



**HORIZONS 2018**

# HORIZONS

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF  
WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

---

---

<b>Editors-in-Chief</b>	Mike Phillips Sabrina Szigeti Andrew Willit
<b>Managing Editor</b>	Cass Feurdean
<b>Layout and Design Editor</b>	Casey Kirk
<b>Copy Editors</b>	Alison Brackett Kaith Garcia Jessie McHenry Marisa Orland Matthew Thom Sammie Virella
<b>Editorial Committee</b>	Alison Brackett Bridget Butler Michael Gregg Jessie McHenry Marisa Orland Katie Schneider Sammie Virella
<b>Marketing/Poster Design</b>	Alison Brackett Colin Minogue Trevor Minogue Marisa Orland Katie Schneider
<b>Faculty Advisor</b>	Dan Portincaso
<b>Faculty Art Advisor</b>	Cecilia Vargas
<b>Student Art Editor</b>	Colleen Brown
<b>Art Reproduction</b>	Jonathan Underwood
<b>Cover Artwork</b>	Michael Wille, <i>Prairie Dream</i> , polaroid Duochrome Film 4 x 3 ½ in.

---

---



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

---

The *Horizons* staff would like to thank the students who submitted their work for consideration and the student editorial committee for sifting through those submissions during spring break to discover the work included here. Thanks also to the members of the Creative Writing Club for their dedication to the writing craft at Waubonsee.

Without the vision and leadership of Cindy Sparr, Dean of the Communications, Humanities and Fine Arts Division, this magazine would not have been possible. We thank her for her generous support and belief in the mission of our publication. We would also like to thank her staff who have always been there when we needed them.

We would also like to thank:

Todd Laufenberg, Assistant Professor of English, for coordinating efforts between *Horizons* and the Skyway Writing competition.

The English Department for helping us get the word out to students about the magazine and continuing the tradition of teaching and inspiring the writers of the future.

The Art Department for teaching and inspiring the visual artists of tomorrow, and for helping us collect and curate the wonderful artwork in these pages.

John Fu, Professor of Graphic Design, for connecting us to student designers, and the Graphic Design Department for their work training designers who will transform our world.

Theresa Larson for her help navigating the purchasing process and for her dedication to excellence for our publication.

Dr. Mary Tosch, Manager of Student Life and her team for helping us organize our events and meetings with seamless precision.

Aurora FastPrint, our printing company, for producing such fine work.

And last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank the college community of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and the Waubonsee Board of Trustees for creating a welcoming environment for the growth of the literary arts at the college.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<i>ALL SHE IS LEFT WITH</i>	11
Elle Fortman	
<i>SCIAMACHY</i>	12
Alison Brackett	
<i>FREE MEN</i>	18
Casey Kirk	
<i>TABLE FOR ONE</i>	19
Michael Gregg	
<i>HIDDEN FROM VIEW</i>	22
Daniel Capobianco	
<i>MY NAME IS...</i>	23
Nathalie Martinez	
<i>CACTUS PLANT</i>	24
Peter De Guzman	
<i>SOLITUDE IN THE WILDERNESS</i>	26
Dominic Castelvevchi	
<i>THE EIGHT STAGES</i>	27
Andrew Willit	
<i>KILLIN' TIME</i>	34
Elizabeth Holmberg	
<i>JERSEY BOY</i>	35
Sammie Virella	
<i>CELLS</i>	37
Alexa Scheckel	
<i>LÍNEAS</i>	38
Jessenia Rodriguez	
<i>ENCOMPASSING POSSIBILITIES</i>	39
Cody Forney	
<i>ORIGAMI STORM</i>	40
Logan Hawkins	
<i>FEATHERS OF A FLOCK</i>	41
Dallas Dell	

<i>AFTERNOON</i>	42
Carlene Lietzow	
<i>I'LL KEEP COMING FOR HIM</i>	43
Claire Youngmark	
<i>SHADOW CREATURE</i>	45
Cassie Laica	
<i>SIMPLICITY</i>	50
Bridget Butler	
<i>COFFEE WITH AN IMMORTAL</i>	51
M.K. Phillips	
<i>VESSEL 3</i>	54
James Michuda	
<i>CHARLIE IN DISGUISE, DECIDES TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE</i>	55
Diane Gil	
<i>SHORT CIRCUIT</i>	56
Daniel Capobianco	
<i>LÁPIZ</i>	57
Jessenia Rodriguez	
<i>RACECAR SPEED</i>	58
Colin Minogue	
<i>33 STEPS</i>	59
Stephanie Burnett	
<i>ENLIGHTENMENT</i>	64
Dominic Castelveccchi	
<i>INTO THE TIDES</i>	65
Isaac Russo	
<i>PYRAMIDS PATTERN</i>	71
Jackson Hazlett	
<i>THE FOX</i>	72
Nathan Klinger	
<i>CRYSTAL LID</i>	74
Michael Wille	
<i>TWO TREES</i>	75
Nathan Klinger	
<i>BROKEN WINGS ON DYING WASP</i>	76
Michael Wille	

