark pulled his briefcase off the bench in a hurry, offering her more room.

"Oh isn't it a beautiful day out today?" The old woman beamed, not noticing Mark's strained expression at her comment on the weather. "My name is Ada. And why are you traveling to hell today?"

Mark sat up a little straighter, a little prouder and smiled shyly. "I have an interview with Lucifer. I'm hoping to be one of his interns this summer and then apply for a job as a real minion in a few months."

Ada smiled and leaned back, glancing him over. "Oh how exciting. You know, you might meet my son, he's in hell." Ada leaned in closer and said confidentially, "not as a worker, but in eternal torment."

"Perhaps one day I'll get a chance to be his tormentor." Mark scooted closer to Ada as his feet started tapping up and down. He smiled, leaning towards her.

"Oh what a small world," Ada said. She placed a small, gloved hand on Mark's arm briefly. "You might see me as well. I visit Eric, that's my son, every Thursday morning. I so look forward to it. It's practically the only joy I get the entire week."

"I'm glad you get to visit him"

"Yes," Ada sighed, "but I do worry about when I will have to stop." Ada's body sagged slightly and she looked quickly towards to ocean before turning back towards Mark.

"Why will you have to stop?" Mark tilted his head, confused.

"You can't visit hell when you're in heaven," Ada said. She seemed surprised that Mark didn't know that.

"Why not?"

"Well, it wouldn't really be eternal torment if your mother could bring you apple tarts every week, would it? I'm allowed to now, but when I die . . ." Ada pulled her purse closer, as though the day was going to steal upon them right now.

"Why don't you just go to hell then?"

"I'm too old and poor for that." Ada laughed ironically, but Mark knew it was true.

"Right, right." Mark could understand her plight. He didn't want to go to heaven either. He stood up and then sat down again closer to Ada. "I could watch over Eric for you. Have you met any of the other demons? Do you know anything that might give me an advantage over the other applicants? I hear it's quite difficult to get in."

Ada smiled and thought for a few seconds. "They just do such a great job. I know, I was chatting with one until Eric was finished with brimstone and maggots one day. She said that she had done quite a few evil deeds before she got hired, as well as being well-versed in the seven deadly sins and she had broken all Ten Commandments."

"Really?" Mark gripped his briefcase tightly.

"Oh yes, but I'm sure you're just as qualified as they are. What grave sins have you committed?" Ada's face was open and expectant.

“Well, uhh...” Mark wracked his brain for the worst thing he had ever done. “When I was younger, underage in fact, I used to drink quite a bit.”

“Oh that is promising. Did you drive drunk and kill someone?”

“Umm, no.”

“Paralyze a young mother?”

Mark’s mouth was dry and his throat seemed to tighten slightly. “No.”

“Hit another car?”

“Not really.”

“Hurt anyone else at all?”

“I shoplifted earlier today.” Mark pulled the puppy, sans butterfly wings, out of his pocket and showed it to her hopefully. “And I jaywalk all the time...” he trailed off, his voice sounded pathetically hopeful and bleak.

Ada looked at him doubtfully. “To really get in good with the devil you have to have hurt other people, and you have to have hurt them a lot. I don’t believe that shoplifting is quite severe enough.”

Mark stood up and ran his fingers through his sculpted hair. He began pacing back and forth, as well as around the bench.

“Damn it! I’ve been focusing on all the wrong things!”

“It can’t be all that bad.” Ada still looked optimistic.

“I got a double Bachelors in Business and Political Science. I passed the board to be a lawyer. I use a Franklin Planner!” Mark rubbed his hands together like a doctor prepping for a surgery. His hands chafed together fiercely, the friction nearly scraping off the flesh. “I’ve studied, but I haven’t put any of it into practice.” Mark paced as though by sheer will he could change his qualifications.

“It surely can’t hurt that you’re a lawyer.” Mark knew she was only trying to make him feel better. His eyebrows, so furrowed they nearly covered his eyes, scanned the ground and his chest seemed to be caving in.



Untitled

Watercolor on Glass, Jesse Hoffman

“What am I going to do? I have my interview today, I can’t reschedule it.”

Ada turned to face him. “There has to be something you can do. Right now.”

Mark gripped the bench. “What? The bus is going to be here in four minutes. There’s nothing!”

“Nonsense!” Ada’s eyes were wide. “I know what you can do.”

“Oh?” Mark’s hand continued scrubbing, prepping for an interview he wouldn’t take.

“Rob me!”

“What?” His hands were still.

“What could be worse than robbing an old woman of her pension so that she can’t go visit her son?”

