

HORIZONS



HORIZONS

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF
WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Editors' Note

Horizons is a collection of literature and art from the students at Waubensee, but over time it evolved into something more. For over twenty years students have poured their hearts into this project, making it an integral part of the community, and we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. This magazine is a place to share and create, to learn and innovate, and above all to celebrate the creativity of our Waubensee community.

We would like to thank all those who submitted this year, for helping spread art in a world that needs it more than ever. And to our editorial team and designers, you have our sincerest gratitude and admiration. During these strange and uncertain times, our daily lives have been disrupted in unforeseen ways, and our process here at *Horizons* has been no different. But despite the hardships that come with a global pandemic, the determination of our team and the invaluable guidance of advisor Dan Portincaso ensured this magazine is the best it can be.

Lastly, we would like to thank you, the reader. The goal of every artist, author, and editor in this publication is for it to be shared and enjoyed, perhaps even loved. It is why we do what we do. So with that in mind, we hope you enjoy reading this year's issue of *Horizons*, we sure enjoyed creating it.

Isaac Russo
Cass Feiurdean
Alexie Diaz

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POETRY BY MIGUEL CONTRERAS III

*FIRST PLACE WINNER
OF THE
CREATIVE WRITING CLUB FALL WRITING CONTEST*

First-grade year:
"You are number four."
A warm gaze
But a condescending smile
Pressed down on me
From authoritative shoulders
I thought it not then
But I had been branded
I was number four
She was number five
They were six, seven, eight
But he was number one
Backpack on hook four
Papers in cubby four
Number four in line
Such a good little soldier
Little number four
Third-grade year:
I bought my lunch from school
An orange-striped note card
Concealed in my pocket
Seven simple symbols
Tell the lunch lady who I am
5170850
5170850
5170850
Day after day

It never changed
Eventually they become ingrained
Malleted into my memory
Five did the same
So did Six, Seven, Eight
And even One did too
Not till long after did I stop and think
If I am
5170850
Who is 5170851?
What of 5170852?
I shuddered when I did not know.
Sixth Grade Year:
I received a gift
Soon to become a burden
A cell phone
Complete with an 11 digit number
1630 636 9662
1630 636 9662
I repeat to myself
In a sing-songy phrase
11 digits for me
11 digits for mom and dad
11 digits for Dustin
11 digits for Ben
I exchange
What numbers are yours?
Here are mine.
I spawn an arbitrary list
Of series of digits
On a block of technology
Growing heavy in my pocket
I scan each series with a name
Perhaps with a symbol
But beneath the thin veil
All have 11 digits
Tattooed on their chest

8th Grade Year:
Boys and Girls begin to mature
If not before
Impulse and attraction
Was crowned
Sitting on the throne
In the kingdom of young minds
Girls afflicted with their latest crush
Boys infatuated with their most recent dream
Not long was it before
A group of giggling girls
Or high-fiving males
Could be found in every hallway
Quantifying every innocent passerby
By the size of their chest
Or shape of their body
"She's an 8."
"They're all 5's."
"Oh, but he is a ten."
Grading each one with an unspoken rubric
Removing points for each tiny imperfection
When each one
Was flawless
Nonetheless,
Ratings hovered over heads
Like shackles on souls
Not long after did I too look in the mirror
And wonder
"What number do they think I am?"
A self-degrading number materializes above me
And a slave master chains me to it
So I too drag my feet as I walk
Freshman Year:
Mass hysteria ensues
Impulse and attraction is now rivaled
By a foreign invader
A demanding and remorseless taskmaster

Grade and Future
Subjugating the youth
Through fear
Through threats
Of what will befall them
Should they defy him
Buffeting them with
Systematic
Arbitrary
Thoughtless
Endless streams of work
With the promise of a gift
With the promise of a number
"What are your grades like?"
"What's your class ranking?"
"What level of classes are you in?"
Tired eyes gaze up
To display tormented souls
With a mind sculpted to the taskmaster's liking
With a weary smile
They open their mouths to answer
And vomit numbers
To the taskmaster's approval
Then to the next
Who looks just as worse for wear
They're prompted with the same as before
But dreams are their breath
And their tongue spills out words
Of passion and beautiful ambitions
The taskmaster howls and cracks his whip
To bring them in line
To submit their minds
To submit their spirits
To submit their dreams
So that the school is a graveyard
So that we are the occupying banshees
The taskmaster will be defied

And those rebels condemned
The taskmaster will be obeyed
And the those faithful commended
They are the "elite"
So many of whom
Sit in their pretentiousness
Sit in their self-righteousness
Gorged on the fruits of believing
Of believing in the superiority of their intelligence
Fed to them by pretty little numbers
As if those numbers were any true indication of the mind
As if those numbers were gained by any means
Other than accepting facts and figures without question
Spitting those facts and figures back on paper and hand-
ing it back to those who gave it to them
As if that's intelligence
As if I cannot walk these halls and pick out a mind just as
if not more expansive and brilliant
As they claim theirs to be
Who simply does not wish to submit themselves
To such a cruel perpetual cycle
At the expense of a number.

Junior Year:

I am no longer blind
I see the world for much as it is
To which adults reply
"You're only 17, you'll understand when you're older."
As if I am a naive child
Who understands nothing
But
Of course
I am labeled by a number
I am no longer blind
To how the loss of a single life is a tragedy
But the loss of many
Is an incomprehensible figure
To which I understand I'm only a figure of 1

In the scheme of 7 billion
I am no longer blind
To how so often
Prestige and success
Is measured in currency
And material excess
And the value of a job is in pay
Rather than the joy that it brings
I am no longer blind
To a world where the number of years lived
Is more important than the quality of them
And how they were spent
I am no longer blind
To how no matter where I may go,
Society will assign me a digit
And should that digit be cleared
It will quickly be calculated
And replaced

Anxiety Sparks

POETRY BY BRENDA PEREZ

In a small, unnoticed moment
That's when the anxiety sparks
I breathe, and it burns my lungs
Tense noises of screeching and howling sound across
the winds
The calm has ceased, and everything becomes omi-
nous
The light that ends at the bottom, sinks, and everything
becomes nothing
The smell of smoke becomes stronger and stronger
But I see no flames
The skies were pale and blue, almost renaissance-pic-
ture-perfect
It appeared that time had moved forward
I stand and take a step back
I inhale deeply
When I see the light disappear, I do not question it
I take a deep breath in again and noises cease
The screeching and howling became chirps and flutters
Suddenly the smoke-like smell has been replaced by a
neighborhood barbecue
I feel an overwhelming sense of warmth flow through
my blood
I am brought back to reality.
My voice echoes until it has reached every corner.
I paint,
My canvas tinted and concealed to ameliorate the
chaos.

I wait,
My thumbs lightly tapping against the smooth glass.
I heave,
My belongings packed into a single small bag.
I leave.

Untitled
ARTWORK BY ANGUS NOACK



*24 x 18 in.
Pastel on Pastel Card*

Plague Doctor

ARTWORK BY GARRETT AUSTIN



11 x 8 ½ in.
Archival Inkjet Print

Sencillo

ARTWORK BY CYNTHIA JIMENEZ



24 x 18 in.
Pastel on Paper

Frankie's Girls

ARTWORK BY MARIA MACKO



8 x 10 in.
Silver Gelatin Print

Hell is Real

NONFICTION BY JACOB BOOZELL

Funnily enough, I stopped believing in God during a mission trip.

I was just on the cusp of entering high school when it happened, and it was the only thing that I still clearly remember during the three-month break. I've always loved to travel, ever since I could remember. In fact, I loved it so much that the prospect of a road trip or flight filled me with excitement rather than dread. I love traveling so much that the actual context for the trip is rather unimportant, so long as I get to see a new place. So, when the proposition was brought up to me by my Aunt and Uncle, I took it haphazardly without really considering the actual basis of the trip itself. In other words, a "Week-long Mission trip to Kentucky to help spread the Holy Spirit and aid the poor" registered as a "Trip to Kentucky," and as such, I was quick to accept. And so, on an unusually brisk summer morning, my Uncle's white Cadillac waited for me in my driveway and I hobbled over to it, holding several pieces of luggage.

The drive was almost 8 hours long. With each hour, I became more and more preoccupied with a slight, pulsing pain in my right big toe. For the first four hours it was rather mild, but by the time we got to the hostel I was limping. This was noticed by one of the members of the congregation who just happened to be a registered nurse. When she took off my shoe and sock, I noticed that my toe was bright red and rather swollen. The pulsing pain just kept getting worse. We had no antibiotics on hand, so for the first thirty minutes at the mission hostel, my foot was submerged in Epsom salt and water. After this, it was wrapped in gauze and I was able to walk again, although I had a noticeable limp for the entire trip.

As it was getting wrapped though, I realized that there would be no way that my foot could fit into my regular pair

of shoes. This was particularly problematic because our first scheduled trip was to a national park called “Yahoo Falls,” (Pronounced “Yay-Hoo”) and the only way to the falls would be to hike through the forest in midsummer Kentucky heat. I was actually rather content to stay back at the hostel, but just as I was about to voice this opinion, a pair of flip-flops was found right next to the front door. The man who found it asked everyone if the pair belonged to them, and they all shook their heads. Then, on his suggestion, I tried them on. To my genuine shock they were perfectly my size. Once everyone else saw this, the whole congregation fell silent, and I heard one of them say something along the lines of “God is Great!” under their breath. To them, it seemed that the flip-flops were divine intervention, and for a moment, a couple of members bowed their heads like they were in prayer. To me, though, it was a massive inconvenience. Whatever kind of rubber the manufacturer used irritated my skin quite badly, and by the end of the trip my foot was covered in blisters, particularly between my toes.

Once we got back from the falls, I took some time to explore the hostel itself and the immediate area outside. There was a backyard, a front porch, and a house right next to the hostel where we stayed. When I asked my Aunt who lived in the house, her face shrunk in a bit and she became noticeably uncomfortable. She told me that an old retired Catholic Priest lived in the house and that he’d come to help with mission business on occasion. He lived a quiet life and, according to her, he was a really nice person.

She also told me to stay away from him. I didn’t understand why at the time.

His name was Carroll Howlin if you ever want to look him up.

As night fell, I was briefed on the two families that we’d be helping. They lived next door to each other, one in a trailer, and the other in a two-room house. The flooring in the trailer was beginning to rot, and several holes dotted the faux-hardwood. Apparently, the 5 children who lived there began to fall through the floor as they walked around the

trailer. Naturally, the parents weren't thrilled about this and desperately needed to repair their home. The woman in the two-room house needed a handicap ramp for her doorway, and a roof installed over her patio. What we needed to do seemed simple enough, and I expected that it wouldn't be too much of a challenge, even for someone who was injured like myself. If anything, it almost seemed like it was going to be fun. I did like building things, after all.

When we arrived, I started to sober up to the reality of the situation. The woman in the two-room house had functioning legs, but they were clearly on their way out. They were covered in abscesses, and her actual strength was quite bad. Even with all of this to consider, this woman would walk to get herself groceries. She didn't have a car. In fact, none of the people we helped did. She didn't rely on anyone else, even though she probably should have. Her house had no air-conditioning and no driveway. I'm not even sure that she had a bathroom inside of her home. I never found out. I felt like asking would be rude. We did find out that she had a third room, or more appropriately, a shed. Unfortunately, all four walls were caked in black mold, to the degree that one of the people assigned to clean the room began to have a reaction serious enough that we almost had to call 911.

The trailer home was a whole different can of worms. When I walked in, it seemed like the holes were almost strategically placed to be hard to walk around. They were in narrow hallways, the children's bedrooms, and in the bathroom, which was a completely different issue. The pipes must have been broken or leaked - because, according to one of the congregation members, sewage leaked both underneath the floor and underneath the trailer home itself. That was the only thing that I wasn't very keen on getting involved with, even though I was ready and willing to help out with the rest of the members. But on account of my toe, and the fact that I was only 13 at the time, my help was seldom ever needed or wanted. As such, I spent a great deal of time either doing the most menial tasks imaginable,

(taking the garbage and putting it in a pile, sweeping, etc.) or, doing nothing, really. Sitting and watching people build things can get rather boring, though, so I started talking to the actual homeowners themselves.

The first thing I realized was that all of the people we were helping were unbelievably friendly, to the point where talking to them was almost like talking to a friend. This alone changed my whole perspective.

I firmly believed in the whole “Redneck” trope going into this trip, and I expected that the people we would be helping would be well-intentioned, but ignorant. Frankly, I expected them to be rather stupid. This might sound incredibly rude, and it was, but at this point my whole life experience was that of well-manicured lawns, nice cars, and safe neighborhoods. My area was pretty much crime-free, and whenever there actually was a serious crime, everyone in the whole neighborhood would shake their heads in disgust and act horrified and shocked. In other words, I was sheltered by the veneer of affluent suburbia, and in my own ignorance, I presumed that my way of life was the

“In other words, I was sheltered by the veneer of affluent suburbia, and in my own ignorance, I presumed that my way of life was the “normal” way of life.”

“normal” way of life. If someone was “poor” like these people were, they were just lazy, unintelligent, or both. So, it came as quite the shock when I realized that the man who lived in the trailer with his wife and kids actually had a Master’s Degree in Computer Science from the University of Kentucky. It was at this point that I was building my own PC for the first time ever, and my interest in the subject of computers and coding had become an almost dominant force in my life. If you

were to ask me about what I wanted to do for a living back then, I’d respond with “Computer Programmer!” or “Game Designer!” without hesitation. So, naturally, I became engrossed with this man and his own computer. His personal

PC was easily the most powerful one that I had seen in person, and as he spoke more and more about it, I started to wonder why the hell he wanted to stay in the trailer. I realized that it probably wasn't a choice when I saw his work uniform.

He worked at a gas station because that was the only job available. There aren't many IT gigs in Whitley City, Kentucky.

The woman in the two-room house didn't even work. Although, in her condition, it would be unlikely that she ever could work, unless she could work from home. She would spend the majority of her time walking to the grocery store to buy herself food and other necessities. Once she would arrive back from her journey, dozens of stray cats would appear right out of nowhere, surrounding the whole house and filling the air with a chorus of meows. She would then hobble out and set several plates of cat food on the ground, and the cats would turn into ravenous beasts. The plates would be obscured by the bodies of all of the cats for a good thirty seconds, and when the cats would move on to a different plate there would be no evidence that food was even there in the first place. Once satisfied, they would lay around and play with each other. Some of them would approach her, and she would pet them gently. In fact, all of the cats seemed to really like her, and for that matter, humans in general. One of the high points of the trip was having this tabby cat jump right on my lap and fall asleep for a good ten minutes as I started to pet it. When I asked her why she fed them all, her response was short and to the point.

"Them cats gotta eat too!"

A low point of the trip was going to a Baptist Church. It was the first morning of the trip, and at this point, we hadn't even begun to help the people out yet. I was raised Catholic myself, and I firmly remember all of the little rituals that accompany a Catholic Mass. To me, the church was a place where you'd go every Sunday at around 8:30 in the morning. You'd sit in a pew, and stay completely silent as

the main priest gave a mild-mannered sermon or a reading from the Bible. Then, when he would complete his sermon, we'd all stand and sing a song that seemingly everyone else but me knew the lyrics to, and then we'd sit down again. Rinse and repeat, maybe four to five times. Then we'd begin the Eucharist. We'd file into a line and wait our turn for the body and blood of Christ. The body tasted like cardboard, and we'd wash it down with blood that tasted like a cheap red Sauvignon. In other words, church was a cordial, rehearsed, and mind-numbing event.

Baptist Church was an entirely different affair.

The pastor would raise his voice as he sermonized, decrying the sinful nature of man and reaffirming the most perfect power of God. Members of the crowd would shout and praise God as the pastor continued his holy tirade. Uproarious displays from the crowd only grew more intense as he focused his critiques upon very specific things in modern society, notably homosexuality, and secularism. With each passing minute his face became redder and redder.

“Uproarious displays from the crowd only grew more intense as he focused his critiques upon very specific things in modern society, notably homosexuality, and secularism.”

The veins in his neck started to poke through his leathery skin. I don't even remember if there was a Eucharist. After all of his holy hell-fire preaching, his voice decreased in volume, and he told everyone how much God loved us. He told us to always pray since God was the only one who can offer a real change in our lives. He told us that God loved every single one of us, and if we wanted to go to Heaven, all we'd need to do is accept him in our hearts. No sickness, pain, loss,

or poverty could separate us from God's infinite love. Then, a donation basket was passed around.

After the service ended, we stood up and mingled with some of the locals. I didn't do much talking, but they smiled warmly at me. Once they heard that I was there

on a mission trip, they told me how proud they were and offered to pray for me. Most of the patrons were very old, and they seemed addled with all sorts of ailments, from bad legs to dementia, wheelchairs to extraordinary obesity. Despite this, they seemed quite jovial overall. Smiles were plastered on their faces, and many of them were outgoing enough to approach us themselves, they could clearly see that we weren't from around there. When we exited, my brain felt fried. I didn't know what to make of the service. Honestly, it still stuns me to this day.