<i>NIGHTMARE</i>	77
Amanda Zedwick	
<i>HONESTY</i>	88
Zoraiz Asif	
<i>FOREST FAMILY</i>	89
Angelica Salgado	
<i>THIS IS NOT AN EXPLICITLY POLITICAL HAIKU</i>	93
Paul Cofer	
<i>MY PIECE OF SHIT CAR</i>	94
Sabrina Szigeti	
<i>PINK FLOWER</i>	96
Colleen Brown	
<i>MANNEQUIN STUDY</i>	97
Rosanna C. Sassanelli	
<i>AFTER THE FLOOD</i>	98
Daniel Capobianco	
<i>SEASIDE</i>	99
Megan Coe	
<i>COOL</i>	100
Natalie Melchiori	
<i>GRANDPA'S PIPES</i>	101
Jessica Driessens	
<i>TEACHER</i>	102
W.H. Mollohan	
<i>FAREWELL REFLECTIONS</i>	103
Dominic Castelveccchi	
<i>FOUR SKULLS AND FOUR CROSSBONES</i>	109
Paul Cofer	
<i>ONE DAY</i>	110
Shannon Gilkey	
<i>RELAX</i>	112
Elizabeth Holmberg	
<i>BATHERS</i>	113
Daniel Capobianco	
<i>CLAUSTROPHOBIA</i>	114
Gina Strubhart	

<i>ESTAMBRE</i>	115
Janice Rodriguez	
<i>TARGET</i>	116
Grace Bales	
<i>THE FEELING</i>	117
Claire Youngmark	
<i>MY DAY</i>	118
Matthew S. Burton	
<i>LIVE MY LIFE</i>	121
Elizabeth Holmberg	
<i>AMAZON 2047</i>	122
Trevor Minogue	
<i>EXPRESS CONNECTION</i>	125
Paul Cofer	





# EDITORS' NOTE

---

---

After a long, fulfilling, and often exhausting process, we give you *Horizons*. This magazine filled with student work has been our lives for the past semester. We could not think of a single thing we would rather dedicate the time to. For joining us in this adventure, we want to give our sincerest gratitude to the students on the *Horizons* masthead for their willingness to give up their Spring Break in the name of literature, and to Dan Portincaso, whose vigilance, and apparent sanity in the face of adversity, helped us retain ours in kind.

*Horizons* is, and always has been, so much more than a collection of student writing and art. The words and images printed in this magazine represent the hard work of artists from every genre, medium, and walk of life putting their hearts and souls into their art. It represents their generosity in sharing their creations with us and with you, our reader. Every page exists due to the tireless effort of authors, visual artists, editors, and staff who to make it a reality. We only hope to provide a publication that does this work justice.

With care and consideration, we present *Horizons* to you, dear readers. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it.

Mike Phillips  
Sabrina Szigeti  
Andrew Willit

Editors-in-Chief



# ALL SHE IS LEFT WITH

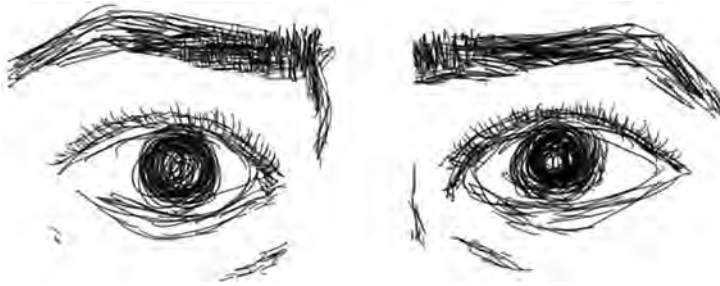
POETRY BY ELLE FORTMAN

---

FIRST PRIZE WINNER OF  
THE WAUBONSEE CREATIVE WRITING CLUB  
FALL “MASKS” WRITING CONTEST

---

---



She slips on the mask, a perfect, shaded veil over the imperfections of her skin  
the marks of her are blurred out  
the brush paints on her eyes  
the gaps in her eyebrows are filled in like the hole in her self love  
instead they are filled in with phthalates, lead, and parabens preventing her  
from liking the gaps in her brows, the unevenness of her skin tone,  
the crevices and bumps and shadows that lay on her  
but more importantly to love her heart, her brain, her life  
because at the end of the night  
when the mask melts off  
that is all she is left with

---

---

*All She is Left With*

# SCIAMACHY

FICTION BY ALISON BRACKETT

---

“The monsters were never under my bed. Because the monsters were inside my head. I fear no monsters I see. Because all this time the monster has been me.”

Nikita Gill

*Tick, tock. Tick, tock.* All Claudia could hear was the thumping in her ears and the ticking of that damn clock. *Tick, tock. Tick, tock.* She blinked up at the ceiling, silently begging for sleep to take her for the night. “*Claudia,*” a hoarse, masculine voice emitted from the darkness. Her only source of light was the bright of the moon peeking through the curtains.