Ada stood up. Her hands were steady as she placed her purse strap over her shoulder. “I’ll start walking away as soon as the bus gets in sight. Then you can run after me and steal my purse and jump on the bus so no one will try to stop you.”

Mark gently touched his fingertips together. He considered the plan.

“I think it’s the best idea we’ve got. Hey, Ada.”

“Yes?”

“I really appreciate this; I mean you are really helping me out here.”

Ada looked up at him. Her eyes were clear and her skin seemed firmer around her mouth. She stood up straight. “Mark, I haven’t had this much fun in years. Don’t worry about me. I’ll visit Eric tomorrow and he’ll love hearing about this. It will make his day.”

Mark smiled at her and picked up his briefcase. Ada looked behind him and her face lit up. She leaned up as far as she could and as Mark bent down she kissed him on his cheek, then shuffled away. Mark turned to watch her and saw the bus turning the corner three blocks away.

The front of the bus stated, “HELL 34 / 7.” That was the one they were waiting for. His fingers tightened on the handle of his briefcase. He took a deep breath and forced himself to wait a few seconds longer. Ada had gotten a pretty good start, for an old lady, and the bus was starting to get close. He ran after her, picking up speed as he sprinted towards her. He hit her shoulder slightly, jostling her as he grabbed the bag from her hand. He planted his foot to turn in mid-stride and dash the half block to where the bus would stop.

As he turned he could see the faint smile on Ada’s face as she threw her out her arms to steady her body. “Help! Help me!”

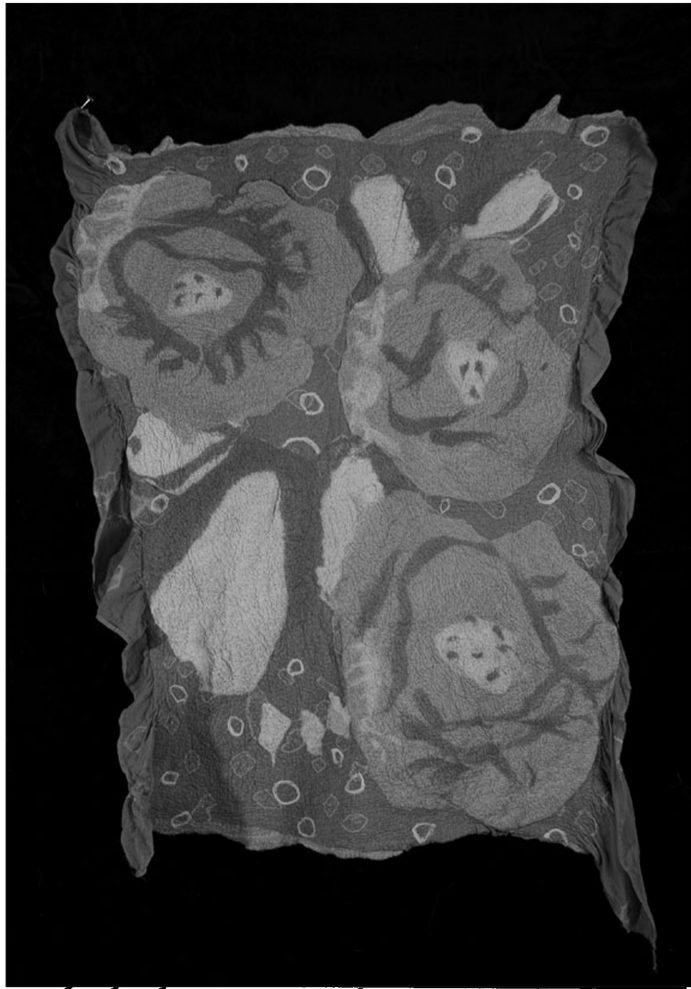
The bus still hadn’t reached them—he had miscalculated how slow it went—it hadn’t even reached them yet, much less the bus stop. He paused in his run, uncertain. There were people running towards him as he shuffled in place, holding the purse tightly against his chest, his comfort blanket against failure. He had to get on this bus!

The bus was a half a block away and someone was now blocking his path, ready to redeem months of absent child-support by saving this old woman’s purse. He couldn’t miss this bus! He could not be late for this interview. Snippets of the conversation he had had with Ada came back to him in choppy fragments.

“I visit Eric . . . the only joy I get all week . . . I’ll visit Eric tomorrow, and he’ll love hearing about this... You can’t visit hell when you’re in heaven.”

Mark stepped purposefully towards Ada holding the purse in front of him, a sort of offering as he shoved it towards her. A look of confusion bloomed on her face as Mark shoved her, pushing on one shoulder as she twisted around. Her mouth gaped open in surprise as she twisted, falling towards the curb. Her slender body sliced through the air, with no air resistance to give her petite body a chance of stabilizing herself. She didn’t make a sound as she lay in the gutter, her ankles up on the curb.