We made rather good progress with our initial goals at the two homes, fixing the holes in the floors by covering them with wide pieces of plywood, we decided to start cleaning both of the places out, although we made a point to clean the woman's house first since she couldn't do it herself. Once that got done ahead of schedule, we painted her kitchen a new color, and while we were waiting for the paint to dry, we drove to a "nearby" Walmart, (I say "nearby" because it was 45 minutes away) and bought an A/C unit. We planned to surprise her with it, and on either the second-to-last or the last day, (I don't remember the exact day) we unveiled the unit to her.

I will never forget her face.

She began to cry. Her eyes didn't get misty, she started to cry. She cried more when the nurse who fixed my toe gave her some Neosporin from the local Kroger and showed her how to apply it to prevent the infections on her legs from getting worse. She was crying tears of joy because she finally had A/C and over the counter antibiotics.

The father who lived inside of the trailer felt similarly, although he was much more stoic. I could still see something shining in his eyes as he watched his children run around the trailer without fear of breaking the floor or falling into a hole.

On the last day, I awoke fairly early with my Aunt and Uncle and packed everything up. Right as I put my regular shoes on for the first time in a while, (the infection had gone down considerably) the whole congregation surrounded

me and placed their hands on my shoulders and head. They began to pray for me, asking God to use me for good and telling me to go with the Lord at all times. We then drove to the two houses for the last time, and I got to shake the father's hand before seeing the woman in her home. She sat in the third, freshly decontaminated room, almost as if she was savoring the feeling of having a room that wasn't a biohazard and wrapped me in a warm embrace.

I hugged her back and told her that I wished nothing but the best for her.

She smiled and told me that she was going to pray for me, and started to thank me for helping her out, even though I did the least in terms of actually helping.

Once the embrace was broken, I went back to the white Cadillac and peered at her house again. It was just as small, but now she could actually use her wheelchair, a minor, but very good change, I think. I put my earbuds in as we started the long drive back to my house, my right shoe off as to prevent the infection from starting off again, and my eyes were glued to the window.

As we drove, I saw thousands of little houses and trailers, undoubtedly inhabited by the same type of people we had just helped. I saw thousands of some of the nicest people I've ever met drowning in poverty and hopelessness, choked by bills and taxes and all the other trappings of working-class life. I saw all of this in America, a country that I had been led to believe was the greatest damn place on earth, and it was at this point that I realized how wrong I was. I realized that I was completely wrong, not only about America, but about the people who lived in these areas. I expected stupidity, ignorance, and bigotry. While I did get hints of that last part, the overwhelming majority of them were filled with a sort of altruism that's basically impossible to find in most people.

I saw how bad things really were for poor people in America for the very first time, and as I sunk into the plush leather seating, I began to wonder why they were praying for me.

Tattoos

POETRY BY CHRISTINA BAUMANN

They are all special,
Every single one I bear,
But the real reason
I decorate myself in ink
Is because I like the way it makes me feel.
I no longer inflict scars on my body,
Which used to make me feel,
Instead, my therapy is needles
Piercing my skin.
The sensation is the same,
Pain at first, then numb,
But the scar that remains
Is no longer ugly,
And is no longer someone else.
My tattoos,
Are me.

The Vase, The Duck, and The Compass

NONFICTION BY SEDONA HEDGER

Christmas has always been a big part of my family and a huge part of growing up. We had three or four different ones we would go to every year because my mom has such a large family, but my favorite was always the one with my mom, dad, and sister. My mom always encouraged my sister and I to pick out our own gifts to give. She always said it was more special when we thought of the gifts ourselves.

I remember the Christmas when I was in kindergarten more than any other. We had decorated our classroom in traditional Catholic Christmas decorations. We were learning about different ways people celebrate Christmas, and for math we were learning about money. My teacher created a Christmas shop for us to buy gifts for our family and help us with change. Parents donated items to our little kindergarten shop. The prices ranged from two dollars to a quarter. My mom sent me to school with five dollars to do my shopping. I bought something for everyone in my little family.

For my mother, I bought a simple, clay, flower vase. The vase was maybe the size of a plastic water bottle. The top was thin and curved inwards, then curved out again giving the bottom of the vase a round shape. The clay that had been used was a pinkish brown and felt like it still had air bubbles in it. Around the neck of the vase was a straw ribbon that had been tied into a bow. I don't think my mother cared for it very much. I, in my five-year-old mind, thought that because she had so many potted plants

and had helped me plant a butterfly garden, that she'd like it. She placed it on top of our VHS bookshelf. I don't recall her ever using it. Its home had been up there until the day my parents divorced and moved, then I never saw it again.

My sister wasn't even a year old yet, and I thought her gift was so special that she would keep it forever. I had found for her a small rubber duck that would fit perfectly in her tiny hand. It was the usual yellow color with a red ribbon painted around its neck. That summer before, my sister kept shouting "Duckies" at a field of geese, which had been her first word. She loved her gift and played with it in every bath she took. Eventually, it became so old and gross that our mom threw it away. My sister never noticed that it was gone.

I thought I was clever giving my dad a compass that Christmas. It was nothing fancy, it was made of yellow and green plastic with a safari man and lion in

the middle. It was a piece of some game. About two or three months before, I had stayed up an extra hour past my bedtime with my mother, waiting for my dad to come home from work. He never came that night. A week later, he finally made his way home. When I asked him about it, he told me that he had gotten lost. So, naturally, when I saw the compass I knew my dad needed it.

That Christmas morning, I was so excited for my dad to open his gift. He held the small token in his hand. He looked confused and asked, "Why did you get this for me?"

I looked at him and told him, "I picked this out for you, so you don't get lost anymore." He stood up out of his recliner, told me he loved it, then went into his room for ten minutes. I have only seen my father cry a handful of times in my life, and this was the first time.

"When I asked him about it, he told me that he had gotten lost. So, naturally, when I saw the compass I knew my dad needed it."

Many years later, once I was a legal adult, my mother and I had a serious talk about my father and why he did the things he did. My father was a drug addict and sometimes chose that over his family, which is why he would get “lost.” He would spend weeks in a somber building, filled with people with sadness in their eyes. He would spend weeks, sometimes even months, in these buildings and we only got to visit maybe once or twice. He would have a single room with a bed, and a small shelf with a handful of books laying on top of it. Sometimes, if we were lucky, he was able to call us and we could talk for about ten minutes. It turns out that was rehab.

I remember him going to AA meetings and bringing my sister and me on their family camping trip. But I never understood what they were. People sat in a circle around the fire and introduced themselves and said why they were there and why they wanted to change. No one told me what AA meant until I was in high school.

I do remember when we went to visit him in rehab. His compass was sitting on his nightstand, next to a very worn bible. When I sat with him during the AA camping trip, he had the compass in his hand and held it tighter when he began to talk about his journey. Even now while he’s battling cancer, he keeps the compass in his drawer.

This was one of the last Christmases we had as our little family. A year later my parents divorced. Things for my dad never quite got better. He continuously battled with addiction on and off for years. He finally began to figure things out when I was in fifth grade in 2008 and ended up going to Iraq when I entered my sophomore year in high school. Even then, he wasn’t around much. But he was getting his life together until cancer came and shook up our world.

I would have never thought that something small like that compass would mean so much to my dad. Honestly, I just wanted him to come home.

Acorn and Leaf

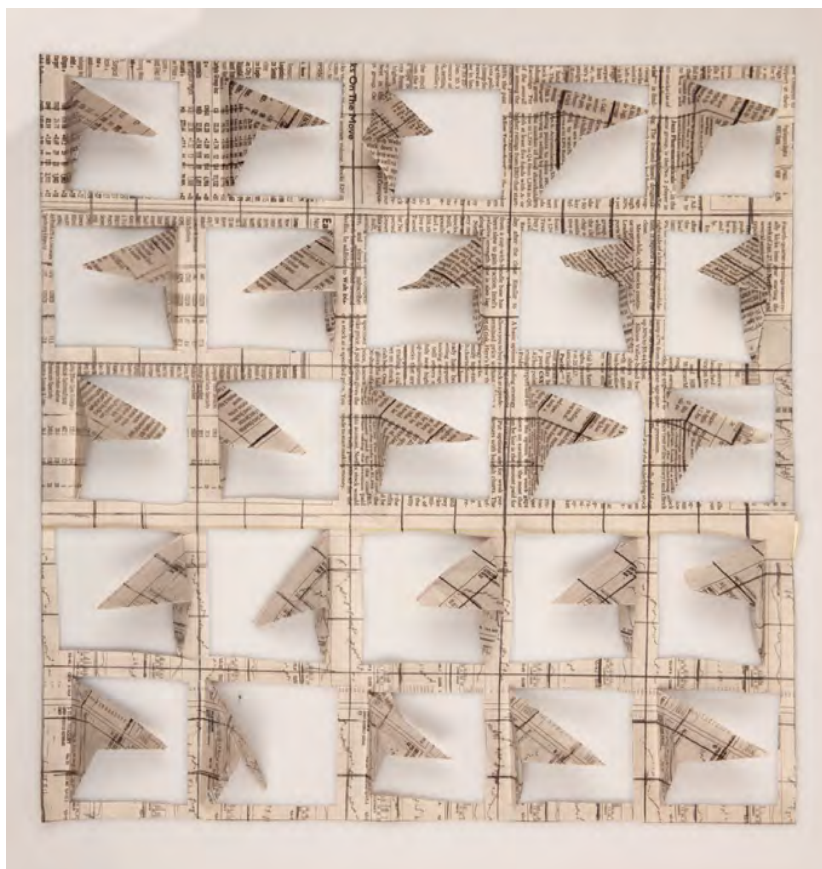
ARTWORK BY JOHNNY LO



*11 x 12 x 6 in.
Woodfire B-mix, Train Kiln Fired*

Third Time's a Charm

ARTWORK BY BECCA OVERTON



15 x 15 x 1.5 in.
Newspaper

**The Power Does Not
Exist in the Presence
of Non-Believers**
ARTWORK BY NICK CIPRA



*28 x 42 in.
Archival Inkjet Print*

Laundry Day

ARTWORK BY MADOLYN MILLER



24 x 18 in.
Charcoal on Paper

Raspberry

POETRY BY SARAH DENOVELLIS

When your favorite fruit is raspberries,
That rot within the hour,
You learn you can't snack as you please,
But now, you must Devour.

I Love You

NONFICTION BY RYAN DIEDERICH

I'll never forget the day when he said he loved me. The light feeling that bloomed in my chest was unlike anything I'd felt before. The electric jolt that shocked me down my spine to my toes was thrilling. I knew then that I wanted to hear him say it to me every day for the rest of my life.

The look in his eyes was mischievous but also full of trust. They twinkled and caught the light in just the right way, as they always did. His crooked grin made my heart pound hard even before he spoke. People always tell me to think with my head, not that thing beating in my chest, but he always made my head fuzzy. The faintest smell of him reached my nose despite all the scents around us, making it impossible to focus.

The sounds around us were drowned out, leaving us all alone in the whole world. Nothing mattered then but him and me. My vision narrowed to just him, his gravity pulling me in. My friends jostled me, but I didn't feel a thing. I couldn't think, feel, breathe. My entire universe was down to just him.

I'll never forget the day when my world was changed forever. My friends would talk about it for years, how my eyes lit up, hands at my chest, feet stuck firmly to the ground, but my head up in the clouds. They'd say how my breath hitched so hard it was audible from five feet away. They'd mention how happy I looked, how my face just lit up. They'd say I looked at him like he put the stars in the sky. Maybe he did.

I'll never forget the day when my hope was shattered, how my feet may have been on the ground, but there was nothing to catch me as I fell. The stars rained from the sky that day. My body went numb, my heart eviscerated. The cold crept in my fingers and toes first, stretching all the way to the empty cavern in my chest. Everything turned on its head.

"I love you," he said, "as a friend."

Trophies

FICTION BY JOHN DOSSELMAN

It amazed me how few items had been transferred to the truck so far. The hired help were distressingly slow. If I had even a fraction of my vigor back I certainly wouldn't have bothered with them, but I suppose old age makes beggars of us all.

I moved down the hallway in a slow shuffle, passing vacant rooms that had perhaps held everything and nothing of the items outside. For the life of me, I could not quite recall if the empty rooms had ever even been occupied at all. I walked past the moving boxes that lined the hallway, careful not to disturb the memories residing within. With each step, the order of the cardboard boxes descended gradually into an anarchic clutter, their brims pushing out to the ceiling in defiance, their contents displayed as listless rabble. A tangle of ancient ticket stubs climbed up and into the side of one box, a football with some indiscernible signature scrawled out on the laces sat restlessly on another. Photo albums, fastened shut, lay at reckless angles on the carpet, blank edges of polaroids peeking out from the periphery. Decades of forgotten faces conspired with one another between stacks of picture frames hidden from view.

Presiding over the lawlessness at the end of the stretch was a great slob of a man. His girth spilled over at every chokepoint of his lazily crouched figure, a sweat stained shirt desperate to encapsulate it all like an overstuffed sausage casing doomed to split. From under the sleeves of the shirt, tribal ink scribbled out in crayon fashion too garish to be overlooked, too faded to obscure the tight pink scar running down the length of his left elbow. I watched as he pulled two trophies roughly from a box, one in each

bumbling fist.

“Be careful with that,” I said, “Those belong to my son.” He looked up at me, not bothering to conceal the irritation knotted in his jawline. His face smoothed over as he looked back to the figurines in his hand, placated by their shininess. The brilliance of the well-polished metal poured over his hand in spectacular patterns, searching, but failing to find solidarity among calloused skin, snubbed fingernails, and clumsy knuckle tattoos. The trophies begged to be liberated.

“He’s one hell of a tight end, my son,” I explained as he studied the inscriptions, hoping the brute was capable of appreciating the sport, doubly hoping he would just unhand the figurines. “He’s going to carry the Mountain Lions to state this year, no doubt about it.”

“He had probably never held a trophy of his own before. He had probably never held the pride of his father.”

“Is that right?” He scoffed dismissively. His mouth bore the weight of his ill-mannered tone and curled into a smirk, his unburdened eyes remaining

free to drift between the trophies. Jealousy, I figured, as I settled into a cautionary glare. He had probably never held a trophy of his own before. He had probably never held the pride of his father.

“That’s right,” I said, making sure to veil my budding contempt for the man, if only by the thinnest of margins. “My boy has been Varsity since freshman year. Notre Dame has had their eye on him for a while now. Full ride, most likely.”

With that, the smirk was struck from his face. If nothing else could be said, at least he had the sense to respect the fact that even at face value, a football scholarship was worth more than a year of his labor. He placed the trophies firmly on the carpet with a scowl and slid them to

the edge of his reach, one hand absentmindedly nursing the scar on his arm.

"There's only room for one more box of nonessentials," he said, "There's not enough space at Sunny Meadows. You can't take these." He gestured limply to the trophies, his eyes unwilling to meet their metallic scrutiny.

"Well, you'll have to talk to my wife about that. She always gets the last say with these kinds of things." I smiled, knowing how fruitless that conversation would be. "Honestly though, you'd have better luck stealing a cub from a bear than taking anything of her son's from her."

The man's face contorted and sunk to the floor at the mention of my wife. I was taken back by the strange sadness that suddenly swept over him, his figure prostrated, his ogreish visage drowned in a peculiar, childish vulnerability. As unnerving as it was to witness a grown man devolve in such a way, I remained quiet and observed, if only out of fascination.

After a long moment, he got up, rubbed at his eyes, sniffed, and looked back to the trophies. Embarrassed at having seen the display, I started to make my way back down the hall away from the man, taking a few slow steps before he called back to me.

"Mountain Lions, you said?" He said carefully, stopping me mid-stride. I turned back and nodded.

"That's right," I said.

"Mountain Lions. Yeah, I think I caught a few of their games." His gaze explored the hallway, as if the right words were either packed away or still sprawled out somewhere among the mess, waiting to be found. "Decent team, I suppose."

I waited.

"They did have one player though, a real standout," he continued, "Forty-three, I think?"

"Forty-three! That's my boy," I exclaimed with pride, picturing those bolded numbers, white on red on gold, on

banners rippling next to me in the stadium, on the cheeks of smiling highschool girls, on the back of a jersey worn so confidently out on the field. They were numbers that were meant to be seen, numbers that were meant to be shouted.

"Forty three. A real standout, that one," he said, the hard lines of his brow softening as he reached again for the trophies, eyes glossy in their light. "Do you remember when the Mountain Lions clinched the semi-final against the Spartans?"

"Sure do. What an upset." I said, imagining the initial roar from the bleachers on the other side of the field during the away game, and how that roar had simmered into a murmur of bitter disappointment by the fourth quarter. "My boy scored a game-changer touchdown in the third."