Claudia’s head shot up, her eyes wild and desperate to find the source of the echoing voice. The voice had become familiar now; it had been reoccurring for weeks, each night as she struggled to find the will to sleep.

Claudia Sanchez was a believer of many things, but ghosts were not one of them. There was no proof, nor logical reason behind the supernatural. In her eyes, anyone who believed in all of that hocus-pocus was full of shit. Yet, as much as she willed her brain to not drift towards the paranormal, she couldn’t find another reasonable explanation to the mysterious voice.

*This is all in your head, Claudia,* she reminded herself. The floorboards creaked beneath her weight as she stood from the bed. They were cold; the kind of cold that sent chills up her entire body.

The bathroom light was bright, *too* bright for her tired eyes. She flinched back, her hand flying up to shield her unsuspecting eyes. “*Jesus,*” she muttered to herself, squinted eyes leading her way to the sink. The image greeting her in the mirror was not the Claudia Sanchez she knew. It was a stranger

– *she was living in a stranger's body.*

How long had she looked like this? She grimaced at her reflection in the mirror. She was disgusted by what she saw. Her normal sun-kissed skin was now pasty with a ghostly grey tint. Dark, heavy bags circled her bloodshot eyes. She looked as awful as she felt; her stomach was rolling and her head hadn't stopped pounding since she first heard the voice.

The sink handle groaned in protest as she turned the cold tap water on. She hunched over to meet the sink's height, scooping the water in her cupped hands and splashing it onto her face. She repeated her actions furiously as if she could rinse away the sick feeling in her stomach. She gently dabbed at her face after blindly reaching for a hand towel, cool beads of water dripping onto her bare feet.

A strangled, horrified scream emitted from her lips as she returned the towel to its home, for her reflection was not the only one to be seen in the mirror. Behind her towered a man – except, was it a man?

He looked as if he had been burnt; his skin appeared to be rough, almost rugged even, and charred patches covered what was once his skin. His eyes that once resembled a breathtaking green were now sunken in and swollen shut. His clothes were singed and tattered, hanging limply from his body. Claudia's heart beat wildly in her chest like a bird in a cage as she stared at the man's lingering reflection, paralyzed by an overwhelming fear.

Her hands clenched and unclenched into fists as her breaths escaped her mouth in short, raspy puffs. She felt doom lingering over her shoulders and slowly she turned to face her demise. But as she finally spun around, the man was no longer there.

Swallowing the growing lump in her throat, Claudia peered her head around the corner, into the dimly lit hallway. No one was there. Just then, her roommate's bedroom light flickered on as the door swung open. Her footsteps echoed loudly against the wood floors as she practically sprinted to wards Claudia.

Swallowing the growing lump in her throat, Claudia peered her head around the corner, into the dimly lit hallway. No one was there. Just then, her roommate's bedroom light flickered on as the door swung open. Her footsteps echoed loudly against the wood floors as she practically sprinted towards Claudia.

"There's – I," Claudia stuttered, eyes still darting all around her. Her trembling hands grabbed ahold of Quinn's shoulders, fingernails digging into her flesh. "We've got to go. Someone's in the apartment."

Quinn flinched as Claudia's nails only dug deeper into her skin. "What the hell are you talking about?" Quinn shrugged away from her roommate's grip, her face furrowed in pain.

"Someone's in the apartment!" Claudia repeated, this time more frantic. "There was a man behind me in the mirror. I saw him!" She spoke as if she was more so trying to convince herself than Quinn. "He was right where we're standing and his face – oh my God, his face was so burnt!"

Claudia's hands trembled as she pushed them through her knotted hair, eyes wide with terror and face scrunched in horror. "It was black and shriveled and what the hell? Why are we still standing here talking? We've got to get out!" Her words flew out of her mouth a mile a minute and Quinn flinched back as beads of spit hit her face.

A look of understanding washed across Quinn's features as Claudia rambled on. This wasn't the first time Claudia had claimed to see this man, and it probably wouldn't be the last. "No one's in the apartment, Claud," Quinn assured.

Flicking off the bathroom light switch, Quinn gently grabbed a hold of Claudia's arm and led her towards the front door. "Look, Claudia. The door is locked. There's no way anyone could have gotten in."

But –" Claudia muttered out pathetically, her eyebrows knitted together and a baffled expression etched itself onto her features. "But I saw him."

I know. I know you did, hon. Now let's get you back

to bed, yeah?" Quinn waited for Claudia to numbly nod before leading her back to her room. "You just got to sleep it off, alright?" Quinn couldn't help but stare as she helped ease Claudia into her bed.

Claudia was no longer the girl Quinn had met so many years ago while pledging for the same sorority. She was once so full of life with a beautiful smile and a contagious laugh. Now, it was as if she was fading away right in front of Quinn's eyes and there was nothing she could do about it. The harder she pushed the further Claudia fell.

"Now get some sleep. Please. I'll see you in the morning."