The bus hushed to a stop after a surprisingly subtle bump. The door breezed open and Mark stepped on, his back straight, his hair smooth, a smile trying to stay silent as he ambled down the aisle and relaxed deeply in his seat.



Felted Flowers Fibers, Danielle Hubing

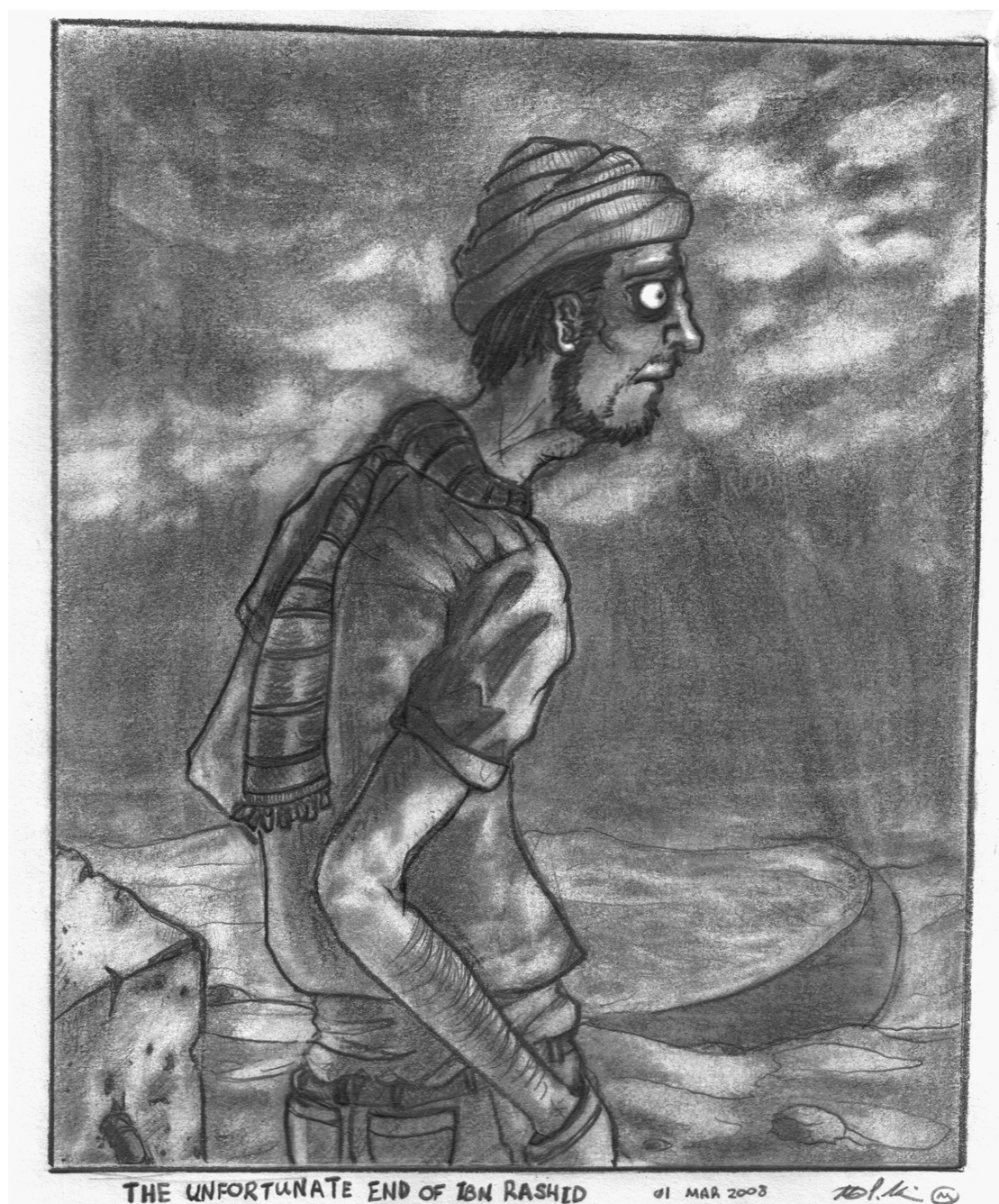
Hold Onto the Breeze
María Germain

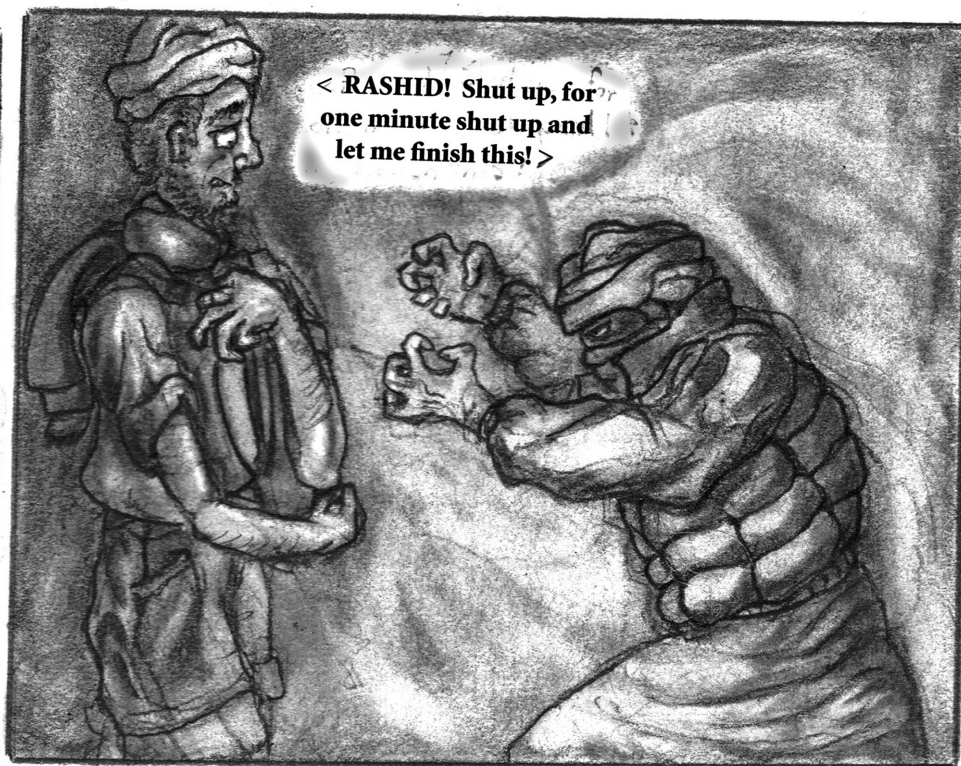