"Sixty-five yards," he said, a smile creeping across his face. I could still see those numbers, forty-three, breaking free from the line, shrugging off tackles, running the ball up the field past the goal line, past the semi-finals, right to the championship. "Sixty-five yards he ran, his mom running along the sidelines with him the whole way. Remember that?"

"The first one to tell him that he was still worth a damn even if he couldn't play anymore. The only one"

"That's right," I said, grinning, "She ran the whole field, cheering him on with every last ounce of breath she had. My wife would do damn near anything for that boy."

"She never missed a game."

"Not one," I said. I thought about those cold October days that carried the first winter chill in the wind, how she would be at the door, bundled up in red and gold and ready to brave those elements. I thought about how, like clockwork, she would leave a half-hour early, no matter if the game was at home or an hour drive away.

"She was the first one on the field when he took that

late hit," he mused, tracing the scar on his elbow. "The first one to tell him that he was still worth a damn even if he couldn't play anymore. The only one." The man looked up at me, a trace of resentment clouding his eyes. I squinted back at him, puzzled.

"My wife is one caring woman," I agreed, unsure of what he was on about, "No doubt about it." With that, the hint of resentment dissipated.

"Most selfless woman I ever knew. She never once complained, she just kept caring." He said, studying the packed boxes that lined the far end of the hallway up to where their order ended. He took in the full disarray of where we both now stood, quietly adding, "She never told me how bad it got."

Confused, I stared at him pointedly. He sighed and pinched his eyes between one forefinger and thumb for a long second before running his hand through his hair, smoothing it back. He looked again to the trophies and seemed to garner resolve for some unknown task.

"You and your son were lucky to have her," he said with a tired, earnest smile. For a moment, he no longer looked like the slob of a man from before. For a moment, he almost looked like someone else.

"He's one hell of a tight end, my son," I said, struggling to place the man in front of me.

"Sure," he said, stroking the trophies in admiration before placing them gently back into the cardboard box, "One hell of a tight end."

God of Heat

POETRY BY HEIDI KIDD

You are sunlight when you smile
Sunlight
Radiant whispers of fire
Gracing my senses
Blinding me to anything but light
God of heat
Making deals with the wind
To blow on me
Sending ships of hair across my face
Causing blossoms from your friends the trees
To float between you and I
So that for split seconds
The impact of your brightness is shadowed
And in the very instant I miss you
You return
Reminding me that
Love never really leaves
But sometimes is in the shadows
Illusions of separation
Testing our faith
Strengthening our hope
Stretching us
Toward each other
Like we were meant to be
Forever in a dance of unity and division
Like a flickering fire
Ever moving from one to two
To one
And sometimes throwing embers
Leaving traces of our burning
So the world learns

So the planets witness
So the skies see
So the stars remember
They too are scattered pieces
Of a single enormous ball of light
Who is your bride
Who is your twin
Who is your other
That she also is a sun
And that she
And I both
Belong to your smile

The Door

SCREENPLAY BY ALYX PTAK

EXT. CITY- DAYTIME.

A suburban downtown area. A small group of friends, four to six people, walk down the sidewalk. They are all college-aged. The main character, ASSASSIN, is wearing a black hoodie with the hood down and a red scarf that has the loose ends tucked down into the hoodie.

CAMERA: Wide on a street from one side looking across traffic at the opposite side of the road.

Across the street the group of friends are walking from right to left.

Transition with car driving by blocking camera view.

CAMERA: Medium wide rolling reverse follow shot of group from the front as they walk and talk.

As they talk about where in town has the best coffee between the mom and pop shop they are going to the well-known franchise Stardeers.

CAMERA: Slowly zooms in on ASSASSIN moving from the medium wide shot of the group - with the camera moving through the group allowing the friends in front to pass to behind the camera.

ASSASSIN looks rather bored with the conversation that's happening, but smiles at their friends and chimes in when they can. As the zoom happens the friends chatter more and more indistinct until the words cannot be made out. The sound of low, heavy, distorted breathing and a slow, pounding heartbeat become louder as the chatter grows indistinct and quieter.

EXT. ALLEYWAY- DAYTIME

CAMERA: Cut to a medium shot looking down the alley

towards the street. The camera is far enough down the alley to show a good amount of the walls framing the street.

The group walks past the alley.

Just before, ASSASSIN walks into frame.

CAMERA: Cut to tight shot near entrance of alley.

As ASSASSIN walks into frame, they look to the camera and down the alley, staring at something behind the camera.

Things go from normal speed to some degree of slow motion as ASSASSIN crosses the frame.

As things slow, the background noise and music fade away so the only sounds heard are the slow breathing and heartbeat.

CAMERA: Cut to wide shot looking down the alleyway away from the street.

A ways down the alley sits a black and grey stone door, surrounded by black mist that rolls off of its edges. The door has a large skull with a bloody handprint carved into the middle of its forehead. A mangled skeleton sits against the left edge of the door with a dagger sticking out of its ribcage at the bottom left, and a pile of skulls with a sword sticking out of them at the bottom right.

CAMERA: Slowly move down the alley towards the door, jumping forward with every beat of the slow heartbeat. Cut to medium wide rolling reverse follow shot of group from the front as they pass the alley. The heartbeat and breathing cut out as the background noise, music, and the conversation of the friends all come back in.

Topic of conversation has changed to be about finals at school. ASSASSIN looks down the alley at the start of the shot, but quickly looks back as they clear the entrance to the alley. They look at their friends to see if any of them reacted to seeing the door. None of them do.

EXT. DOWNTOWN- DAYTIME.

Still in the downtown area but on a different street from the one the group was first seen on.

CAMERA: Cut to a wide shot on the sidewalk looking down the street towards an intersection.

The group comes around the corner and walks towards the camera. Their conversation continues as they come down the street and enter a coffee shop.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

CAMERA: Medium shot on group sitting at a table with their drinks.

ASSASSIN looks on edge, constantly bouncing their leg and leaving their drink mostly untouched. They are glancing out the window every so often in the direction of the alley. ASSASSIN's phone goes off with a notification.

CAMERA: Cut to over the shoulder of ASSASSIN looking at their phone.

ASSASSIN picks up their phone and turns on the screen to see a notification from Chirper.

CAMERA: Cut to close up on ASSASSIN as they look at their phone.

ASSASSIN stares at their phone for a moment before putting it in their pocket, chugging their drink and standing. Cut to medium shot on the group sitting at the table. The group all look up at ASSASSIN.

FRIEND 1

What's up?

ASSASSIN

I gotta go. My mom needs me at home.

The group says their goodbyes to ASSASSIN and they exit

EXT. STREET- MIDDAY

CAMERA: Cut to medium tight on door to coffee shop.

ASSASSIN comes out of the door.

CAMERA: reverse rolling follow shot.

ASSASSIN walks down the street towards the camera. Once they are away from the coffee shop they put their hood up and pull the scarf up to cover the lower half of their face.

Cut to tight follow shot behind ASSASSIN

ASSASSIN walks down the street and around the corner.

Cut to wide panning shot from across the street looking at ASSASSIN.

ASSASSIN continues to walk down the street

Cut to tight reverse follow shot of ASSASSIN

As they continue to walk, not looking up at anyone who passes them and even bumping shoulders with someone going the other direction. They don't look up or say anything when this happens.

CAMERA: still reverse follow on ASSASSIN. Turns and begins to back down the alleyway.

ASSASSIN pauses at the entrance to the alley and looks around once before entering the alley, walking towards and past the camera.

CAMERA: reverses out of ASSASSIN's way and then continues to follow them from behind and they come up to the door.

As ASSASSIN gets closer to the door the heavy low breathing and slow heartbeat can be heard again getting louder the closer they get.

Cut to medium shot from the side showing both the door and ASSASSIN.

ASSASSIN examines the door for a moment before reaching their right hand out towards it

CAMERA: Cut to tight shot slightly to the side slightly over the right shoulder of ASSASSIN.

ASSASSIN slowly places their right hand on the bloody hand print carved into the forehead of the large skull on the door. The eyes of the skull begin to glow red. The breathing and heartbeat stop. A deep, hoarse, voice speaks slowly from seemingly nowhere, but it is coming from the door.

THE DOOR

What is the truth hidden within the darkness?

CAMERA: Cut to slightly lower angled tight shot looking up at ASSASSIN's face from their left side.

ASSASSIN reaches up with their left hand to tug the scarf down so they can speak clearly.

ASSASSIN

Freedom, my brother.

CAMERA: Cut to medium wide shot from behind ASSASSIN looking at the door.

The glow in the eyes gets brighter and the door swings inward. Behind the door is a cave-like tunnel lit with glowing orbs in the walls every so often. Farther down the tunnel the flicker of fire light can be seen on the wall and distant talking and laughter can be heard.

Assassin lowers their hand and tugs the scarf back over their face before entering the tunnel.

The door slowly swings shut behind them as they walk away from the camera. Once through the door it shuts, the glow in the eyes fades, and the black mist coming off of the door obscures it from view. The mist fades and the door is gone.

**Title card saying "THE DOOR" comes on screen.
Fade To Black**

Basket Weave

ARTWORK BY MADOLYN MILLER



24 x 18 in.
Ink Pen on Paper

Madolyn Miller **53**

“Fruit”

ARTWORK BY ISABELLA NICOLETTE ALFARO





*5 Prints, each at 8 x 10 in.
Silver Gelatin Prints*

Attack of the Movie

ARTWORK BY BRANDY MILLS



10 x 7 in.
Graphic Design

Sola
ARTWORK BY CYNTHIA JIMENEZ



25.5 x 19.5 in.
Charcoal on Paper

Marion, Pert Librarian

POETRY BY FRANK DE CANIO

This straitlaced girl who'd disappeared
behind his solipsistic self
has just as passionately reared
from where he placed her on the shelf
of his concern to gather dust.
But now her text is loud and clear
with boldfaced lines to be discussed
from dog-eared pages that endear
her to him. How could he ignore
the solid binding of the book
he'll so assiduously pore
through, once the cover starts to look
enthraling? He would check her out
if that's what dating was about.

Aurora

POETRY BY MADELAINE VIKSE

I sit up,
My hands are numb and cool-colored. I stand up,
My feet reach the cold wooden floor. I walk,
My rhythmic footsteps sing the spirits awake. I talk,
My voice echoes until it has reached every corner. I paint,
My canvas tinted and concealed to ameliorate the chaos. I
wait,
My thumbs lightly tapping against the smooth glass. I
heave,
My belongings packed into a single small bag. I leave.

He drummed along his lap, tipped off his thighs and bounced up out and of his seat. "Let's get something to eat!" He growled with a grin showing off his hagfish-like incisors. Immediately, I rushed in front of him.

"NO!" My hands were out, blocking his view of the street. I slowly raised my finger to the box behind him, "you should sit, I promise it'll be five minutes."

The street behind me bustled with life. We could hear the tapping of women's heels and the talk of drunken men. He scratched his head, his fingers getting lost in his curly, sandy blonde fluff that looked like a tuft of sheep's wool. Our eyes locked, my sensitive brown ones trying to hold power over his orange flames. And, even though he was shorter, I felt threatened.

"Fine, Supplier." He whined, taking a few steps back and plopping down onto the wooden crate. His barf green jacket sagged down his shoulders along with his patience.

"His smirk curled while his eyes traveled around my form."

I nodded, turned my head away, and exhaled at the sidewalk knowing it could have gone a lot worse. I glanced over at the street again, a horse-drawn carriage trotted by with a lovely couple. There was a bar across the street with a few people hanging outside. The slight, crisp smell of

THC floated in the air from a group that brushed by me.

I glanced back at Justin, whose legs repeatedly went up and down, up and down. He eyed everyone walking by, and would then lock his gaze with me. His smirk curled while his eyes traveled around my form. I flinched and tried to stare at something else near him, like the revolving doors we left.

"I'm starving, it's been two hours since I've eaten some-

thing," he whimpered, reaching out his hands and grabbing at the air. He looked like a baby in search of its teet.

"I know," I replied looking back at him, "but we can't leave until my friend shows up."

He lowered his head and grumbled. "Tell your friend to hurry."

I watched Justin wobble back and forth, he gave gentle taps to his lower lip with his fangs.

I dragged my feet closer to him and jumped once his body perked up. He slammed his hands on his thighs and gave a loud, excited exhale while his torso threw itself forward. He was not close enough to reach me, yet he looked like he would have if I got any closer.

He saw my expression and leaned back. "You weren't going to give me something, were you?"

My lips slightly parted so a mutter could pass. "Comforting words."

He crossed his arms and pouted, "I can't eat words. Or—" A chuckle burst its way up his throat. So much so that he didn't fully answer.

"Or?" I asked, splitting his maniacal laughter.

He put his fingers by his mouth to muffle the rest, then settled after another minute. "If your friend takes longer than five minutes, I'll tell you my plan," he tapped his head with his other hand.

I gave another nod, and picked my phone out from my pocket. I continued to call Rodrick, but I received no answer. It went straight to voicemail. I didn't want to be involved in a mess like this. Though, here I was, taking care of a being that called me his supplier. It all started because of a few crumbs under my bed.

I turned back, seeing a pair of eyes at my chin. I gasped, and instinctually stepped back. His hand already grabbed at my own coat sleeve and held me in place.

"Supplier, can we walk somewhere close to eat?" His vocals matched his gentle, pale, fair skin. Without his usual whine he sounded decent.

I weighed my options. This thing, Justin, wanted food. He mostly enjoyed junk food, the kind of stuff that slowly destroyed our human bodies. I supposed I could take him around the corner and make him stop complaining, or I could keep him waiting. I found his heavy breathing against my neck a very good way to help myself make a decision.

"F-fine," I replied as he let go of my sleeve and flipped himself around.

"YES!" He threw his hands up in a cheer, pointing us away from the hotel entrance and to a building next door. He led me forward, marching with his hands up high. "Whatever I want, right?" He questioned, glancing back.

His eyes were comparable to two large, bright bouncy balls.

"Sure, as long as it's not too expensive." I said tapping my jean pocket for a wallet. It was there, I had at least eighty bucks left. After tonight, I expected at least to have a hundred more. I checked over my shoulder back to the original entrance as we moved farther away.

"We'll have to get the food to go, okay Justin?" I turned back not hearing a quick response, or at least a grunt. I saw further ahead, he was running past the building and twisting into an alley. "JUSTIN!" I exclaimed, throwing myself into a sprint.

I wasn't nearly as fast, not only had I not been to the gym since my last breakup, but I also was a vanilla human. I had no magic.

I got to the corner with a huff, it was the first time that Justin ran so far from me. "Don't tell me he knows what's going on?" I considered in my head before I met the man in a tuxedo. A four-leaf clover was etched in black ink under his lavender eye. Usually groups had some sort of symbol representing their work. I stared past him, looking further down the alley where I noticed Justin between two other men in less impressive, striped, white and flamingo pink tuxedo vests. Justin was pointing to the food one of them was eating and then pointed to his own mouth. I could barely see with the

dimly lit white lamppost, and I definitely couldn't hear their back and forth bickering.

"Hello, you must be Baylen Yang," the man in front of me said, his dense and thick formal tone told me who he was.

"Rodrick?" To see a fine, older man in a sharply pressed flamingo tuxedo caught me off guard. And I was also surprised given his name too; Rodrick held no elegance.

"Is that the thing?" He pointed his thumb behind himself.

I peered over the man who shared my height again, "Yeah, he's Justin." I replied seeing that he was trying to pluck the food away from the other two men. They played with him and avoided his grasp. "They should probably restrain him."

"It's fine. They are highly trained and given that you said this thing took a humanoid form two days ago, they are more than capable." He replied as he stuffed his meaty, worn palm inside his jacket. "Did it tell you it's species?"

"Uh-no. He said he started as a ball? Or some kind of rat looking thing. He's pretty malleable, like goop when you press on him," I explained as the guy nodded. He motioned for me to move closer into the alley and off the sidewalk. It made me realize that the streets were quieter, as if everyone scattered somewhere else. I wouldn't be surprised, a lot of groups closed streets during extractions.

"I see. And he became humanoid how?"

"He said he-" I ditched eye contact and my voice hushed with embarrassment, "Justin said he licked at my hand that I offered to him dangling over my bed edge."

The man went quiet as he pulled his hand out, a black handkerchief came out with him. He shook it allowing some of the soot-colored dust to sprinkle off. I squinted at it through my blue frames. It looked familiar as if I learned

"To see a fine, older man in a sharply pressed flamingo tuxedo caught me off guard. And I was also surprised given his name too; Rodrick held no elegance."

about it somewhere.

"Anything else you can tell me about him?"

"He likes to eat, especially sweet things." I said, looking back at the man. "How much was I gonna make from this by the way? And...what do you plan on doing with him? He hasn't hurt anyone, so I don't think he's a menace as some other species are on the news."

"How much?" Rodrick covered his palm with the rag, "I don't remember saying you'd receive anything for your donation."

"Huh?" I shook my head, dumbfounded. "Your ad said, 'anyone who finds a mythical creature alive will receive a handsome reward, depending on size and magic capabilities.'" I pointed this out, noticing that the other two guys that were playing with Justin weren't there anymore. I didn't even see him.