As Claudia's door closed shut, she pulled her knees up to her chest. Quinn thought she was crazy. They *all* thought she was crazy. They all handled her as if she was a delicate flower, as if she would snap at any given moment. But she wasn't crazy. They just didn't understand.

Claudia's hands grabbed at the ends of her dry, bedraggled hair and she tugged at it harshly in a frustrated manner. "They don't understand." She repeated to herself in a whisper, her face scrunching together as hot tears welled in her eyes. "Why can't they see what I see? Why don't they understand?"

*"They're different from you and me, Claudia,"* a gravelly, feminine voice spoke out. It vaguely reminded her of Marge's sisters on *The Simpsons*, a coarse voice that was the product of having smoked cigarettes your entire life. *"We're special. You're special. But they don't understand, they'll never understand. They just think you're crazy. Are you crazy, Claudia?"*

The echoing voice circled around her head in a haunting manner and all she could focus on was that one word. *Crazy. Crazy. Crazy.* The voice repeated in a taunting manner, a piercing cackle bouncing off the walls. Claudia's curled up body rocked back and forth in protest as she tugged harder on her strands of hair, so hard she could feel the brittle wisps of hair breaking off in her hand.

"No, no, no," she muttered out helplessly, shaking her head rapidly. "I'm not crazy. *I'm not crazy,*" she insisted, but to



whom was unclear. Her heart beat rapidly inside of her chest, so hard that she was afraid it was about to burst out of her body any minute now. Sweat droplets decorated her skin, falling from her face to the bedsheet below her.

*"I know what will make you feel better. Do you?"* the voice chimed menacingly. Her blood ran cold as her eyes darted towards the first drawer of her nightstand. *"Imagine how much better you'll feel. This could all be over, Claudia. All you have to do is open the drawer."*

Claudia unraveled herself from the scrunched up position she was in, letting the chunks of hair she had yanked out fall onto her bed. Inching towards the nightstand, her trembling hand reached out before halting. Did she dare?

*"Do it,"* called the voice, *"Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it."* The voice jeered over and over until finally, Claudia reached out and yanked the drawer open. The drawer groaned in protest, and inside, several empty pill bottles rattled around.

She desperately searched through the empty, orange bottles. "Come on," she hissed anxiously. Her blurry eyes read the titles as she threw them to the side. Diazepam, Clonazepam, Chlordiazepoxide, Lorazepam, more Diazepam... the list went on until finally, her fingers grazed a small, clear baggy in the back of the drawer.

She yanked the baggy out and inside held several small, white bars. Xanax. "Jackpot." It was as if the mere action of spotting those pills was enough to miraculously release the weight that had been sitting upon her shoulders. The overwhelming anxiety that had consumed her for weeks slowly began to diminish and as she unsealed the baggy, she noticed that her tremors had stopped.

*"Good job,"* the voice, now beginning to fade away, praised. *"You know what to do now."* Her fingers fished out two of the small pills from the baggy. It seemed that they were almost gleaming in the moonlight.

One by one she placed them on her tongue, cringing as she swallowed them dry. She let the baggy fall to her side and her body fall into her mattress, a sigh of relief escaping her lips

as her head hit the pillow.

In that moment she was as free as a bird with no worries or cares in the world. She'd worry about feeling guilty tomorrow when the initial high wore off and the severity of her actions finally settled in. When Quinn came to check on her the following morning she'd find Claudia fast asleep amongst the empty pill bottles and know that once again, Claudia had failed at detoxing. And when Claudia awoke, she'd be met with disappointed stares and passive aggressive remarks for weeks.

It had become a routine for the two roommates. Quinn would assist in Claudia detoxing once again, in hopes that this time it would work, though deep down the both of them knew that it wouldn't and they'd be back to square one in no time.

Claudia would be just as disappointed as Quinn when she would finally awake from her drug-induced sleep and realize what she had done. She'd have to start all over, she'd have to go through this misery once again.

But she'd worry about that tomorrow because as of that moment, she was going to let herself enjoy her little slip-up.

# FREE MEN

POETRY BY CASEY KIRK

---

---

The men with the long flowing braids, free to do as they please.  
Their muscles strong and flowing like the waves of the ocean.  
Rowing farther and farther each day, in attempt to find the rest  
of the world.  
Braving the cold, cutting, cruel water and the jabbing sharp ice.

Anything but left on this cage of a landmass.  
Trapped.  
If only I could be among the free men.

# TABLE FOR ONE

## NON-FICTION BY MICHAEL GREGG

---

---

I light the stove and prepare my ingredients. Tonight is a special night. I hope she will like my plan to prepare her dinner. Tonight, for this Valentines Day, I want to do something different, something romantic. My hands grip the knife gently as I begin to cut away at the vegetables to make fresh pesto for the chicken dish I want to surprise her with. I smile to myself as I can only imagine the look on her face. I picture her beautiful smile as she hugs me gently for preparing such a simple but heartwarming meal.