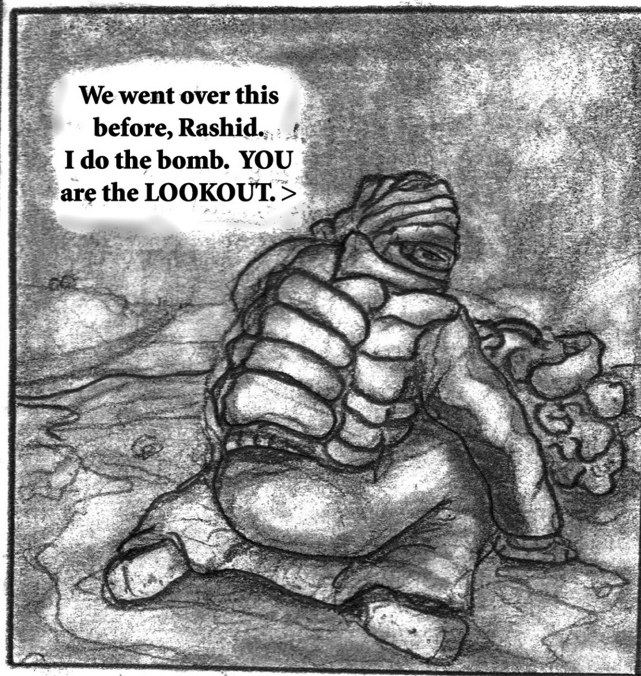
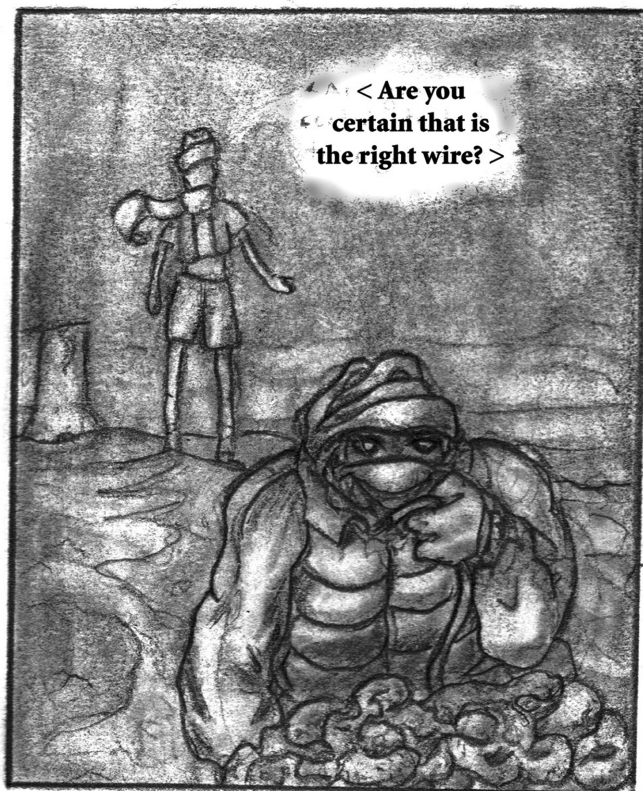
The sweet scent
 Intertwined with smile
 Raindrops fall
 And touch so slightly
 Lilac kissed
 Tulip twisted
 A look turned mildly
 Laced with tender
 Swiveled pink
 Lilies wink
 A secret kindled
 Promised petals
 Whispers in gold
 Meaning untold
 Hold onto the breeze
 Keep me close