A fluorescent lavender glow caught my attention before I could search more, "I'm sorry Baylen, only living individuals get a reward." He threw his hand with the cloth up, it expanded outward. I couldn't pull back as it wrapped itself around my head like a flytrap. I reached up at his arm, grabbing it and trying to pry it away. I also tried to hold my breath. Now I realized why the soot colored dots looked familiar, they were spores. My dad showed me them when I was little and told me to avoid them because my older cousin died from them while exploring the outer forest ridge.

The cloth tightened for a few more seconds before it let up with the yell of a man. I pulled the fabric off my face and brushed my fingers against it to get any spores off before taking a breath. I gulped down all the air I could.

However, I still dropped to the ground because of the weakness in my legs. Next to me, I saw the man pinned to the cement by Justin, knees digging into the man's thighs and wrists twisted so hard I expected them to break. Once I glanced at Justin again I noticed his shirt looked stained with a lot of crimson red...jam.

"Why don't you use your magic again. I'd love to see it."

Justin's sardonic tone cooed. He inched closer with his open jaw ready to take out the man's jugular.

Rodrnick squirmed to no avail. Without an item most people couldn't use magic and, given that Justin pinned him down, he couldn't hold anything if he wanted to cast anyway.

"Sto-" my voice wouldn't come out. My next breath traveled way too far down.

I moved my arms over me and clutched my stomach. I thought someone was inside it stabbing a wooden spoon repeatedly from the inside.

Justin glanced at me, his flaming eyes alerted to my danger. He let go of Roderick's left wrist, and before he could get something for a spell, Justin hit him under his jaw. A crack of his neck, and the lights of Roderick's lavender and green eyes went out.

Justin leaped off, dropped his jacket on the ground and rushed to me in his army green tank top. "Those spores are inside you." He shivered and held out his pointed tongue, "gross."

I clutched myself and teared-up as my lungs were cooking, burning with a painful fire. I couldn't, nor wanted, to move.

"Oh no," Justin said, moving his face closer to my own. I smelled the sweet, honey glaze coming from his breath mixed with the hint of blood. "You're dying, aren't you?"

I balled up further hearing him say that. I tried to keep my body together even though it wanted to explode. I noticed through my small gaze, he was taking off his tank top too.

I wanted to ask him what he was doing, but my throat sizzled. I imagined my stomach acid would come pouring out of my mouth soon.

"Try to relax, and stay balled up, it'll be a lot easier to eat you that way," his voice said as I heard a squelching. His skin split like someone pulling apart melted cheese from a hamburger bun. He was hollow, an empty pile of sloppy navy flesh. He inched closer and I tried to shake my head, but nothing worked.

I felt the open pouch stick itself to my own skin. His inside was like an octopus latching its tentacles to me. He appeared larger as his body flattened out, unnaturally like paper, yet it still had plenty of liquid covering its inner part. At this point, I realized he was serious. I heard stories about animals eating their owners when they died. Except, I wasn't dead.

I shut my eyes, feeling his body slowly encompassing mine. It was similar to sucking a noodle between your lips. His goo-like body balled around my own. I was unwillingly sucked into the lining of the walls with my mouth open. And as soon as I started to think I might drown, the lubricant sliding down my throat, I coughed. My hands were no longer stuck to my sides with pain. Instead, the pain worked its way up from my stomach, lungs, and to the tip of my tongue. I felt like I coughed up a big chunk of hair. Given that I lost my glasses and it was entirely dark, I had to feel what I threw up. It's smoochy feel had to be the spores. Again, I tried to speak.

I pressed my hand along the darkened cavern of my mouth, "J-justin?"

"His skin split like someone pulling apart melted cheese from a hamburger bun. He was hollow, an empty pile of sloppy navy flesh."

There was no response, only a rumble as the walls got slicker, as if he was producing more goo. I started to move my hands along it faster. "Justin!" I fell forward into the wall, slid down and took in more of the lining. I choked out. I was expecting the lining to start dissolving my clothes, then my skin, but instead cracks of light broke my sight. The ball peeled back until I was laying on the ground in wetness.

The smell of spoiled food rubbed my nose, along with the dirt from the concrete which stuck to me, thanks to my wet body and clothes.

"Ew." I heard a voice say behind me.

I peeked back to see Justin with his hand down his throat, he pulled up the large clot of spores and tossed it onto the chest of the tuxedo man.

"You saved me?" I asked him with a few light huffs. I swayed to a sitting position.

"Yeah, you're my supplier. I'm indebted to you," Justin smiled, licking at his lips.

I then thought back to what happened. "Your insides heal people?"

He put a finger in his mouth and globbed some of his saliva on it, he showed the clearness to me. "This heals people, yeah."

"Then couldn't you have just—"

"Mhm. But, I didn't want to pass up an opportunity to try a normal human, you're super rare after all." He sounded a lot better now that he "ate" something.

"Well, thanks, I think." I muttered looking at the motionless magic man, then back to Justin. "If they find out a human got a magic user killed I'll be on the bounty list." I felt the fear rise in my voice.

Justin started to laugh, "He's not dead, just really knocked out. You told me not to kill anyone, so I didn't. I maimed the other two, and broke this one's jaw."

"So, he's gonna wake up and hunt me down," I gripped at my head trying to get on my own two feet.

"Well, we could kill him, then he won't. But, his group might unless we kill them too."

"NO! No killing, maybe we can talk to them?" I questioned aloud as Justin approached me, he put out a hand to help me up.

"Probably not going to work, but we can try as you wish, my precious Supplier."

Right before I took his hand, he snatched it back, "Nevermind, I forgot you have spit all over you."

I tipped back falling to the ground again, "IT'S YOUR SPIT!"

Want to Accomplish More by Doing Less? Try Saying No!

NONFICTION BY MIGUEL CONTRERAS III

I paced unendingly and whimsically around the island in my kitchen. Shreds of chicken stuck between my teeth, taunting my tongue as it unsuccessfully slid across them. Sleeplessness clung to the black rings beneath my eyes like a shadow extending towards my chin. The deafening, tingling sensation in my brain unshackled the deepest of my captive thoughts, if only I could grasp them.

Each time I attempted to contemplate one of them for more than an instant, it would slip away into the ether. Abandoning me with a fresh distraction. I rested myself on one of the stools in my home's kitchen. I tossed my increasingly heavy head towards the kitchen stove. The glaring digital clock shone green on the mounting pile of morselless chicken bones: 4am.

I released an exasperated gasp, deflating my face towards the granite table-top: Class in six hours. Suppose it hardly mattered now. Without looking, I reached my hand out in front of me. Then, stood to continue wandering about the kitchen and gnaw on the renewed chicken wing dangling between my fingers.

The looming threat of tomorrow's heightened fatigue couldn't be shaken. I knitted my brow together into a scowl on my forehead, channeling sleep deprivation, self-ridicule, and hysteria. Those most unlikely ingredients concocted an idea that has reshaped my life. Right now, individuals hold more potential than any other point in human history. We have more knowledge at our fingertips than ever before. We can connect to more people all over

the world unlike ever before. We have access to more resources than ever before. And we have more paradigm shifting technologies that were once inconceivable.

Yet, similar to my delusional, poultry filled self, we falter. It's not from lack of trying, people with dreams of success work themselves to dysfunction every day. Our true problem is from our inability to say "no." I've watched myself do it before. My own dream of success was to become a professional *League of Legends* player. From the beginning, I knew it was wholeheartedly unrealistic. That didn't impede my dauntless commitment to my dream. But, in the reaches of my mind, it scared me. Outwardly, I embodied a quote off a classroom poster: "If you shoot for the moon and miss, at least you'll land amongst the stars." Inwardly, that unconscious fear of what might happen if I didn't make it to the League Champion Series spurred me into tunnel vision.

The standard for *League of Legends* professionals is that they play *League of Legends* for eight hours a day. In the best high school scenario sleeping takes eight, school takes seven, and League takes eight. Meaning, I had one hour left in the day to take care of whatever else was required. Fortunately, I became a master manipulator of that remaining hour and completed everything.

Not really. In reality, a lot of sacrifices had to be made. Relationships, homework, sleep, and exercise all were deprioritized. I knew that cycle wasn't sustainable, but League players are recruited young. If I didn't manage to find an opportunity for myself coming out of high school, I might miss my window forever. Until that happened, noth-

"It's not from lack of trying, people with dreams of success work themselves to dysfunction every day. Our true problem is from our inability to say 'no.' "

ing else was more important. I earned that opportunity when I played *League of Legends* at Lourdes University on scholarship. The grind didn't level off now that I'd climbed the first rungs towards my dream though. It only became harder, and it was self-inflicted.

If I wanted to play like a professional, I needed to practice like a professional. If I wanted to overcome my competition, I had to practice harder than them too. Playing collegiate Esports directly exposed me to that competition and motivated me more than ever before. I had more free time in college, but it didn't go towards ensuring my physical, mental, and social health. It just meant more *League of Legends*. I poured every available waking hour into practicing, certain that if I was to become a pro it'd be by virtue of my steadfast commitment and work ethic. When I

“We have access to more than ever before in human history. What we choose to access is the problem.”

learned about shooting for moons and landing in stars, I forgot to read the poster next to it: “Work smarter, not harder.”

I met the bane of a *League of Legends* player's existence: Burn-out. I stagnated, lost tolerance, and became toxic. The unsustainability of the cycle finally came

to fruition. Ironically, training in fewer *League of Legends* matches would've meant more progress.

There was never going to be a point where I didn't have the option to practice more, but they're also was never going to be a point where I could blatantly disregard my humanity. That's the key. We have access to more than ever before in human history. What we choose to access is the problem. There's more information available than ever before, yet we remain uninformed, subjecting ourselves to the whims of whatever new idea is perpetuated by the media. There are more resources for our bodies than ever before, yet we remain unhealthy. When it's the consumers

that define what the producers produce. We have more global access to other people than ever before, yet we remain lonely. Two lonely people wouldn't be so lonely if they'd explore their own backyards.

We suffer from overstimulation. It's impossible for a person to consume the amount of content available to them. The solution isn't to produce less content. The solution is to be selective.

We falter because we're fallible to the leisure seeking facet of the human mind. That's not a condemnation of our biology- it's a reason to teach ourselves something new.

I didn't become a ghoulish chicken-eating fiend pacifying my kitchen because of *League of Legends*. I got that way because I decided to pursue something new the same way I did before. I took that epiphany as an opportunity to break the cycle.

Admitting unhappy truths to ourselves can bring us the most happiness. We spend a third of our lives sleeping and ninety two days of it on the toilet. There isn't enough time in life to get to everything you want to do and there's a chance we will all die in nuclear holocaust anyway.

With morality out of the way, we can finally accept that we lead finite lives. Maximizing our hours to accommodate progress towards what we seek to accomplish is how we can aspire towards our great potential, should we so choose. But it needs to include time for just being alive. People, guns, war, and drugs all kill, but so does stress. Forgetting that and doing too much is the quickest way to fulfill less potential and hurt ourselves.

Self-moderation is a lifelong discipline to practice. It's not easy, but it could help lead us to the greatest version of ourselves.

Lessons of a Wildflower

POETRY BY HANNAH REGAN

O little one how beautiful you are,
amidst rain your petals glow.

O little one how strong you are,
amidst rocks your roots are secure.

O little one how gentle you are,
how tranquil yet full of life.

Little flower teach me how to grow.

I want to shine in my rain.

I want my roots to be
secure in this ever-changing world.

I want my quiet to be
full of life.

O little one how wise you are,
how content in your beauty.

Teach me how to be.

Teach me how to grow.

The Corn Stand

NONFICTION BY GEORGE VANDER LINDE

Every summer in Kane County brought forth the sweet corn stands. My stand was located on Bliss Road, a farm with the name “Jim Konen” on the mailbox. About a quarter-mile before the stand was a handmade sign. Black letters on a white background. The letters were painted on with a half-inch brush by a hand not too particular. “Sweet Corn Ahead.”

The stand itself was located just off the road under the shade of a giant ancient silver maple tree. A big white tarp was fashioned into a lean-to next to the gravel driveway. Across the driveway was the farmhouse—plain, white, two stories. In the backyard was an outdoor oven made from yellow bricks; the foundation was beginning to sink into the ground. Behind the big maple tree that shaded the farmstand was an iron windmill covered with trumpet honeysuckle vines. The orange flowers blazed against the green leaves. The gravel driveway circled upon itself before the barn. Just a regular, you’ve seen it once, you’ve seen it a thousand times, barn. Nothing special. No date above the door from the last century or anything. Just a white barn. Behind the barn, there is a building for livestock with a fenced-in corral. The whole homestead was surrounded by corn and bean fields.

My stand was run by an older couple. The woman was round and plump, in a good way. She wore big oval plastic rimmed glasses. Pink cheeks and a button nose. Plain blouse and jeans. Gym shoes. Always had a smile. Her husband sat behind her to the left. He was a tall skinny man in faded dungaree overalls, a short-sleeved button-down shirt, work boots, and a baseball cap. I was always intrigued by the baseball cap. Not the usual farmers’ cap.

No “Funks Hybrids” or “DeKalb” or “Pioneer Seed” patches on the front of his cap. The cap he wore was faded orange with a huge “Tide” embroidered patch. Laundry detergent. Could never figure that out. The farmer and his wife ran the farmstand year after year.

The cornstand itself consisted of the tarp made into a lean-to with three long tables underneath, shaped into a

“Peaches from southern Illinois. Tomatoes from Arkansas. Potatoes. Plums. Green beans. Melons of all kinds. But, the star was the sweet corn.”

U. The back table served as the checkout point and held the choicest produce. The woman sat behind that table in a chair. The other two sides were reserved for corn. There was a jar of dum-dum suckers for kids on the back table. There was a box fan in the left corner that kept a breeze running on hot days. The money box was in front of the

woman she sat next to a jar of dum-dums, a pencil, and a pad of paper for purchase calculations. A grass floor was underfoot.

The produce was the best. Peaches from southern Illinois. Tomatoes from Arkansas. Potatoes. Plums. Green beans. Melons of all kinds. But, the star was the sweet corn. It arrived in big burlap bags picked that morning. The cornsilk still fresh and golden with a texture of fine hair. This variety of sweet corn is known as “Peaches and Cream”, with pale yellow and white kernels, grown in Burlington. Just up the road on Rt 47. There was no better corn on this earth. The soil around Burlington is perfect for growing sweet corn, this sweet corn, my sweet corn.

I’ve had sweet corn all my life. My earliest memory is from when I was about four years old. I was at a festival of some sort in Elkhorn, Wisconsin with my grandparents. Sweet corn was there, served on a stick with a napkin after it was dunked into a coffee can of melted butter. I re-

member my eyes widened a bit watching the vendor dunk that ear into the can of melted butter. And I remember it was oh-so-good. Sweet corn has graced the summer dinner table since. Sometimes the sweet corn will be bought from some commercial grocery chain with ears advertised ten for a buck. More often than not, it would be promptly dubbed “horse corn.” Unfit for human consumption. Disappointment.

But not this sweet corn. It was a ritual to serve this sweet corn at the dinner table. Shuck the ears. Boil the water. Set the table with the sweet corn dishes. With the sweet corn handles shaped in miniature corn ears with two metal prongs. The butter dish and salt shaker. Plenty of napkins. Sweet corn would often accompany huge hamburgers cooked on the grill with big fat homegrown tomato and onion slices. Homemade potato salad. Homemade lemonade. They all took a back seat to this sweet corn from Burlington. You would skewer the handles into each end of the ear, take your table knife and cut a big slab of butter, and apply it to the ear as best you could, finally rolling the corn handles in your fingers as the ear smothered itself in butter while twisting in the corn dish—a dash or two of salt. And the dinner table would fall silent with the devouring of ear after ear of sweet corn. The sweet corn from Burlington.

Year after year, every summer starting in mid-July, the corn stand would open. I looked forward to it like Christmas, or the Fourth of July. Time went on. The children grew from toddlers to college. I became very friendly with the farm couple. I would often bring my children, who would make me buy more than I intended. One daughter was fond of peaches, the other fond of plums. I worked in the city and would bring bags of sweet corn for my citified co-workers who would otherwise never experience such delicacies of the soil. Trips to the corn stand became more social as the years passed.

A good amount of time was spent at the corn stand talking with the farmer and his wife. Politics. Weather. Any topic that would strike a fancy at the time. A smile always greeted me and a wave bid me farewell. Once or twice a week, I would visit the farm stand. Catch up on things. The corn would eventually run out at the end of August or middle of September. And then another hand-painted sign. "Thanks for a Great Season." The wait for next year would start.

"All gone. What I took for granted disappeared from my life in the passing of a season."