The water begins to boil and I break the noodles and toss them in with a pinch of salt as I stir them gently. Next, I chop up the chicken into bits and let it cook in a well-oiled pan that I prepared ahead of time. I listen as the chicken begins to cook, the sound of it sizzling reminding me of the many times my mom taught me how to cook. I quickly check the fridge to remind myself that a nice bottle of Sauvignon Blanc waits and chills. My mother recommended that it would make an excellent pairing for the meal that I was creating.

The timer beeps and I take the pasta out of the pot that it was cooking in and I give it a dash of oil so the noodles don't stick and take the chicken out so it does not burn. I return to my freshly made pesto and add it all together. Low and behold, the meal is ready and just in time as I check the clock. The time reads four-thirty P.M. She will be arriving at six which gives me enough time to set the table and light the candles. I pull out a nice red velvet table cloth as I set the table with plates and silverware. I place a red candle at the center of the table and light it gently as the flame comes to life casting a soft glow across the room. I turn down the lights just little to help set the mood. Then I wait patiently for her arrival.

And wait...

And wait...

And wait some more...

I check my clock to see the time is almost seven o'clock surely she would have been here by now right? No matter, she must be stuck in traffic. I return to my seat and wait.

And wait...

And wait...

And wait some more...

The food is gone now. I put the last scrap of chicken and pasta into my mouth as my hunger finally took over. I open the bottle of Blanc and begin to pour a glass for her and myself as I move her food to the microwave so she may enjoy it later. I raise a glass to toast love as I drink the wine down gently. I hold onto my faith that she will come soon.

I just have to wait a little longer.

So I give a toast to my mother...

A toast to my family...

A toast to myself...

A toast for a long life and good health...

A toast for a...I pause there as I set the glass down. Half of it is gone. I sit there in silence. I turn to look at the candle as the small stub continues to produce a small light. The room continues to darken as the night drags on. The time is now ten thirty P.M. and I ask myself, "Where did I go wrong? Did I offend her some way? Was I too forward with my proposal? Was it too much?" She said yes. I remember the dazzle in her eyes as she smiled and gave me a kiss on the cheek.

"Oh my goodness! Yes I would love to be your valentine," she said with a cute little wink and bright smile. "So what will we be doing?" she said with curiosity as thousands of thoughts flooded her mind on what I could possibly do. "It's a surprise, sweetheart, swing by my place after work and there shall be a table for two" I said with a smile on my face as she leaned in to kiss me on the cheek and told me she would be done with work at six. I told her I would see her then.

But now I sit here alone with my thoughts as my phone begins to vibrate and I look to it with a glimpse of hope. As I see that it's a Facebook status update I look it over, and with great sorrow come to find the words that break my heart. "In a relationship with..." as I see the tags, posts. People tell her how cute a couple they are as I sit, tears streaming down my face. The candle in the room finally goes out. The room now completely dark as it hides the occupant sitting at the table for one.

# HIDDEN FROM VIEW

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO

---

---



Oil on Panel  
49 x 28 in.

---

---

# MY NAME IS...

ARTWORK BY NATHALIE MARTINEZ

---

---



Charcoal  
24 x 18 in.



# CACTUS PLANT

ARTWORK BY PETER DE GUZMAN

---

---



Acrylic on Panel  
14 x 26 in.

# CACTUS PLANT

ARTWORK BY PETER DE GUZMAN

---

---



Acrylic on Panel  
14 x 26 in.

# SOLITUDE IN THE WILDERNESS

POETRY BY DOMINIC CASTELVECCHI

---

---

From my warm room, I embark on  
A small journey, not ten steps in total,  
To the magnificent darkness of the wilderness

The Big Dipper greets me, shining in  
The mystical night sky like a lighthouse perched  
On a lonely island during a dark storm

I lean against the smooth wooden balcony,  
Feeling as if I am cradled in God's hands

The air is fresher than can be imagined,  
And a cool breeze tingles my face and  
Sifts through my unkept hair, swiftly

I stare into the mysterious darkness of  
The forest, and, when I begin to feel  
Fear, I gaze up at the stars for comfort

An infinite aura of tranquility surrounds  
My existence, and allows me to simply be.

# THE EIGHT STAGES

NON-FICTION BY ANDREW WILLIT

---

---

The game of Magic: The Gathering consists of five crucial and powerful colors. Almost every card in the game will revolve around one of these colors: Red, White, Black, Blue, and Green. Those colors are essential to the game, and describe much more than meets the eye, correlating to certain emotions or ideals towards the real world around us.

-Red standing for freedom, emotion, active, impulse, destruction.

-White for peace, law, structure, selflessness, equality.

-Black for power, self-interest, death, sacrifice, uninhibited action.

-Blue for knowledge, deceit, caution, deliberation, perfection.

-Green for nature, wildlife, connection, spirituality, tradition.

These colors are all special and unique in their own way, and can be refined to create very specific decks with direct purposes. But when putting all five into a single deck, your deck itself can begin to have conflict. For example, red loves destruction, and yet you also have white, which contains peace. This can quickly make everything you do unfocused, or untreated, creating chaos within your strategies.