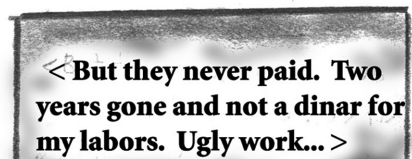
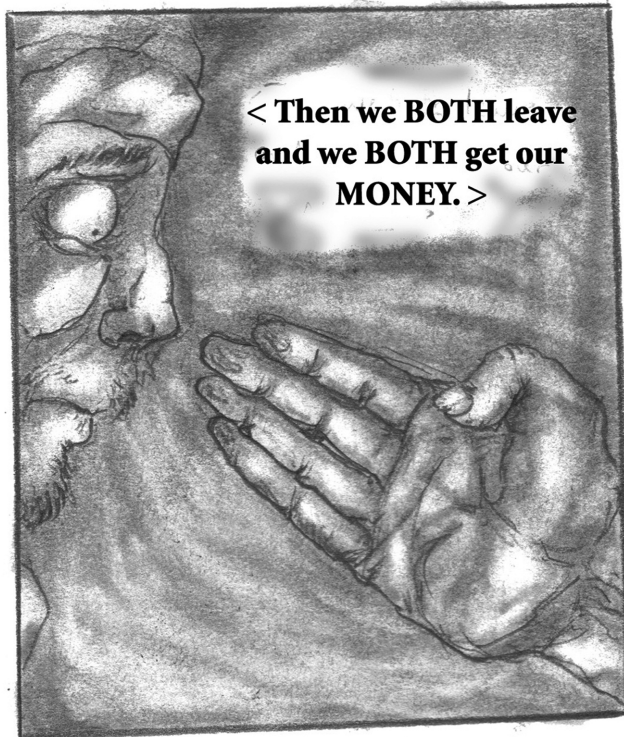
Temperate Crescendo
Vanessa Faye Percy

A lulling tenor holds sway over flight
 Earth pulsates amidst cadent heart
 Rove tide scalds the bereft canopy
 Quarries of shore brimful and rare
 Incurious rapt drifts in clarion foam
 Sun fades aloft his winsome profile
 A debonair guide tarries far north
 Past the effusive clouds one to nine

The Unfortunate End of Ibn Rashid
Matthew P. McMillan



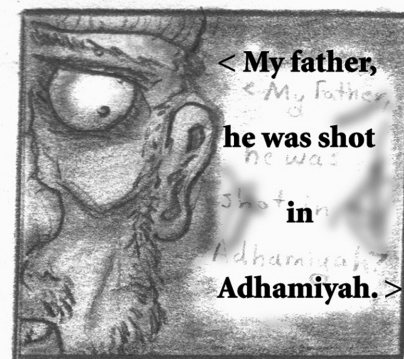




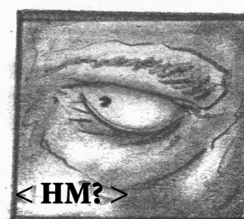


< But ah,
Hasan? >

<He always
pays. >



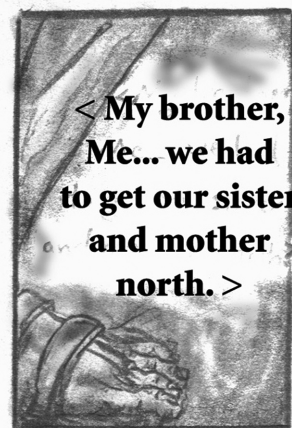
< My father,
he was shot
in
Adhamiyah. >