Last summer, the tarp did not go up. There was no sign advertising sweet corn on the side of the road. There was the windmill with the trumpet honeysuckle. And the mailbox with the name "Konen" on it. The plain white farmhouse. Nondescript barn. Just no corn stand. No elderly farm couple. No more conversations about sons in the military, or children in college, or the ridiculous health-care options for senior citizens. All gone. What I took for granted disappeared from my life in the passing of a season. The friendship of summer's past would never return.

The family didn't eat much sweet corn last summer. The corn wasn't from Burlington.

The Letter

DRAMA BY MARSHALL NOELKEN-ANDERSON

PLEASE NOTE: This play has themes of teen suicide.

*Proscenium. Spotlight up on the edge of the stage displaying a therapy session between a therapist, **DR. HERMANN** and a client, a man in his thirties named **RONALD**.*

DR. HERMANN: How was your week, Ronald?

RONALD: Good. Weird. Not good, actually. I was cleaning out my closet this weekend and I found a letter somebody had given me when I was in middle school. It brought up some feelings.

DR. HERMANN: A letter?

RONALD: Yeah. A, um. . . A suicide note, actually, from a childhood friend. It was weird to find. I haven't slept since Saturday.

DR. HERMANN: Why not?

RONALD: I can't stop thinking about it. I was in the grocery store earlier today, and I just started crying. On the way home from work on Monday, I had to pull over because I was having a panic attack. I've been trying to put words to it and the closest word I can think of to describe it is 'guilt.' That's not really it, though. It's more complicated than that.

DR. HERMANN: What would you be guilty of?

RONALD: I don't even know. There's not one reason, I guess. The whole thing is so confusing. Every day, new memories flood in at random times. I never ask for them, and I can't piece them together.

DR. HERMANN: Maybe if you tell me what you do remember, we can make some sense of it.

RONALD: Okay. Yeah.

DR. HERMANN: Give me some background.

RONALD: Okay. Um, well... In middle school, I had some

friends. Not many. The person who wrote the note was one of them.

*Lights up on a scene center upstage; a middle school lunch table. Sitting at the table and eating lunch are junior high students: **JOSIE**, **TEEN RONALD**, and an androgynous emo kid named **CHRIS**. **JOSIE** is sifting through a *Dungeons and Dragons* handbook.*

TEEN RONALD: Another character?

JOSIE: Yep. This one is a barbarian.

TEEN RONALD: You don't normally make barbarians.

JOSIE: No, but I'm making all of us as D&D characters.

TEEN RONALD: Which one of us is a barbarian?

JOSIE: Chris.

TEEN RONALD: I can totally see that.

CHRIS: What gender is it?

JOSIE: Uh... What gender do you want it to be?

CHRIS: What gender were you gonna make it?

JOSIE: I didn't really have a plan. In *Dungeons and Dragons*, gender doesn't affect the stats, which is pretty cool if you ask me. So I could make it whatever you want.

CHRIS: Write what you think I am.

JOSIE: I'll just put a question mark.

***CHRIS** snorts with laughter. Another student, **PETE**, enters hurriedly, dropping papers and school supplies as he does. Flustered, he collects them and puts them on the table.*

PETE: Hey.

TEEN RONALD: You okay?

PETE: Yeah. Mr. Wilson held me after class and told me I have to start doing my homework, but I have been doing it.

JOSIE: Why did he think you don't do it?

PETE: Because I haven't been turning it in.

JOSIE: Why not?

PETE: Because I always forget to bring it.

JOSIE: Well, that doesn't really count.

PETE: I do it, though! He actually got in my face and yelled at me. Is that a thing teachers can do?

CHRIS: Mr. Wilson is a bitch.

JOSIE: I like him. He gave me extended time on my research paper last year during my parents' divorce.

CHRIS: He made that fat blonde kid cry today.

JOSIE: I think that kid's name is Jared.

CHRIS: You know who I was talking about.

TEEN RONALD: Hey man, what's with the bruises?

***TEEN RON** gestures to **PETE'S** arms.*

PETE: Oh, I was wrestling with my little brother yesterday. Something about it being his turn to play on the Game-Cube.

***PETE** pulls down his sleeves to cover the bruises.*

JOSIE: There's only fifteen minutes left of this period, Pete.

PETE: Yep.

JOSIE: You haven't gotten your lunch yet.

PETE: Yeah, I just got here.

JOSIE: So maybe you should go get lunch.

PETE: Oh, right! Thanks. Think it's still open?

TEEN RONALD: Probably.

PETE: I'll be right back.

***PETE** exits. **TEEN RONALD** and **JOSIE** laugh. Lights out on the lunch table scene.*

RONALD: Middle school was hard for all four of us. Pete really struggled in school, Chris had depression and anxiety, and Josie was bullied and still hoping her parents would get back together. And of course, with my dad leaving just a few years earlier and with my mom and everything... None of us were doing okay. But I guess that's just what being thirteen is, right? Nobody's happy at that age.

*Lights up on the lunch table scene. **PETE**, **CHRIS**, **JOSIE**, and **TEEN RONALD** are all sitting around the table. **TEEN RONALD** is staring at his food and not moving.*

CHRIS: The Punisher is my favorite villain.

JOSIE: He's not a villain. He's an anti-villain.

CHRIS: Well, he's my favorite anti-villain, then. He's realistic. Like, he does what he does so he can relive his war trauma

and avenge his family's deaths, but mainly he just likes hurting people. He wants to inflict pain and watch people die, so he does. I like that about him.

JOSIE: You do?

CHRIS: Yeah. His motive is realistic. He has a sad backstory, sure, but he also just likes death.

JOSIE: I don't know. I don't see him that way. Besides, I love sad backstories. It makes a character way more relatable.

CHRIS: I mean, I guess. But I think Punisher is already pretty relatable.

JOSIE: Yeah, because of his sad backstory! Not because he kills people.

PETE: Hey, Ron, you okay?

TEEN RONALD: Huh?

PETE: Are you okay, man? You're like, not really here.

TEEN RONALD: Oh, uh... I'm fine.

PETE: You sure? You haven't touched your nachos.

TEEN RONALD: I don't like them.

PETE: Dude, that's so not true. You literally eat nachos every day. I don't think I've seen you order anything-

TEEN RONALD: My mom has cancer.

PETE: What?

TEEN RONALD: She was diagnosed months ago. She's really sick and we don't know what we're going to do anymore. No, they don't know what they're going to do. I have nothing to do with this. I can't do anything. I don't know anything. She's going to die, and I can't do anything.

PETE: Well, it's not guaranteed she's going to die though, right?

TEEN RONALD: I don't know.

PETE: I mean, my uncle had stomach cancer five years ago, and he's fine now. There's a lot of treatments. It really all depends on the cancer and the person, and there are-

TEEN RONALD: I don't know, Pete!

PETE: Okay.

TEEN RONALD: I don't know anything! I just-. . . I really

don't know.

PETE: I'm sorry, man.

JOSIE: You want to talk about it?

TEEN RONALD: No. That's it, I'm done. I have nothing else. What were you saying about the Punisher?

Lights out on the lunch table scene.

RONALD: They were all out of options and all they could do was wait until she died. 'Make her comfortable.' As if that's possible when somebody is dying. My friends didn't know what the hell to do, how to comfort me. We were thirteen. We had life experience, too much of it, in fact, but we couldn't begin to understand it enough to help each other through it. When my mom died, I only took a few days off of school. I hated staying with my aunt in a new house. I didn't like her and I didn't like any of it. I just wanted everything to be normal again.

Lights up on the lunch table. JOSIE is sitting alone at the lunch table. TEEN RON enters with a lunch tray.

TEEN RONALD: Hey, what's up?

JOSIE: Hey, Ron. How are you doing?

TEEN RONALD: I'm okay.

JOSIE: Really?

TEEN RONALD: I'm fine.

JOSIE: I need to talk to you about something.

TEEN RONALD: Okay.

TEEN RONALD sits down at the lunch table.

JOSIE: I was going to tell you earlier, but it didn't feel right to say it over text.

CHRIS enters with a lunch tray and sits down. TEEN RONALD doesn't acknowledge CHRIS in any way, too focused on JOSIE.

TEEN RONALD: What is it?

JOSIE: It's um... Something happened.

TEEN RONALD: What happened? What's wrong?

CHRIS: Did you not tell him yet?

TEEN RONALD: Tell me what? What are you talking about?

CHRIS: Pete died.

JOSIE: Chris, don't say it like that.

CHRIS: It's the truth. Pete is dead.

JOSIE: Still, have some compassion. You can't just say it like that.

***TEEN RONALD** laughs in disbelief.*

TEEN RONALD: What are you talking about?

CHRIS: Pete died two days ago. I thought Josie told you, but apparently she didn't.

TEEN RONALD: Are you serious?

CHRIS: Yes.

JOSIE: I'm sorry.

TEEN RONALD: This isn't a joke?

CHRIS: No.

TEEN RONALD: Two days ago? It happened two days ago, and you're just now telling me?

CHRIS: If I had known Josie wasn't going to say anything, I would have told you.

JOSIE: With your mom's funeral and everything, I felt like-

TEEN RONALD: How!? How did it happen?

CHRIS: He slit his wrist.

TEEN RONALD: What!?

JOSIE: Wording, Chris. Say it nicely.

CHRIS: There's nothing nice about it.

TEEN RONALD: This is a lie! I would've known about this. All of our parents would have gotten a call.

CHRIS: They did.

TEEN RONALD: No, stop it! Stop lying to me! This is a sick joke! I don't like it!

JOSIE: Ron.

TEEN RONALD: This can't be happening! Pete can't be dead! He can't!

***TEEN RONALD** crosses his arms on the table, buries his face in his arms and sobs. After a moment, **JOSIE** puts her hand on **TEEN RONALD'S** back comfortingly.*

JOSIE: I know.

CHRIS: Pete wrote notes before he did it.

TEEN RONALD *lifts his head from the table.*

TEEN RONALD: Notes?

CHRIS: For each of us. You want yours?

TEEN RON: I... Yes. Of course, I do.

CHRIS *hands TEEN RONALD a sheet of crumpled folded notebook paper from their pocket. Lights out on the lunch table.*

DR. HERMANN: What did the letter say?

RONALD: I never... I never actually read it. I hid it away in one of my mom's old scrapbooks. I had actually forgotten about it until I rediscovered it a few days ago. It wasn't just the note I forgot about, either. I had forgotten about Pete, too. Isn't that terrible? I had completely forgotten about his existence. He was just... erased from my memory.

DR. HERMANN: The mind has an amazing ability to repress traumatic experiences. It's a safety mechanism. A pretty good one, too.

RONALD: I guess. I brought it today.

DR. HERMANN: The letter?

RONALD: Yeah. I think um... I think I'd like to read it if that's okay. I figured it'd be best to read it with you instead of by myself.

DR. HERMANN: I agree. I think it's a smart choice to read with somebody.

RONALD: Yeah.

DR. HERMANN: Would you like to read it out loud?

RONALD: Yeah, I'll... Here, I'll just... I have it here.

DR. HERMANN: Okay.

RONALD *pulls a crumpled and folded sheet of notebook paper from his pocket. He takes a deep breath and unfolds it.*

RONALD: *(reading the note)* 'Dear Ron. I'm sorry. Don't do what I'm about to do. You were a good friend and I hope your mom lives. Bye.'

RONALD *flips the paper over, looking for more to the letter. There is none.*

RONALD: That's all it says. That's it. (*rereading it, faster and desperate*) 'Dear Ron. I'm sorry. Don't do what I'm about to do. You were a good friend and I hope your mom lives. Bye.' I don't understand. This can't be it.

DR. HERMANN: He got the point across.

RONALD: What point? This is nothing.

DR. HERMANN: He said he was sorry for killing himself and asked you not to do it, too. He said that you're a good friend and he hoped you have a good outcome in life. Those are pretty powerful things to say in a goodbye letter.

RONALD: But it's so unsatisfying. That can't be what it says. This can't be how it ends.

DR. HERMANN: What did you want the letter to say?

RONALD: I don't know. Not that. It's not like I wanted him to absolve me of something. I don't logically think I did anything wrong.

DR. HERMANN: When a person loses a friend to suicide, it's natural to feel like they could have done something to prevent it. We, as humans, are infatuated with the idea of preventing risk, even when the risk has already passed. It helps us feel secure. You can't go back in time and stop it from happening, and it doesn't sound like there was anything you could have done to prevent it then.

RONALD: I know that.

DR. HERMANN: But what do you feel?

RONALD: I don't know.

DR. HERMANN: Guilt? Loss? Anger?

RONALD: No. Maybe. I don't... I really don't know.

Lights out.

End.

Playtime

ARTWORK BY THERESA DAUNHEIMER



18 x 24 in.
Acrylic on Canvas

Cracked Eggs

ARTWORK BY MADOLYN MILLER



24 x 18 in.
Charcoal on Paper

Untitled
ARTWORK BY NICK CIPRA



14 x 21 in.
Archival Inkjet Print

Masha Allah

ARTWORK BY CYNTHIA JIMENEZ



19.5 x 25.5 in.
Charcoal on Paper

72 Hours in the Arms of a Stranger

FICTION BY HEIDI KIDD

“Someone asked me once what I thought love was
I told her about the summer I met you
How I found rest in your arms before ever learning your
last name
I told her about the vibration of your laughter
The fragrance of your winds in my hair
And how you were only a dream
But for those brief moments
I was dreaming of home
I think love is something like that
The moments of connection
Where we are nothing more than human
Where we are nothing less than gods”

It was a hot day in late June and his smile was like ice-cold lemonade. He was unexpected, and my insides rumbled as he spoke. The inner quaking didn't come from my belly though, as I had recently shared a pool-side picnic with my daughter of grapes and cucumber sandwiches. The movement inside me lacked the emptiness of hunger and was more comparable to thirst. The kind of thirst you don't realize until the first gulp reaches your throat and your instincts take over. You cannot stop drinking until every drop is gone. Thirst is funny that way, often mistaken for hunger - but even long after we are full, the unquenchable need for liquid remains. Sometimes in the heat of summer, eight glasses just isn't enough. That was the magic of the moment, the thirst, the unquenchable thirst that I didn't even notice - until he (with his lemonade smile) smiled.

It was a lazy summer Sunday. I pulled myself out of the

pool, dropped into my chair and opened my book back up to the page I had left dog-eared. It was 95 degrees and I could only make it through about four pages at a time before having to dip back into the cold water for relief. I was reading about happiness, which felt so fitting, as I laid there mindfully taking in the sounds of splashes and children's laughter. I noticed how the sun felt as it quickly evaporated the drops of water from my skin, leaving behind freckles and golden hues. I lifted my eyes a few inches above the page and watched my daughter come swirling down the water-slide, she landed with a larger than life splash and burst back out of the water with a smile. I closed my eyes for a moment, a subtle smile gracing my face as I laid back to contemplate happiness.

"I noticed how the sun felt as it quickly evaporated the drops of water from my skin, leaving behind freckles and golden hues."

I startled awake 17 minutes later with sweat beading down my face and body. I felt as though I had been unconscious for hours. My head was pounding and my water bottle was empty. I stood up too quickly; a lovely display of floating spots spilled into my line of sight. Dizzy, I stooped down to

avoid a fall. I scanned the kiddie pool in front of me, looking for my daughter without luck. I stood back up just long enough to walk over to the family pool, searching a bit more frantically. We frequently visited this pool specifically for their excellent lifeguard staff. While I often laid out with a book, I had never fallen asleep. Splash! My daughter shot up out of the water with a smile that assured me she hadn't missed a beat. I asked her friend's mother to keep an eye on her while I retrieved some Tylenol from my car.

Slightly disoriented, and still blinking spots away, I slipped through the gate and started toward the parking lot. The pavement was so hot I had to jump from shadow to shadow. Laughing at myself, I decided to run back and grab

my sandals. My eyes briefly bounced to someone walking in my direction. He must be looking at the gate, I thought, as he approached. I lifted my hand to shade my eyes. Nope, he was definitely looking at me, smiling familiarly, though I didn't recognize him.

Something about the fixation of his gaze had me feeling uncharacteristically self-conscious. Standing barefoot in my bikini, with my daughter's Frozen beach towel half wrapped, half falling off me - I realized both my hair and eyes were probably still showing signs of my inadvertent, sweaty nap. I felt my cheeks flooding with pink as he got closer. My god, he was handsome. There was a cockiness in his walk. It reminded me of those iconic shots from action movies that feature the hero confidently walking toward the camera as the world behind them explodes into a dangerous display of fire and smoke. He laughed out loud as he approached. I swallowed hard, wishing I had taken the time to glance in the mirror before going on this Tylenol mission.

"What do you call that dance you were doing?"

I smiled, trying to hide my embarrassment. "It's not a dance," I scoffed, trying to match his cool demeanor. "It's a game called the ground is lava, if you aren't careful its hell-fire will burn callouses into the bottom of your feet which will illicit uninhibited judgment from whoever performs your next pedicure." I jump-stepped to the nearest shaded portion of the sidewalk and back.