## **Untap Step**

*Player will take this moment to untap all permanents, (EX: Lands, Creatures, Artifacts), unless a card states otherwise.*

I got into Chris's car. The seat was smooth and warm while the summer sun screamed on as he drove us to a card shop. We talked and chatted away, laughing from a joke or two said along the way as we pulled into the parking lot.

The sign reading “*DRAXTAR*” shone from the daylight pouring onto it. We opened the doors and shuffled inside. The warm air quickly changed, getting colder and dryer as the doors closed. We made our way to the counter and began peering downwards at the sea of cards cased and sealed under the glass cases. Walking across the room, we stood shoulder to shoulder, excitement churning within us as cards shimmered in our sight, as if calling us to pick one more up before we left. Grazing from case to case I found it: the first card I needed.

*Progenitus*. The biggest baddie I ever knew then. A 10 Strength / 10 Toughness for ten mana.

Its gold border gleamed around the photo of a nine-headed serpent screeching back at me with instructions below the illustration. I smiled more than ever before at a specific phrase mentioned on the card.

“Protection from everything.”

### **Upkeep Step**

*This step is when many cards will trigger their effects. EX: “At the beginning of your upkeep, if an opponent controls three or more creatures, sacrifice Defense of the Heart, search your library for up to two creature cards, and put those cards onto the battlefield. Then shuffle your library.”*

My computer whirred to life, the monitors warming up with it as I sat down. Cards were sprawled across my small desk. The light from the monitors made them glare and gleam. I opened up my internet and started researching more of my ideas. Scrolling through pages and pages, I scanned from card to card. The databases narrowed my search as I wrote down each name onto a sheet of paper. My friends chatted at me loudly from Teamspeak.

“Andrew, you’re not still on that deck idea right? I already told you, the mana-curve just isn’t great, and that mana-base won’t allow you to focus to what you really need,” Chris said, laughing. All he could hear is the sound of my pencil scraping across my papers. “Maybe try something three colored? That might help you narrow into a more exciting play range!”

“I’m working on mine, and it’s only two!” Luke chimed in through a cheap crackled microphone. His voice poured out of my headset, higher pitched than normal. I ignored them.

Deep down I could feel the sense of conviction that what I was building would be a perfect dream come true, anticipating the proof of what I have culminated. This deck would be something never seen before, I was sure of it.

### **Draw Step**

*This is when the Player will draw their one card per turn.*

I looked at my phone while walking to the side of my house, where the old black mailbox hung against the siding. Its mouth was agape with several letters addressed to me. I pulled them out and felt my heart accelerate, my legs almost dragging me back inside to open my new purchases, racing to the kitchen. The creaky table greeted me so I could toss down the load of letters.

One by one, I pulled sheets of paper and cards from the envelopes, my hands sliding across the heavy plastic holding my prizes inside. Pushing the scraps of letters aside, I lay all the cards out facing me on the table, mentally checking the invisible list in my head, making sure that they were all there, and I began to sleeve them in protective plastic sleeves. A crisp black sleeve drawn into one hand, and my new card in another, I went to work. The monotonous feelings helped me think as I worked out how every card would work in correlation with the others. I felt the weight as I finally sleeved the last one, letting it all rest in the palm of my hand. Progenitus shimmered inside a yellow sleeve placed squarely on top of the tall deck. I put that card aside and began to get a feel for the shuffle of cards.

### **Main Phase I**

*This phase is when players will play their one land per turn, cast spells, and play sorceries. Ex: I play a forest, I then tap that forest to cast Birds of Paradise.*

Looking out the window from my desk, I began wondering how to make the deck work. The sun went on, letting light pour into the cramped office, white boxes all over reflecting the light back while I pulled the deck from the metal

desk and started another round of shuffling. I wanted the cards to tell me something while I slid from one to the next. I let out a deep sigh trying to understand how to win any game with these cards. I felt a flame burning inside as the cards drifted through my hands.

Placing the deck down, I cut it and drew my starting hand of seven. The cards answered me and settled my doubts as I played a round with myself to test the strategy and flow. Drawing, playing lands, and summoning monsters to the field without any hesitation. The cards burned bright as light slashed against the plastic covers, keeping them safe from harm. I leaned back and laughed. I was excited to experience the thrill of my first real test with my friends that night.

### **Combat Phase**

*The player declares attacks using their creatures. All attacks are automatically directed to the opposing player allowing them to decide if they want to block with another creature or not. EX: I choose to attack with Avacyn, Angel of Hope. They choose to block with Balefire Dragon.*

The sound of shuffling filled the room, our three voices turning to silence as we looked down at the round wooden table beneath us.

Luke's cards were sleeved in a dark forest green. *Varolz, the Scar-Striped* was tucked away into a black sleeve, portraying the image of a gruesome troll reflecting the look and feel of the deck, along with the play style.

Chris was shuffling away, his deck sleeved in a bright, warm green, with his commander card *Marath, Will of the Wild* sitting in front of him; an elemental beast, resembling the form of some kind of elk stared back at him.