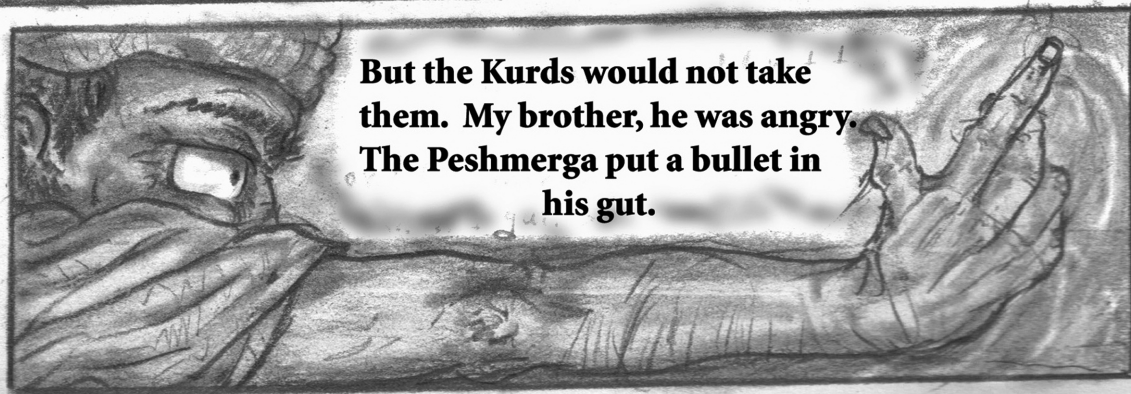
< HM? >



Sunni, all of my
family. My father,
he was shot in the
market and died
by a fruit stand.



< My brother,
Me... we had
to get our sister
and mother
north. >



But the Kurds would not take
them. My brother, he was angry.
The Peshmerga put a bullet in
his gut.

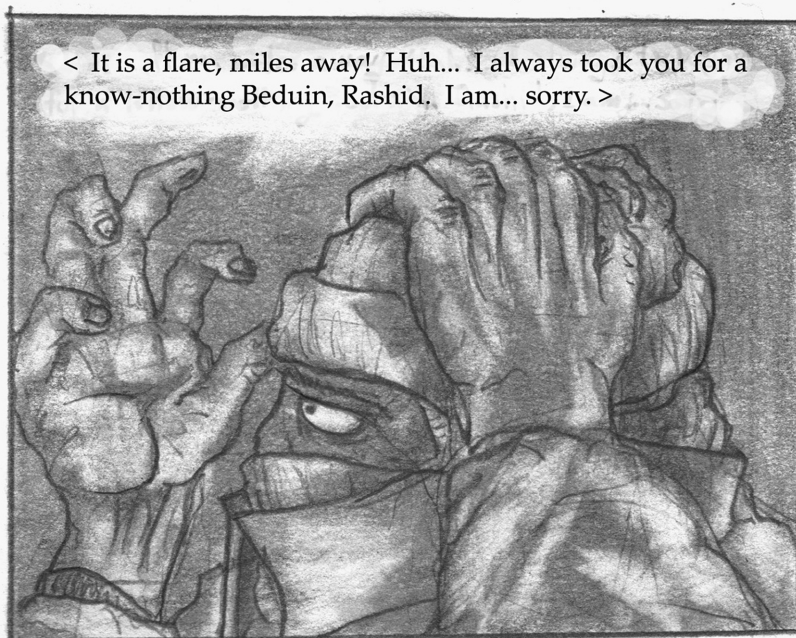
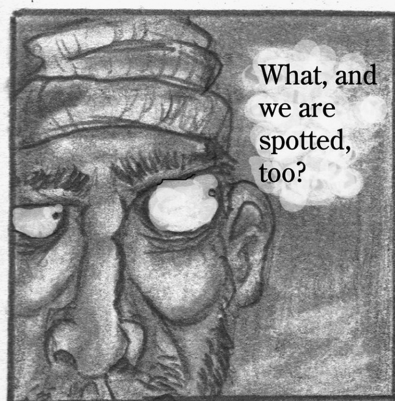
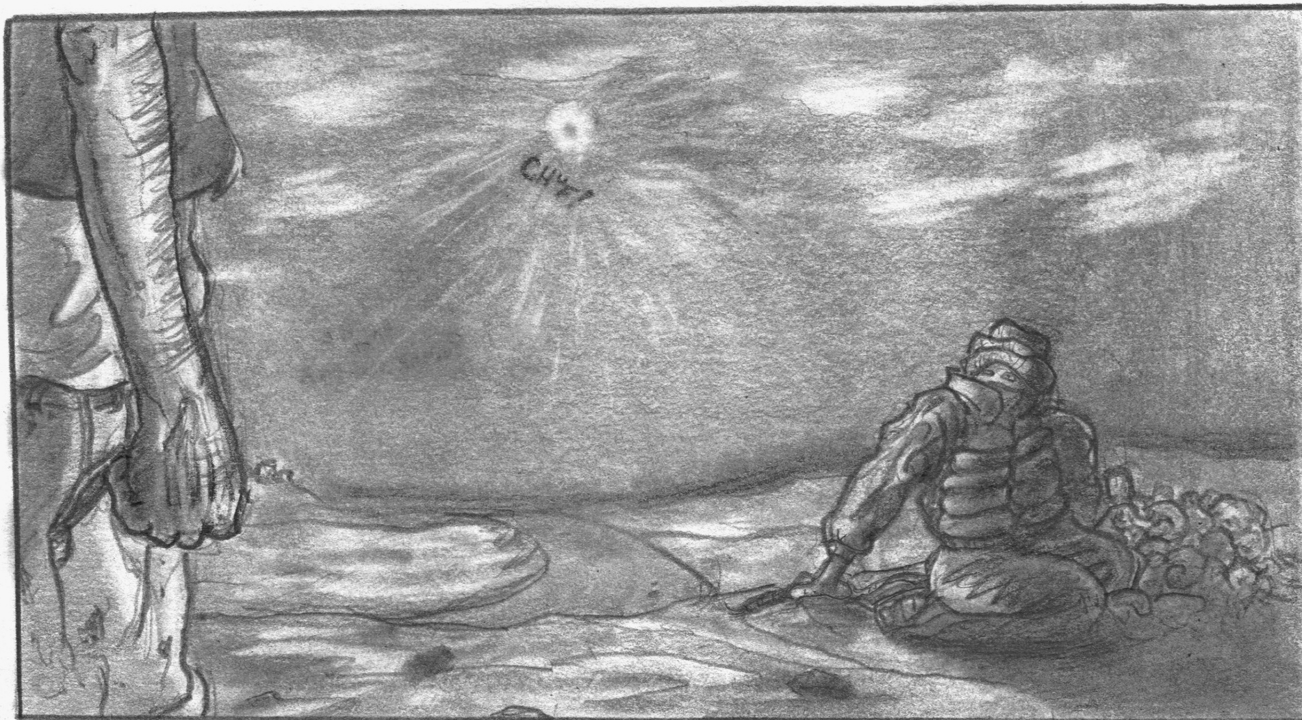
< My brother,
he did not
even have his
rifle, but
still he
dies. >