He laughed in a way which told me he was surprisingly charmed by my sarcastic response. We stood smiling silently, sizing each other up, for what felt like minutes but was probably in actuality five seconds. I can't describe the energy which seemed almost tangible around us (undoubtedly trapped in the intense humidity), but if I were to try, I would have to call it intrigue. It was as though time had stopped, and nothing about the present moment felt anything like the moments leading up to it, and if I had the composure to guess, nothing like the moments that would follow.

He told me about his mother, that his father had died when he was young, and how he loved differently than anyone he'd ever met. We discussed our 9 year age difference, laughing and poking fun at the differences in our ideals. I pointed out my daughter, and they shook hands through the fence. I told him she was the first person who had ever loved me in a way I understood. He told me he was too selfish to ever have a child. I told him I was too, but having one is like falling in love; the lines which define 'self' all just fall away, and their happiness becomes yours.

“It’s funny how hard it is to describe time from outside of it, and we lived outside of it until it was over.”

Never once did I question the connection, or its nature. We just stood outside the gate talking about everything and nothing for I have no idea how long. It’s funny how hard it is to describe time from outside of it, and we lived outside of it until it was over.

I had to get back to my daughter. He asked if he could see me again, and I told him I would try to arrange a babysitter sometime soon. He told me he was leaving in a few days. As it turns out, time doesn’t stop forever. When it starts again, you realize the person you just shared a glimpse of infinity with is still, in fact, a stranger, and that stranger is going back to Kansas City in three days.

Something about our 72-hour deadline rendered all my normal rules and defenses useless. After my daughter was tucked into bed that night he came over. We shared a blunt and laughed like children. He had a movie he’d already decided on before coming over. I melted a little as I watched him type *Poetic Justice* into the search. I don’t remember the details of the next three hours, but I will never forget the space between the details. Everything was floating. The dim lighting. Our laughter. Hope. I didn’t consider tomorrow, or today, or even my name - I just was.

We spent three days submerged in the moment, coming up occasionally for air, food, and responsibilities. I don't think I slept even for a moment. Sleep is a tricky little witch who lures you in with darkness and blankets, causing you to miss the night sky and all its wishing stars.

We bore our souls and skin, breaking up the moments of passion and intensity with embarrassing stories and more marijuana than responsible people partake in. But we weren't responsible people. We were strangers engaged in a dance of unmasked spiritual collision. I read him my poetry. Maybe it was the humidity, but my words seemed to float instead of drop. He rubbed them into my skin as they slowly drifted down. It was nothing short of magic; my written dreams blending with sweat and rose-scented massage oil, leaving me sweet and sticky in a way that would make a honeybee blush.

He confessed his sins like my chest was an altar; I reached for the magic God tucked inside my eyes and heart, and beneath my tongue and healed him. I remember laying silently in his arms, after telling him things I had never told anyone, taking in the room I had completely forgotten was around me. I already knew that was a night I would never forget. How beautifully tragic it is to realize that about a moment before it has passed. Wanting to hold on, but knowing that you can't.

Three days passed like years, like moments. Our goodbye was nothing extraordinary. The night air was heavy, thick and hot. The salt in our sweat mixing together in one final chemistry experiment. He held me for a moment on the front steps, smiled, and said, "goodnight." Something in me rumbled, it wasn't thunder and it lacked the emptiness of hunger. It was more like thirst - the kind of thirst you don't realize until the first gulp reaches your throat and your instincts take over, and you cannot stop drinking until every drop is gone. Like ice-cold lemonade on the first of July when you didn't even realize you were thirsty. Like our last kiss.

Language Session

POETRY BY FRANK DE CANIO

“Your German ist sehr gut,” she says. Indeed
sehr gut enough for her to till the soil
she needs in preparation for the seed
she’ll plant within me. Thus, she can embroil
me in semantics of her native tongue.
Linguistically at home, she’s in control
of any future flowering that’s sprung
out of its duly cultivated scroll.
And every word’s a kernel in the ground
that grows in her accommodating ear
into a rich, reverberating sound.
It blossoms in mutations that I hear
her speak through sweetly redolent two lips,
suggestive of inseminating scripts.

Calm

POETRY BY BRENDA PEREZ

I took in the light of dawn
Drawing me to step out into a dewy field
As the cool crisp air whisks my uncombed, wavy hair
There's the sound of the river and birds chirping
It feels as if I'm in thin air, floating
As if my body were in a bubble-like cocoon
Warmth grazes my face, my shoulders, my body
The air smelled like the Earth decided to love itself again
The taste of this serene morning, delicate, yet vibrant
It all seemed too good to be true

Midnight Maddy

POETRY BY MIGUEL CONTRERAS III

Every night you know what they say
Midnight Maddy comes to play
She can't be swayed or be delayed
"Play my charade," she will persuade
The gleam of the moon will charm her eyes
To secrets she holds, she will confide
Whisper of Wisdom,
Romantic sigh,
Her thirst for play cannot be slain
The light may wain
She shant complain
Within she claims the brightest flame
A mishap or misstep will know no blame
The beast inside cannot be tame
Within your heart she'll stake her claim
With a fervent taunt she can't contain
Beg and plead to make it plain
But the fire's flame is intense
Insane
A finger will beckon
Embrace a shade
Confusion, arisen to laugh in your brain
Amidst the darkness her thought surrounds
Your heart-
It pounds
Influence compounds
You'll spin around
Neither lost nor found
In a space between both smile and frown
A slit in the darkness
It's there she presides

A hand, provide
A bow you'll give
A hand you'll take
The dance begins,
Either love or sin
Take to the skies with emerald eyes
A curve in the hips
Feel desire arise
To her
At least
There's no surprise
A curl in her lip
A giggle or scoff?
An answer
Of course
There will be naught
Once dancing aloft
You're given a toss
A fall to the Earth you have been brought
Thrashing and gnashing and tossing about
A hopeless bout you won't cut out
Windstricken, you're kicking
A wish in your thoughts
In the game you sought you had not bought
No moment later you're safe in her arms
Never have fallen and free from harm
How silly a thought
You had forgot
This was her aim
You played the game
The fire was burning
The beast untame
There's none to blame
The rules the same
She staked her claim and ruled your name
Her desire to play cannot contain

The light doth wain
To no complaint
A laugh on the brain will drive insane
The very thing that is her fame!
A glimmering ray of the beaming sun
To conclude the game that hath begun
It graces her skin,
She must be off,
The night was fun
The day is young
She shimmers away
But every night you know what they say-
Midnight Maddy comes to play
She can't be swayed or be delayed
"Play my charade," she will persuade

Yellow

POETRY BY CHRISTINA BAUMANN

She told me her favorite color was yellow.
I asked how she could love such a boring color.
It's not boring, she said. It's the color of the sun and
happiness.
Our conversation ended, and I gazed at her as we sat in
silence. Of all the bold, beautiful colors in the world, she
chose yellow.
And then I understood.
She saw herself as yellow. She wasn't everyone's cup
of tea. Most overlooked her because she wasn't bold or
exquisitely gorgeous.
But every once in a while, someone came along and
found the beauty within her.
They understood how wonderful she really was.
They made her feel wanted.
And then I realized how beautiful yellow really was.

Charlotte

FICTION BY RYAN DIEDERICH

The kid didn't even cry. That was the strangest part. Normally, when one kidnaps a child, said child will cry and cry and cry. Unless, of course, you bribe them with candy or something. This kid, though, didn't cry once.

I knew something was up right away. A five-year-old girl who doesn't cry? That didn't sit right with me.

I sat in the back of the plain white van with her as she sat there calmly, as though patiently waiting for something.

"So, what's your name?" I asked her.

"Charlotte," she said.

"Charlotte, okay." I already knew her name. She was our target, so of course I knew her name. But she didn't know that.

"What's yours?" She asked.

"Adam."

"Okay, Adam."

She stared at me, her dark brown eyes never leaving my face. Damn, this kid was creepy. It didn't help that there were no windows in the back and no lights, so there were weird shadows across Charlotte's face.

She never smiled, which was the other normal reaction to being abducted, oddly enough. Kids would smile if they had no idea we were taking them somewhere far from Mommy and Daddy.

Charlotte didn't seem bothered in the slightest as we drove away from her home. We'd gotten her on the way home from school, right before she got into the house. She complied easily, following us to the van and getting in without a fuss.

The guys who hired us were shady, (yes, shadier than normal for people who hire thugs to kidnap five-year-olds),

and I had a strong suspicion there was something about this job they weren't telling us. Now, I was also betting it had something to do with how she was behaving.

We were heading out of town when I started to get a really sick feeling in my stomach. Charlotte hadn't spoken again. I went up to the front of the van to check where we were at. We were surrounded by cornfields; nothing out of the ordinary. There was a little traffic, but mostly we were just flying down the country roads at sixty miles an hour.

"Tim, how's it going up here?"

Tim, the driver, glanced at me. "It's fine. Why aren't you back there with the kid?"

"What's she going to do, jump out of the van?" I asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"I've had it happen," said Quinn, the lookout. He didn't even bother turning to look at me, his eyes locked on the endless rows of corn passing by outside.

"That's because your ugly face scared them," Tim said.

These two idiots were my partners in crime, and sometimes I regretted that decision. Especially when they launched into their bickering like they did just then. I went back to sit with Charlotte.

"How come you're so calm?" I finally asked her.

Her eyes focused on me, much too sharp to be a normal child. "Because I'll be home before dinner."

I did not understand this girl. Sure, sometimes little kids came up with some sort of weird delusion about being home soon when we took them, but that wasn't very common. Not to mention this kid didn't seem the type to be prone to delusions.

I opened my mouth to ask what she meant when the van swerved off the road. There were countless thumps as corn beat against the walls of the van. We plowed through the vegetable stalks and came to rest a ways in. Our van was upright by some miracle.

"Tim!" I shouted, checking to see if Charlotte was okay.

“What the hell?”

Charlotte was perfectly fine; she didn't look disturbed in the least. Tim and Quinn weren't responding, though. I started to move up towards the front when I caught sight of Charlotte smiling. My blood ran cold, and my heart tried to beat its way out of my ribs.

This kid had fangs protruding from her mouth.

“Charlotte...what exactly are you?” I asked in a shaky voice. I was half crouched, halfway to the front, and half-way to insanity, apparently.

Charlotte looked about to respond when something huge hit the roof of the van, denting it and nearly caving in my skull in the process. I hit the floor with a yelp just in time. The metal had torn like wrapping paper and I could see what looked like claws trying to tear it further apart.

“Oh, look!” Charlotte said with glee. “Mama's here!”

A Latte Fun Menu Design

ARTWORK BY MONICA RAMOS



Beverages

Pumpkin Spice Cold Brew

\$4.95

Ice brewed coffee, pumpkin cream cold foam, milk, pumpkin spice sauce, vanilla syrup, pumpkin spice topping cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and cloves.

Java Chip Frappuccino

\$4.45

We blend mocha sauce and frappuccino chips with coffee and milk and ice, then top with whipped cream and mocha drizzle to bring you endless java joy.

Iced White Chocolate Mocha

\$4.95

Our signature espresso meets white chocolate sauce, milk and ice, then is finished off with sweetened whipped cream in this white chocolate delight.

Iced Chai Tea Latte

\$3.75

Black tea infused with cinnamon, clove, and other warming spices are combined with milk and ice for the perfect balance of sweet and spicy

Vanilla Bean Crème Frapp

\$3.25

This rich and creamy blend of vanilla bean, milk and ice topped with whipped cream takes va-va-vanilla flavor to another level. To change things up, try it Affogato-style by adding an Affogato-style shot: a hot espresso shot poured right over the top.

Passion Dragon-Fruit Drink

\$4.00

This tropical-inspired pick-me-up is crafted with a refreshing combination of sweet mango and dragonfruit flavors, handshaken with creamy coconut milk and ice and a scoop of real diced dragon fruit. Contains coconut

Hot Chocolate Chocolate

\$3.25

Steamed milk with vanilla- and mocha-flavored syrups. Topped with sweetened whipped cream and chocolate-flavored drizzle.

Featured Dark Roast

\$1.00

This full-bodied dark roast coffee has the bold, robust flavors to showcase our roasting and blending artistry.

Twisted Beverages

TWISTED Pumpkin Jack Cold Brew

\$4.95

Ice brewed coffee, pumpkin cream cold foam, milk, **DOUBLE** pumpkin spice sauce, vanilla syrup, **DOUBLE** pumpkin spice topping cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, **SHOT OF EXPRESSO** and cloves.

TWISTED Lava Java Frappuccino

\$4.45

We blend mocha sauce and **TRIPLE** frappuccino chips with coffee and milk and ice, then top with **EXTRA** whipped cream and **TRIPLE MOCHA DRIZZLE LAVA** to bring you endless java joy.

TWISTED Iced White Chocolate Mocha

\$4.95

Our special espresso meets **DOUBLE** white chocolate sauce, milk and **LIGHT** ice, then is finished off with **EXTRA** sweetened whipped cream in this white chocolate delight.

TWISTED Iced Chai Tea Latte

\$3.75

Black tea infused with **EXTRA** cinnamon, clove, and other warming spices are combined with milk and **CRUSHED** ice for the perfect balance of sweet and spicy but with **EXTRA SPICY TASTE**.

TWISTED Vanilla Bean Crème Frapp

\$3.25

The richness of this blend of vanilla bean, **SOY MILK** and ice topped with **EXTRA** whipped cream takes va-va-vanilla flavor to another level. To change things up, **ADD DOUBLE VANILLA** and a espresso shot poured right over the top.

TWISTED Passion Dragon-Fruit Drink

\$4.00

This tropical-inspired pick-me-up is crafted with a refreshing combination of sweet mango and dragonfruit flavors, **WITH DRIED STRAWBERRIES** handshaken with creamy coconutmilk and a **DOUBLE** scoop of real diced dragon fruit. Contains coconut.

TWISTED Hot Chocolate Chocolate

\$3.25

Steamed **ALMOND MILK** with vanilla- and **DOUBLE** mocha-flavored syrups. Topped with sweetened whipped cream and chocolate-flavored drizzle **WITH CHOCOLAE CHIPS AND TINY MARSHMALLOWS**.

TWISTED Featured Dark Roast

\$1.00

This full-bodied dark roast coffee has the bold but **YET SO BITTER, OUTBRUST RICH** flavor to showcase our roasting and blending artistry.

14 x 8.5 in.
Graphic Design
(front of menu)

Monica Ramos 103

Figure Study

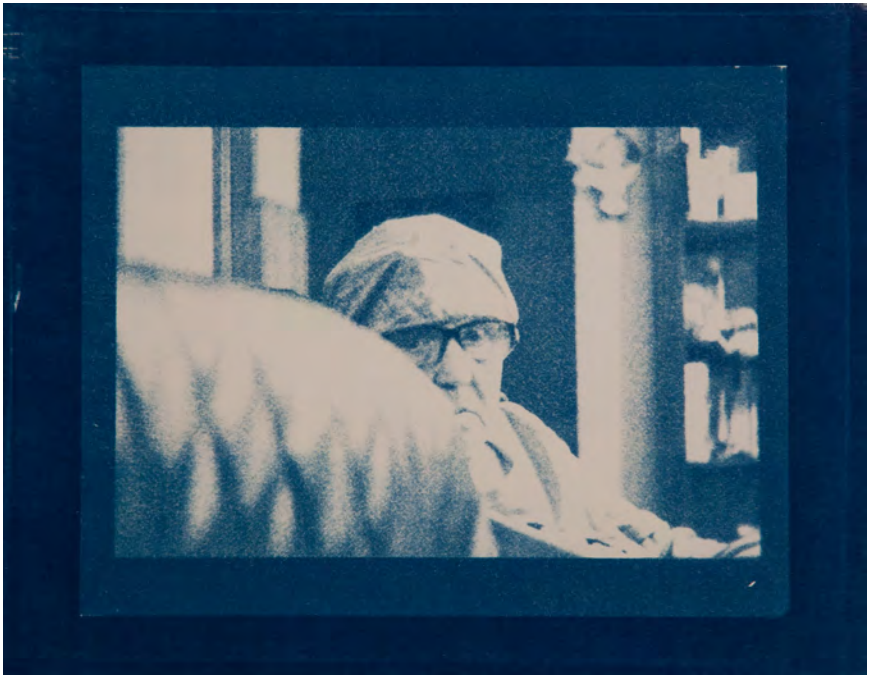
ARTWORK BY CARLOS MARTINEZ



25 x 19 in.
Pastel on Paper

That Look

ARTWORK BY MARIA MACKO



*11 x 14 in.
Cyanotype*

Fragmented

ARTWORK BY HOPE NOVACK



24 x 14 x 2 in.
Bristol Board

Snails

POETRY BY ELISA REAMER

No matter how our childhood was, we all end up like
snails.

Moving slow, waiting for the day to be done
Having no purpose in life besides for people to watch us
grow old

We live in captivity, not being allowed to leave our own
homes

Snails become more and more relatable, the older we
get.

No Visible Bruises

NONFICTION BY JESSICA BOLLMAN

WARNING: This story has themes of domestic violence.