I looked down to see *Progenitus* shimmering back at me, with the yellow sleeve helping add to its godly effect. As I shuffled my cards, we continued our conversations. We laughed and chatted about new cards being found or discovered as we individually placed our decks down in front of us, letting the others cut the deck in a clockwise motion.

I pulled my deck to the side of me, my commander sit-

ting on the top left of my card mat as I drew my hand. Seven cards drifted from the deck into my palms, letting me decide my first play. Time quickened as we took our turns, playing land, gaining mana, and passing the turn. Cards shuffled through as we played our hands.

I felt a soft rush as my deck sung to me, giving me the next perfect piece of what I needed. Card after card, I began to control the field, letting no one surpass my lead, slamming Chris down, shutting him down fast. He watched his field become empty as I turned to focus my next target.

Black to kill, white to protect, blue to deceive, green to overwhelm, and red to destroy. I watched my deck take its first game, forcing Luke into a corner, his deck being torn again and again from each brutal assault, from one game to the next. I kept a steady pace, my deck guiding me, victory after victory. Soon after, we stopped to check the clock and I let my friends leave, their dreams bent and hearts weighing heavy. I gave my deck one last shuffle before sliding it back into its case.

### **Main Phase II**

*Follows the same format as Main Phase I, except if you have already played your land for that turn, you may not play another one.*

Weeks drilled onward, time forever pushing us forward. I was in love and my deck called out to me with excitement. It continued to work perfectly every time, but then newer ideas began to set in. More decks were being built and cards were forced to move, and I carefully moved card after card from my perfect magic deck. Its strength thinned out as cards were exchanged to different decks to help carry the burden.

That moment of my magic career still haunts me. I had to strip apart what was perfect, peeling off the magic as cards swirled into other places. From black sleeve to purple, or white. The power was dispersed into separate decks. My gods wept openly as I tore into what was already perfect.

But, I pulled it close to me. My computer glowed bright as I scoured to reforge what was once there. Different cards, fun



cards, things to bring what was once such a force back to full power.

### **End Step**

*This step is when the player has a last chance to play instants, or any spells as long as they have flash. EX: During my end step I cast Cyclonic Rift.*

Even now, the deck is still something I struggle with today. Every card has a story to me, has called to me in some way, and has helped me when I needed it. I look towards the horizon with renewed vigor, watching as more cards get released, new ideas and even newer combinations enticing my always changing opinions. The deck stands above all my petty idealistic squabbling, its image cemented as it gets harder and harder to change out cards, rigor mortis setting in as time forces it to age.

### **Cleanup Step**

*During this final step, the game is to ensure that no rules have been broken and that certain actions are still in place. EX: I have nine cards in my hand, but the rules say I can only have seven, so I must discard two cards.*

How does one decide what to share to others when it is about oneself? I sit now, in a bed, on a laptop, decklist in front of me trying to rationalize or convey something more to those who may not even understand the fundamentals of Magic. I could say that through time, my deck has lost a fair share of its games. Or that my friends began to build in cards to specifically handle me when I would begin to get ahead. Hell, I could even tell you that the card that started the whole deck is one of the weakest points inside the deck itself, and has been a sore spot for the deck!

That kind of realism hit me harder than it should. Am I really describing on paper what pieces of cardboard say about me as a whole? The mix of colors described something more than just an imperfect deck. I am not perfect, my emotions have always dug deeper than they should, my brain a conflux of swirling dreams and aggressions, leaving me unfocused when it can be needed. It comes down to a simple head-always-in-the-

clouds cliché. It's basic, but nevertheless true. This deck is still continuing onward, as am I. It makes newcomers excited to verse it, and it has even made a few old players laugh with its absurd winning conditions. I am all the more determined to prove that something not common, not even completely logical, has a place and can even be something so powerful and fun to watch. Something like that can bring joy to everyone around it.

# KILLIN' TIME

POETRY BY ELIZABETH HOLMBERG

---

---

With me you're just killin' time, and it's just killin' me.  
You're waiting for something, someone better. I see it in your eyes.

But you're just filling in the space between you and loneliness  
And I'm just filling in the space between despair and happiness.

Passing time doesn't bother me at all - don't think about it all day.

No, just at night, like 3 a.m., when in the dark I think and lay.

We keep it light, we keep it fun, no need for seriousness,  
But I felt a tear smear when I woke last night, like I'm delirious.

Spending time with you is costing me my life  
Cause you're just killin' time, and it's just killin' me.  
Let me go, let it go, just let me be... free.