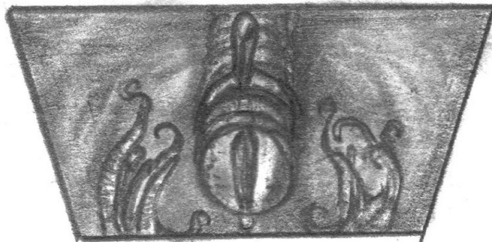
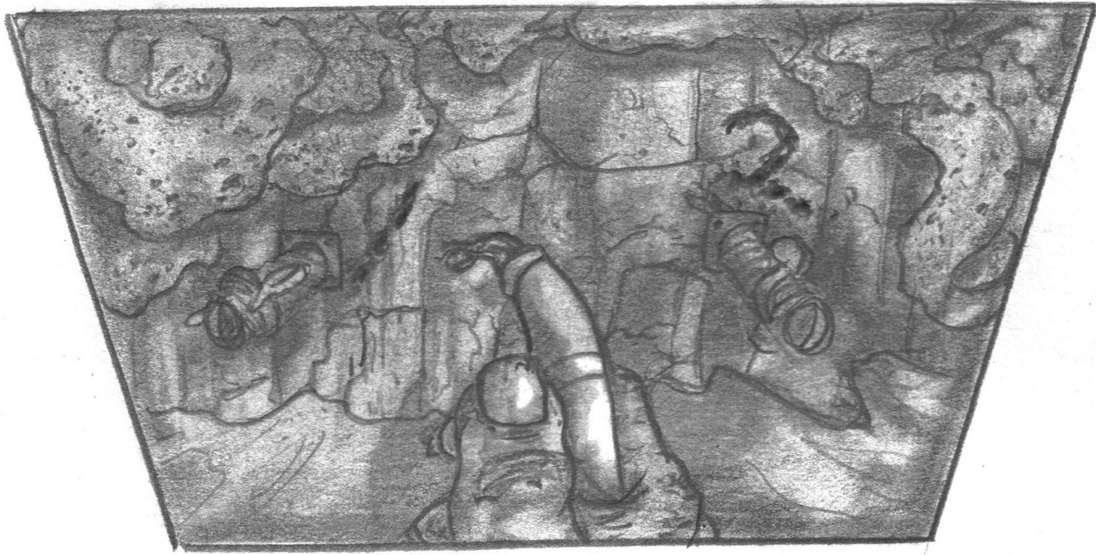
< So I turn to
grifters and
smugglers, but
both want
money to take
them out. >