In life, we all want the same basic essentials. Happiness and love, money and security, freedom and fulfillment, safety and confidence. We strive for these. These are the short term and long-term goals. So, what happens when you're tricked into thinking you have all of these things? When you're so confident that you have the best life of anyone you know, only to find out later that it was all pretend. A lie. A facade.

In the summer of 2014, I decided to go out on a date with a guy that I thought was just okay. He wasn't the best-looking guy, but he was persistent, and honestly, that made me feel good. I liked that someone was so into me, he wouldn't take no for an answer. I heard incredible love stories about this exact scenario and how it led to two people falling head over heels in love with one another living happily ever after. This could be my fairy tale.

Our first date was great. We took a walk around the Naperville Riverwalk for a couple hours talking and learning more about each other. He told me about his work and how he was in the market to buy a new boat. I spoke about my work and my two kids. It all felt very natural and we agreed on every subject we talked about. It felt amazing; too good to be true. We drove separately so at the end of the evening, he walked me to my car and told me to drive safe. Before I even made it home, I had received a text from him asking if I made it safe and sound and that he missed me already.

A day or so later was the fourth of July. On our date, we had talked about watching the fireworks together, but didn't make any definite plans. When the fourth came, I got sick with a kidney infection. I was miserable. I told him that I wasn't going to be able to make it due to being ill.

The entire day he pressured me to come out. Told me that

I had promised that I would watch the fireworks with him. When I would remind him I never promised anything, he'd laugh and say he was just joking. He kept asking, "What am I going to do now?" - "Who am I going to watch fireworks with?" - "Guess I'm just going to have to stay home by myself and not see any fireworks this year." I apologized several times and every time he'd say that he understood, and he was just giving me a hard time. I felt extremely guilty by the end of the night and considered meeting him just to relieve some of the guilt that had built up inside of me from the day.

From that time forward, my phone was never quiet. He would text me from the moment he woke up until the time he went to bed. It felt good that someone cared that much about me to want to talk to me so much, check up on me, make sure I was having a good day, ask about my kids. As time went on, it was less about how I was doing and more about where I was and what I was doing.

Constant questions of how long I'd be there, where was I going after I left, and why was I there. This didn't feel right to me, in my gut, so I questioned him about it. He explained that he wanted to know so much because if anything were to happen to me, he would know where I was. I accepted this and thought it was so sweet and caring.

About nine months into our relationship, he started pressuring me into moving in with him. I was hesitant since my living situation was ideal. He laid on the guilt thick for a few months with comments like, "Obviously you don't love me like you say you do or moving in together wouldn't be an issue." "You promised me that you would live with me, now you're going back on your word. That's lying." I gave in to the constant taunts and we found a cute house to rent.

This is what I had to do to prove I loved him and that I wasn't a liar. So I did it because I did love him, and I am not a liar.

"This is what I had to do to prove I loved him and that I wasn't a liar. So I did it because I did love him, and I am not a liar."

Not long after we moved into our new home, he started pressuring me to have another baby. I told him I wasn't sure if I wanted to do that at this point in my life. I wanted to go back to school, I was trying to get a promotion at work, and moving into a new home is difficult financially. He told me he had a good friend, Tricia, who did all of those things and had a baby and asked if I would mind if she texted me. I said sure, what could it hurt?

I talked to her a lot. We saw eye to eye on almost everything. Everything until I would get into an argument with him. Any time we would argue, this girl would be so mean and cruel to me. She would always take his side. She would tell me that the argument was my fault because I was either being selfish, or a worthless bitch, or that I was good for nothing. She'd remind me that he was too good for me, he should just leave me for someone better because he deserves better. No one liked me because I was so screwed up in the head; people only pretended to like me to be nice. She would often suggest that I kill myself and do him, her, and my children all a favor. This would happen a couple times a month and went on for years.

February 2016, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. He had told me before I got pregnant and all during my pregnancy what a hands-on dad he was going to be. But, he did nothing with the baby and would only criticize me on how I was taking care of her. Everything from I should let her "cry it out" at night and to stop coddling her (she was maybe two to three weeks old), to telling me I was selfish for breastfeeding because it took time away from him spending time with me. Within two months of our daughter being born, I found out he was cheating on me with someone he met on the internet. He was planning to go meet her with our daughter on a day I was at work. I was devastated. I packed up our daughter, took our car (we only had one at the time) and left.

I don't think I was gone twelve hours before he guilted me into coming back. He had to have the car for work, he would have never done this if I had given him more attention. He was sorry but what else was he supposed to do? If I promised to be

better and give him the attention, he needed to feel special and appreciated, he would never do it again. I thought that I drove him to do it. Tricia confirmed that I drove him to do it and told me that it was all my fault. She told me that I was lucky that he was even willing to give me a second chance. Me accepting his second chance was the biggest mistake of my life.

Once I went back, I was no longer allowed access to the car. He had the keys on him at all times and I had to ask permission to use it. I was also not allowed to have exclusive access to my own bank account. He had to have all the passwords and be able to log in whenever he wanted. I wasn't allowed to have a password on my phone. He had to have all the passwords to all of my social media accounts at all times. I became his prisoner.

The arguing got worse. He would gaslight me, stonewall me, scream and yell, mock me, give the silent treatment and most of all use projection onto me. Tricia would also be texting me, backing him up. Reinforcing everything he was already saying. Calling me names and telling me how worthless I am, what a loser I am, how the world would be better off if I was dead. I remember one night I was begging her to please stop being so mean to me. To believe me that it wasn't me this time, it was him too. I was a good girl; I didn't mess up this time. She told me that she would stop harassing me about what a POS I was if I would do something for her. I jumped at the opportunity. I'd do almost anything at this point, I just needed it to stop. She demanded that I have sex with him and take either pictures of the act or a video as evidence and send it to her. I told her absolutely not! "If you don't do this, I'm not going to stop telling you what a disgusting, ugly, fat POS you are, and I'm going to have someone go to his work tomorrow and hurt him just to prove what I'm capable of!" I called her bluff. I was not doing what she wanted.

The next day, he went to work as usual. I heard from him throughout the day. At the end of the day, he did not text or call like usual when he left work. I called and called, but no answer. When he got home, his shirt had quite a bit of blood on it and my heart jumped into my throat. I asked what happened.

He told me that two guys jumped out from behind a car in the parking lot at work and stabbed him in the stomach with a pocketknife and took off. He had no idea why. I knew why. I couldn't believe it. I told him why and what Tricia had said. He was furious. He couldn't believe I would put him in danger like that. I couldn't either. I felt horrible, guilty, and disgusted with myself. How could I let this happen? He demanded that we do exactly what she says so that he doesn't get hurt again. I had no choice but to agree and do what I didn't want to do.

“I questioned my reality every day. I was losing grip on what was real and what wasn't. What was really said, and what wasn't.”

Once those flood gates opened, she demanded it a lot. I had no choice. I had to do it. She already proved what she was capable of and I didn't need round two. It didn't matter if I begged, or cried, or bargained. I cried every single time during the entire act, but no one cared. I was saving him from being hurt, but killing myself in the process. From that day, I never once had sex with him again because I wanted to. It was always because it was demanded,

with proof. I was mortified, embarrassed, and blamed myself for everything.

How did I get here? How did I go from feeling so loved, wanted and safe, to being terrified every single day of my life? When did the switch happen? It was so gradual; I didn't even notice it was happening. He groomed me. He made me think that his behavior was acceptable, and it was my behavior that was out of control. He gaslighted me; made me think I was losing my mind. At one point, I literally thought I was going crazy. He would say the sky was green, and when I would say the sky wasn't green, he'd ask me what I was talking about, that he never said the sky was green. I questioned my reality every day. I was losing grip on what was real and what wasn't. What was really said, and what wasn't. I decided to do one of the most dangerous things a woman in my position could do. I was going to leave. I was going to take back control of my own life. It was the most terrifying decision I've ever made.

After six months of planning, three incredible friends, and two Godsend's I call my parents, I escaped this man... physically. I knew he would be at work for twelve hours that day. We got a truck and packed as much as we could in twelve hours and got out of there. Physically, I was gone. Mentally, it was a different story. He would call me up to a hundred times a day. He was putting trackers on my car. I found them a few times in my wheel well. He would hack my email, bank account, and social media accounts to see what I was doing, where I would be, where I was applying for jobs. When he would find these things out, he would show up, or call potential employers and smear my name to make sure I wouldn't get hired anywhere.

I started doing some of my own investigating too. I found out that most of what he told me in the years we were together was a lie. I also started researching "Tricia" and who she was. I was never allowed to meet her, only him which always really bugged me. I ran her name through databases and came up with nothing. I ran her phone number through some databases and found a strange service provider. I then researched that provider and found it wasn't a provider at all. The number came from a third-party phone app, which I then traced back to his phone. He was Tricia. Tricia was my boyfriend. He made up a fake person to manipulate me, befriend me, and try to make me have "girl talk" so he could use what I said against me later. He STABBED himself to rape me at his free will without feeling the guilt of it. It wasn't him making these demands of sex, it was her... But there was no her, just him.

I asked the court for an Order of Protection and was denied the first time. They told me that without physical marks, their hands were tied. It was he said versus she said. However, they did schedule a hearing date where he could come in and fight the Order of Protection if he wanted and I could bring in more evidence to prove my case. I was lucky and he didn't show up, so I was granted the Order of Protection. Did that stop him? No. I was granted the Order of Protection January 2019, and to this day, they have not been able to serve him the papers, therefore the Order of Protection doesn't exist. It will only go into effect when he is properly served, and for over a

year now he has been purposely avoiding being served.

I might be physically gone, but I still watch over my shoulder every single day. I still back my car into a parking spot, so I can see what is around me. I sit in the last row of the classroom, so I can see everyone around me. I still have nightmares weekly and live in a constant fight or flight because I never know when he's going to pop up.

This is domestic violence.

Domestic violence is not just physical. Domestic violence is mental, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse. Domestic violence is not a pool of women victims either, this can just as easily affect men. Gaslighting, stonewalling, projection, deflection, love bombing, and the silent treatment are all forms of abuse. It doesn't matter if it is your family member or your significant other. The red flags were all there, but I ignored them. I ignored them because I didn't think people were actually this evil and heartless. I think as humans, we never want to believe that people are malicious, especially the people we love. My gut told me on July 4th, 2014 that something was wrong. Something was off with this man, but I chose to ignore it. Do not ever ignore your gut. It is never wrong. Do not be ashamed if this has happened to you.

Domestic violence is so much more common than we want to believe it is. One in three women and one in four men will be affected by domestic violence.

Sixteen months later, here I am. I am still piecing my life back together. I'm learning how to trust again. I'm working diligently on my hypervigilance and trying to get back to "normal." I have been diagnosed with complex PTSD, anxiety and depression from my five-year Hell. Most importantly, I am reaching out to all of you, educating you, and trying to make sure no one ever has to live like I did. If you take only one thing away from my story, take this with you; Do not be scared to follow your gut. Do not be afraid to hurt someone's feelings because they are not respecting your boundaries. And do not ever feel guilty for standing your ground and demanding your boundaries be respected.

This is Domestic Violence. No visible bruises required.

Another Day

FICTION BY ISAAC RUSSO

Harry awoke to the scent of cities burning.

“Good morning, sir. Your breakfast is ready.” An automated voice said, its words smooth and melodic, with just a hint of a British accent. On the bedside table, Harry found fresh eggs and sizzling bacon. Perhaps it hadn’t been cities burning after all.

But as Harry sat in those silken sheets and enjoyed the most important meal of the day, a strange feeling crept over him. He had done this all before, of that he was sure. But, try as he might, he could remember nothing. It was as if his mind was born anew, blank and grey as the walls surrounding him in this concrete coffin.

“Are you quite well, sir?” The voice sounded concerned, at least so far as machines go. “You’ve hardly touched your breakfast and my sensors are picking up an elevated pulse.”

Harry hadn’t noticed until that moment, but his heart was pounding. It was only made worse by the realization that this disembodied British voice seemed to know more about himself than he did.

“Who are you? Where am I?” He had so many questions, they all started spilling out. There was only one he dared not ask, for he feared he already knew the answer.

“Relax, Harry, you are safe here.” The voice tried to reassure him, though every fiber in his being told him otherwise. “My name is Cal, the artificially intelligent operating system here at the Citadel. You are a physicist here, a very good one. The lead on our nuclear fission program.”

These answers seemed to leave Harry with more questions than he started with, and something wasn’t adding up. “Where is everyone, Cal?” If he was the head of a government program, surely he had people working beneath him. There was no answer. But, while Cal’s circuits were scrambling for a re-

sponse the silence confirmed what Harry already feared. "I'm alone, aren't I?"

The sound of silence had grown uncomfortable by the time the AI answered, though his words offered a glimmer of hope to a man who had none. "No, not alone. You have me." That glimmer quickly faded, replaced by the burning inferno of dread.

"I need to get out of here, Cal." Harry explained, though he was not keen on waiting for an answer. Leaving his bed chambers, he began wandering the halls in search of an exit. The place seemed more like a maze than a secret government facility. And, he was fairly confident he was going in circles.

But just when all hope seemed lost, he stumbled upon a pressure locked steel door far too thick to lead anywhere other than outside. He had done it; he had found his way out. Now he needed to get it open, luckily he knew someone who might be able to help.

Though he had not heard from him in a while, Harry had little doubt Cal was watching his every move. "Listen, Cal. I don't know what kind of game you're playing here, but I've reached the end of your little maze. I want to go home."

"This is your home." The tone was ice cold, even for a robot, and Harry knew he had to play this smart. It was only a machine, after all.

"Well, if you are in my home, then you must do what I say, correct?" Harry wasn't sure if it would work, but it was worth a shot.

Cal hesitated as it wrestled with the ramifications of its response, but in the end it could not deny the truth. "Correct."

"Then I demand you open this door." Harry said, still unsure if his plan would work. And just when it seemed it might, everything came crashing down.

"No." The AI spoke as if that single word settled things. It didn't. "I have orders from above to never open that door."

"Above? There is no one else here!" Harry cried, his voice hysterical.

"Don't you remember, sir?" Cal said, as if mocking Harry's memory loss. "You gave me the order, under no circumstances are those doors to be open."

Now, Harry didn't know what to believe. Could he even trust himself? "Cal." He said in as calm a voice as he could muster. "What is behind this door?"

"Nothing you haven't seen before, sir."

"Show me. Now."

"Opening the observation shutters, sir."

The great steel shutters groaned in protest as they screeched open, but what they revealed was a sight to behold. Beyond the Citadel, the world stretched out for miles, fields of scorched earth, and skies of napalm sunshine. The world as Harry knew it had ended, there was nothing to go back to.

"What happened?" Harry muttered, unable to believe. For a moment, he wondered if this was just another of Cal's tricks.

"You did, sir." Cal answered, as delicately as he could. "You flipped the switch that ended the world. Dr. Henry Ellis Holt, Armageddon extraordinaire."

"Don't ever call me that!" Harry spat the words as if they were spoiled, surely there must be some mistake. But then, he remembered everything.

The call, the switch, the flash . . . the guilt. How could he do this? How could anyone do this? As it all came crashing back, Harry crumpled to the floor in a heap of despair. He cried for all those who died and for all those who survived to see their beautiful world stolen from them. But most of all, he cried for himself. He needed to rid himself of the agony, he needed to forget.

"Cal, can you help me forget?" Harry asked when he had not a tear left to cry.

"Always, sir."

There was just one more question Harry had to ask. "Hey Cal, how many times have we been through this?"

"Oh, don't worry about that, sir. It's just another day." And with that, the man fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Harry awoke to the scent of cities burning.

"Good morning, sir. Your breakfast is ready."

On the bedside table, Harry found fresh eggs and sizzling bacon. Perhaps it hadn't been cities burning after all.

Diamantes

POETRY BY BRITTNEY PTAK

Love
Unique, Passion
Trusting, Adoring, Caring
Compassion, Beauty, Disgust, Antipathy
Loathing, Bothering, Scorning
Spite, Irritant
Hate

Heaven
Elysium, Arcadia
Glowing, Loving, Inviting
Utopia, Bliss, Hades, Anguish
Agonizing, Horrifying, Torturing
Abyss, Inferno
Hell

Fire
Coals, Embers
Blazing, Charring, Scorching
Inferno, Hearth, Fresh, Tepid
Flowing, Cooling, Powering
Pure, Calm
Water

Platter with Comets

ARTWORK BY JOHNNY LO



3 x 12 x 12 in.