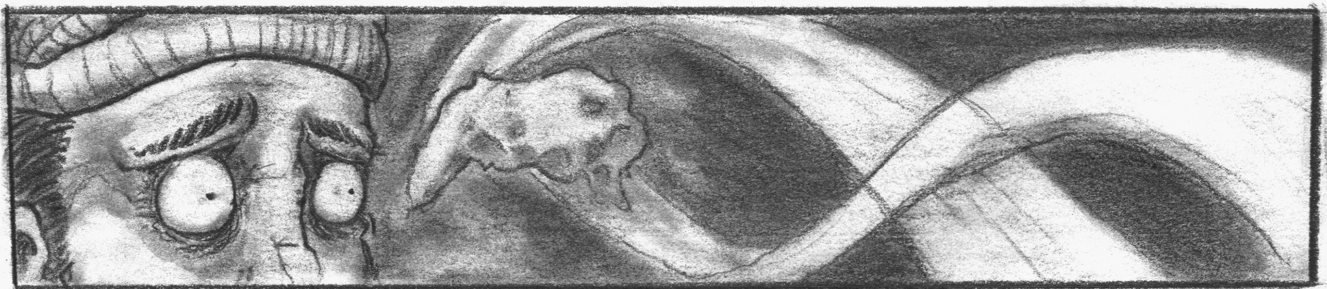
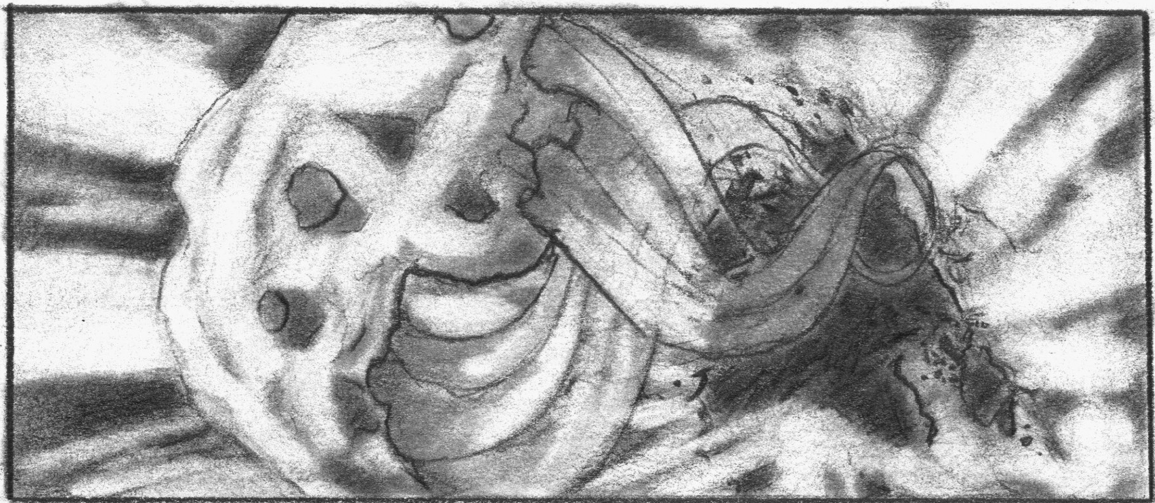
< And
you are
right.
Hasan
always
pays. >

< Two Hundred
to install, one
thousand if
one dies. >

< I NEED this. Contact 2 is GREEN. >









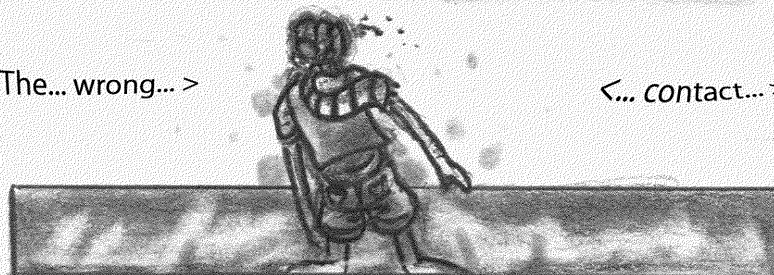
< It was... >

< Wrong... >



< The... wrong... >

< ... contact... >



< ... >



END
②