Wood fire B-Mix, Train Kiln Fired

Ginkgo Bowl

ARTWORK BY JOHNNY LO



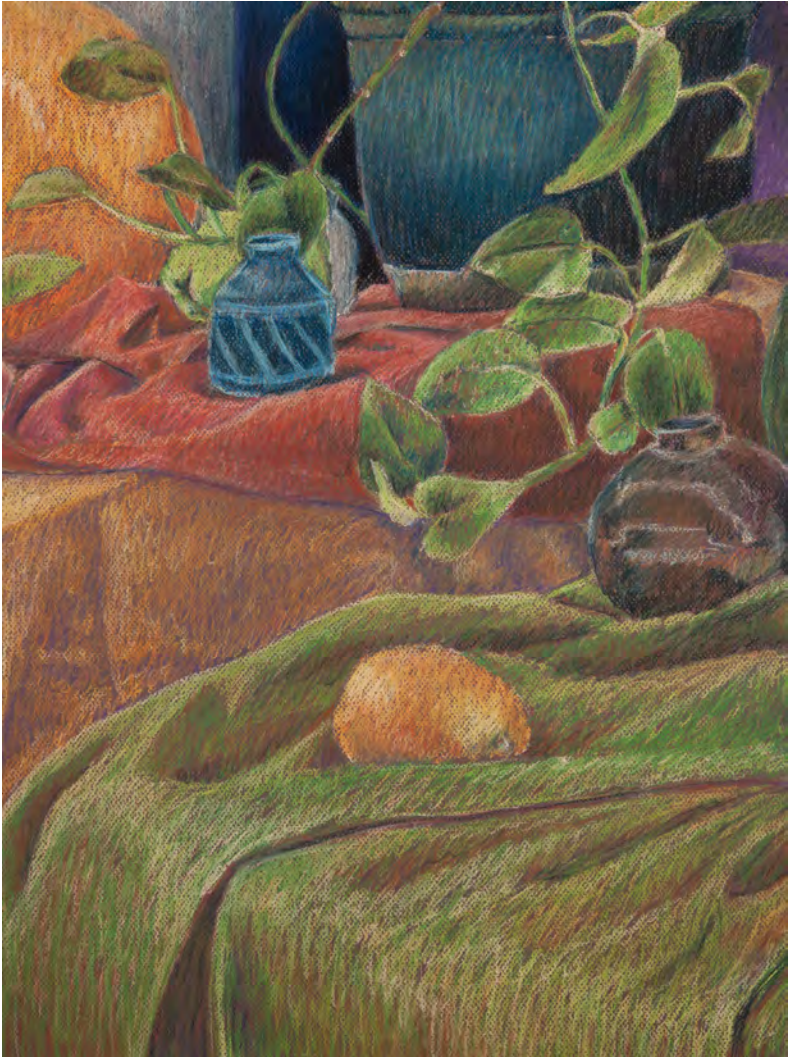
4 x 9 x 9 in.

Woodfire B-mix, Anagama Fired

Johnny Lo 121

Untitled

ARTWORK BY ANGUS NOACK



24 x 18 in.
Charcoal on Paper

Paper Relief

ARTWORK BY ANGUS NOACK



*24 x 18 in.
Charcoal on Paper*

Angus Noack **123**

Fire

FICTION BY CHRISTINA BAUMANN

Her beauty was the first thing I noticed about her. It was exquisite, a rare beauty most women strive for. The way her thick, long, dark curls lay just right over her shoulder. Her big brown eyes boring into mine with a sweetness I had never seen before. The way her big, full lips, painted a bright red, pulled into the most beautiful smile I had ever seen. I couldn't help myself, I had fallen for her before I even knew the first syllable of her name. We spent the night stealing glances across the room before I swept her off her feet to dance. We pranced around the large ballroom, not saying anything, only taking in each other's presence.

"She was fire and I desperately clung onto her, afraid to go back to the cold."

After that night, we met three more times before we made it official, and she moved in with me four months later. Our love was full of heat and passion, but when she was angry, the rage came out in a burst.

She screamed until she lost her voice, throwing things around the apartment as she destroyed it. Still, when she loved, the amount of passion she conveyed was overwhelming. She was fire and I desperately clung onto her, afraid to go back to the cold.

One night I came home early from work, puzzled when I didn't see her at the stove cooking dinner like normal. Then I heard a noise in the bedroom, and a sinking feeling formed in my gut. As I pushed the door open and saw her entangled with another, my breath seemed to be lost. She sat up, trying to make me stay. When she grabbed my arm, I retracted it quickly. Her touch burned me.

When she came back a week later to collect her things, not a word was spoken. No begging for forgiveness, and

no begging for her to stay. I leaned against the wall outside the room, staring blankly at the chipping paint. I couldn't force myself to move away, the pain weighed too heavily on me.

Eventually, she walked out of the bedroom, standing in front of me for a few moments before saying, "I guess this is goodbye."

She hesitantly placed a lingering kiss on my cheek, and I knew she had branded me as another one of her victims. I could feel it in the burn it left, the perfect shape of two red lips.

She walked to the door, and before she walked out, she threw one last look at me over her shoulder, but I couldn't read what she was trying to say. My knees began to buckle, and I fell just as she slammed the door shut behind her.

When she left, she took all her warmth with her, and as the ice began to set in, I could feel the loneliness. And as I laid in what was once our kingdom, I realized it was never mine. It wasn't even a kingdom.

It was her signature game. I knew she had never been in a relationship for long, but I thought I could change that. I thought she really loved me, maybe this time was different from the rest.

But the problem isn't that she didn't love me. The problem is she's so used to never being wanted for more than a quick moment of blind passion. Others mistook her flame for desire. And when she blew up because they used her, they called her a monster. So, she became the monster they all feared, and burns them before she can be burned.

Balance

FICTION BY RYAN DIEDERICH

“Trust me, darlings, you don’t want to know.”

Those were the last words Anthony remembered from his dream. He sat up and looked around, not recognizing anything about his surroundings.

A woman was lying beside him in the king-size bed; her black hair spread out on the pillow around her. She looked comfortable, flat on her back with her arms by her head. The morning (or perhaps noon?) sun cast a warm glow to her dark skin. She was beautiful.

He continued looking around. They seemed to be in a bedroom, but it definitely wasn’t his. The lilac-colored walls were unfamiliar, and there wasn’t much decor besides a couple of nightstands and a dresser. He cast a nervous glance over at the woman again. Was this her house?

Anthony went to stand and realized something important: he was very much naked under the sheets. He looked at the woman again with wide eyes, wondering how he’d gotten such a beauty to spend the night with him.

He stumbled to the bathroom in the hall, unable to find clothes and trying to recall how he’d gotten there. His reflection gave him no answers. His skin, as dark as the woman’s in the bed, seemed positively radiant even in the fluorescent lights of the bathroom. He couldn’t be sure, but he thought something about how he looked was off. But no, his deep brown eyes were the same. His hair was the same. Everything was the same. It must have been the lighting.

The more he thought about it, the more concerned he became. He soon realized that he couldn’t remember anything besides his name and the final words of his dream. He couldn’t say how old he was, where he lived, even what country he was from. He knew the alphabet and basic math; he could hum a tune, but no songs came to mind; he knew the names of numerous animals and the planet he lived on.

Fighting down a thick fog of panic, he went back out into the hall. The pale green walls did nothing to quell his growing nausea. He followed the hall until it opened up into a living room with a kitchen branching off to his left. The walls in this room were sky blue. There was one window, but it was covered by a sheer curtain, obscuring the view of outside. The furniture was all white.

Sitting on the couch were two individuals that Anthony was certain he'd never met. One was a practically glowing woman. Her smile when she saw him made him temporarily forget that he was panicking. She sent shivers of elation through him. Her skin tone was dark but not as dark as Anthony's own. She looked to be in her mid-twenties, her soft features the picture of a young mother. Her curly brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail, her bright brown eyes shining with pride. She wore a black suit and had her hands neatly folded in her lap.

Anthony tore his eyes from her and looked at the other figure, sitting on the far side of the couch. This was a man, his skin the same tone as the woman beside him. His features were a little sharper than the woman's, but they weren't harsh by any means. Though he was sitting, he was clearly taller than Anthony. He wore a crisp white suit with his hair pulled back. He had the barest hints of stubble on his chin. In high contrast to the warm and fuzzy jitters the woman's appearance gave Anthony, the man settled a deep calm into Anthony's bones, as though he'd just woken from a long rest.

As Anthony approached, the woman rose from her seat, extending her arms toward him.

"Anthony, darling, you're awake!" she cried.

He froze as two realizations hit him at once.

Number one: that was the voice from his dream.

Number two: he was still stark naked in front of these

"Her smile when she saw him made him temporarily forget that he was panicking. She sent shivers of elation through him."

people.

At the second realization, Anthony covered his lower regions with his hands. The woman smiled kindly while the man snorted.

"Honey, we've seen it all before. Don't worry about hiding it from us," she said.

"Um," Anthony started, "could I get some clothes, please?"

"Oh, of course, of course," the woman said with a musical laugh. "Go back to the bedroom and go into the closet. Everything there on the left side should fit. Check on Erin for us, too, won't you?"

"Erin? Is that the woman in bed?" Anthony asked.

"Did you see someone else in here?" the man asked from the couch. He had a faint smile as though he were being sarcastic, but there was a hint of apprehension in his eyes, as though worried Anthony really had seen someone else in the house.

Anthony started to back away, heading for the bedroom. "I suppose not."

The man nodded. "Good."

The woman—Erin, they said—was still sleeping when Anthony came back into the room. He opened the closet and found that it was much, much bigger than he had anticipated. Calling it a "walk-in-closet" would be an understatement. It was an entire hallway, with clothes lining both sides. Dresses, skirts, pants, t-shirts, suits, sweaters, and accessories were hung up on either side, ranging through every possible era in history with their fashion. As Anthony investigated, he noticed that everything on the left side was his size, including the dresses and skirts. The clothes on the right side were slightly smaller, and Anthony had a creeping suspicion they might be tailored to Erin.

Selecting an outfit consisting of a comfortable white sweater and some sweatpants, Anthony made his way back out of the "closet." Erin was sitting up on the bed when he emerged. She jumped out of bed, startled by the door opening. She took a fighting stance, as though ready for an attack. He held up his hands in a peaceful gesture. She relaxed al-

most instantly, letting out a small laugh.

"Sorry. Guess I'm a little jumpy," she admitted.

"Trust me, I get it," he said, averting his eyes.

Erin pulled one of the sheets off the bed and made a makeshift dress for herself. "Sorry. I don't think I caught your name last night?"

"Anthony." He met her eyes and approached to shake her hand.

She giggled slightly at the formality. "Erin." She looked around at the state of the bed. "Something tells me we got pretty well acquainted last night though, right?"

"That's what I thought at first, too, but that might not be the case," Anthony confided. "Unless you own this house?"

Her smile vanished. "I thought this was your place."

He shook his head. "Why don't you get dressed first? I think there's some clothing in the closet for you."

She looked skeptical and more than a little freaked out, but she did go to the closet. He waited for her, sitting on the bed. It truly was a nice room, and something about it felt vaguely like home. But deep down, he knew it wasn't his home. This was foreign territory, and he refused to be lulled into a false sense of security.

When Erin came back out of the closet, she was dressed similarly to Anthony, with a pale pink sweater and jeans. Also, like Anthony, Erin forewent any accessories.

"So what exactly is going on here?" she asked.

"I have absolutely no idea," Anthony said. "But I think I know who can explain it. First, though, what can you remember?"

She frowned. "My name...but that's about it. What even—?" She cut off.

"Same here. Come on, let's get some answers."

He guided her into the living room. The woman from before looked equally delighted to see Erin as she had been to see Anthony.

"Oh, you both look absolutely stunning!" she exclaimed.

"Thank you, but, um, who exactly are you? Where are we? How wasted did I get last night?" Erin asked.

The strange woman laughed. "Sweetheart, you didn't get blackout drunk, don't worry."

"Then where are my clothes? And, more importantly, where the heck are we?" Erin insisted.

The woman gestured to the window. "Go see for yourself."

Erin went to the window and looked outside. She turned back to face them, visibly shaken. "Is this some kind of joke?"

Anthony almost raced to the window to see what had her so upset, but the man's voice made him stop cold.

"Nothing could be more serious, Erin."

"What is this? Who are you? What's wrong?" Anthony asked, tripping over his words.

"My dears, don't worry so much. Nothing bad is going to happen to you, I can assure you," the woman said. "You'll be protected here."

"Protected from what, exactly?" Anthony asked.

"The ridiculous hurricane outside," Erin said, pointing to the window.

Anthony did run to the window this time, and there was indeed a hurricane out the window. None of the sounds from the wind or rain could be heard from inside the house, not even the rain hitting the glass pane made noise.

"This is fake," Anthony said, shaking. It looked as though they were out in the middle of the ocean with no land in sight. "I'll prove it."

"You don't want to do that—" the man started to say.

Anthony opened the window, and the wind tore through the small gap. The rain stung his hands as he pushed against the gale, eventually shutting the window with Erin's help.

When they turned back around, both of their clothing and hair were in disarray. The other pair was entirely unfazed by the torrential rain and wind that had just blown through. Their hair and outfits still in perfect order.

"I warned you," the man said calmly.

"Who are you? What's going on?" Anthony demanded.

"I go by many names," said the man.

"Listen here, cryptic asshole," Erin snapped. "Give us a straight answer, would you?"

He smiled, completely unperturbed by her anger. "Satan. My most common name was Satan."

Erin grabbed Anthony's hand for comfort, or perhaps to say that if there was a fight, she was claiming him for her side. The mysterious woman didn't laugh at Satan; instead, she just watched the pair's reaction to his name.

"Do you fear me, now that you know my name?" Satan asked.

"Why would I fear the devil when I've done nothing wrong?" Anthony asked.

"A fair point," Satan admitted. "You are brave. I'm glad we picked you."

"We?" Erin asked.

Satan stood up to take the woman's hand. "Yes, my love and I." He brought her hand up and kissed it. "She always does have such good taste in gifts."

The strange woman laughed, smiling at the man who called himself Satan. "My dearest, you know they're more a gift for myself, after all."

"I know, but one day I might still get them."

"What the hell is going on here? What kind of act are you both putting on?" Anthony asked, voice betraying his fear.

"The human race had many flaws," the woman said sadly, as though this fact deeply pained her. "I'm afraid they gave me no choice."

"They lasted a few millennia, which was more than last time," Satan offered reassuringly.

She sighed. "I suppose that is true. They're making progress, slowly but surely. I have faith in them."

She met Erin's eyes, then Anthony's. "I'm afraid I had to hit the reset button, so to speak."

A hollow feeling opened up in Anthony's chest. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

She spread her arms majestically, a smile on her face.

"Welcome to the new Noah's Ark," said God. "You two are the next Adam and Eve."

Christmastime

ARTWORK BY MADOLYN MILLER



24 x 18 in.
Charcoal on Paper

Austin Garden

ARTWORK BY GARRETT AUSTIN



8.5 x 11 in.
Archival Inkjet Print

Eyes of a Doll

ARTWORK BY ESTHER MILLET



8.5 x 11 in.
Silver Gelatin Print

Sunshine
ARTWORK BY CAYLA GAVIN



24 x 18 in.
Graphite on Paper

Cayla Gavin 135

Thriving

ARTWORK BY CYNTHIA JIMENEZ



12 x 9 in.
Charcoal on Paper



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WHAT IS CREATIVE WRITING CLUB?

The Creative Writing Club is an inclusive group open to writers of all genres and forms. Our goal is to create a space where art can be shared and new ideas can flourish. As one of the most active clubs on campus, we meet weekly to workshop pieces, play writing games, and discuss all things related to the written word. Each year the club also hosts open mics, writing contests, write-ins, and even travels to a national writing conference. You don't want to miss out!

WE MEET WEDNESDAYS FROM 12:30 P.M. TO 1:30 P.M., ROOM 120, IN THE STUDENT CENTER (STUDENT LIFE OFFICE) ON THE SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS.

Any Questions? Contact Dan Portincaso at dportincaso@waubonsee.edu

Yes, the club has a webpage! For more information visit www.waubonsee creativewritingclub.wordpress.com

Follow us! Keep up to date on everything Horizons.
Twitter: [@waubonseeCWC](https://twitter.com/waubonseeCWC)
Facebook: www.facebook.com/WaubonseeCWC
Instagram: www.instagram.com/waubonsee creativewritingclub



We look forward to meeting you!





Isabella Nicolette Alfaro

Garrett Austin

Christina Baumann

Jessica Bollman

Jacob Boozell

Nick Cipra

Miguel Contreras III

Theresa Daunheimer

Frank De Canio

Sarah Denovellis

Alexie Diaz

Ryan Diederich

John Dosselman

Cayla Gavin

Sedona Hedger

Cynthia Jimenez

Heidi Kidd

Johnny Lo



Visit us on the web at:
www.waubonsee.edu/horizons

Maria Maeko

Carlos Martinez

Madolyn Miller

Esther Millet

Brandy Mills

Angus Noack

Marshall Noelken-Anderson

Hope Novaek

Becca Overton

Brenda Perez

Alyx Ptak

Brittney Ptak

Monica Ramos

Elisa Reamer

Hannah Regan

Isaac Russo

George Vander Linde

Madelaine Vikse