# JERSEY BOY

FICTION BY SAMMIE VIRELLA

---

---

I thought my heart could never be broken. I thought that nothing and no one could ever hurt me, that I was as invincible as Superman. I had been wrong; months had passed since my impenetrable heart was sliced open. The dawn of a new school year was upon me once again. As I strolled down the halls I could still smell him on the tattered old sweatshirt that draped over me like a beautiful tapestry. Tears threaten to spill over my betraying eyes as the aroma hits my nostrils. That's when I see him barrel around the corner. My breath hitches, laced with panic. My pits begin to perspire, fueled by the blood pumping furiously through my veins. His golden locks cascading perfectly down his face, while his bright blue eyes shone against his sun-kissed skin. I had forgotten how tall he was, towering over the other boys like a skyscraper floating above the roar of the city. He struts down the hall as if he rules the world. When I finally notice that he isn't just walking with any boys, he was walking with... football players? That's when I see the jersey he arrogantly wears. It's pristine red and white, with our school's majestic mascot front and center. Jealousy yanks at something superficial in me. I had wanted nothing more than to be the girl who proudly displayed her boyfriend's football jersey. Letting everyone in the school know that I was his, and he was mine. The jealousy quickly passes as my eyes begin to skate over him and the other boys to find a statuesque girl wearing his jersey and holding his hand. The heat that had been welling up inside me was instantly replaced with an arctic chill.

*Hmm, I guess that is the new me?* I had heard he began dating someone else a week after we broke up over the summer. I glance further down and notice his hand perched atop her voluptuous bottom. He twists to the athletes, high-fiving them goodbyes, then proceeds to throw his new plaything against the

lockers. I grimace as their tongues fight for dominance, spit flying every which way; hands groping parts of each other's bodies that shouldn't be touched in public places. I sighed with relief, knowing that this new girl was most likely giving him what he wanted, what I had refused to give him, what he had forcibly taken, what was not his to take, and why we broke up after three years of dating and more than a decade's worth of friendship. The naiveté of my irrational teenage brain had thought that the first boy I loved would wait until I was ready, wouldn't try to push me into doing something I hadn't wanted to, but he had. I'm pulled back to the memory of the burn of his scraggily beard against my scorching skin while he held me down, against my will. Battling, crying, screaming against the boy I trusted. The rip of my shirt being torn and my quiet sobs were the only sounds coming from his basement. Hastily he removed his boxers, moving then to my pants and undies, jaggedly tearing them off my protesting body. One hand pinned my delicate shoulders down, while the other snaked up my chest to greedily grab at me. I writhed in protest, but he is so colossal that I couldn't move an inch.

"You know you want this, Rachel. We're in love; this is what people do when they're in love," he justified to me. That was when I felt a sharp pain in my pelvis, followed by a resounding moan from the barbarian atop me.

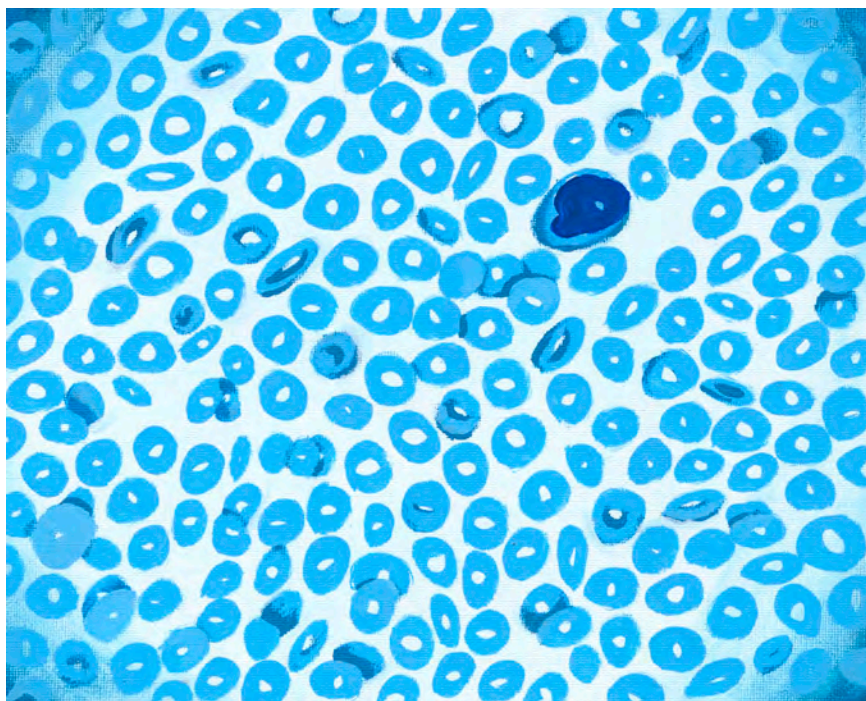
"Please stop. Please." I begged through the tears streaming down my face. That only made him grab my wrists, pinning me like prey down to the couch. Protesting had him crushing into me harder. With every thrust I resisted less and less, finally becoming docile; the fight sucked out of me, I laid there like a dead fish until he was finished. Makeup streamed down my face mixing with my tears to make a black river. I thought, *How could this be happening to me? It's not like I had gone out partying and was claimed by some random guy.* Dragging my mind away from the haunting memory playing on repeat in my head, I pulled my mask back down over my face, expertly composed. I continue walking to class, carrying with me a secret no one would ever know.

# CELLS

ARTWORK BY ALEXA SCHECKEL

---

---



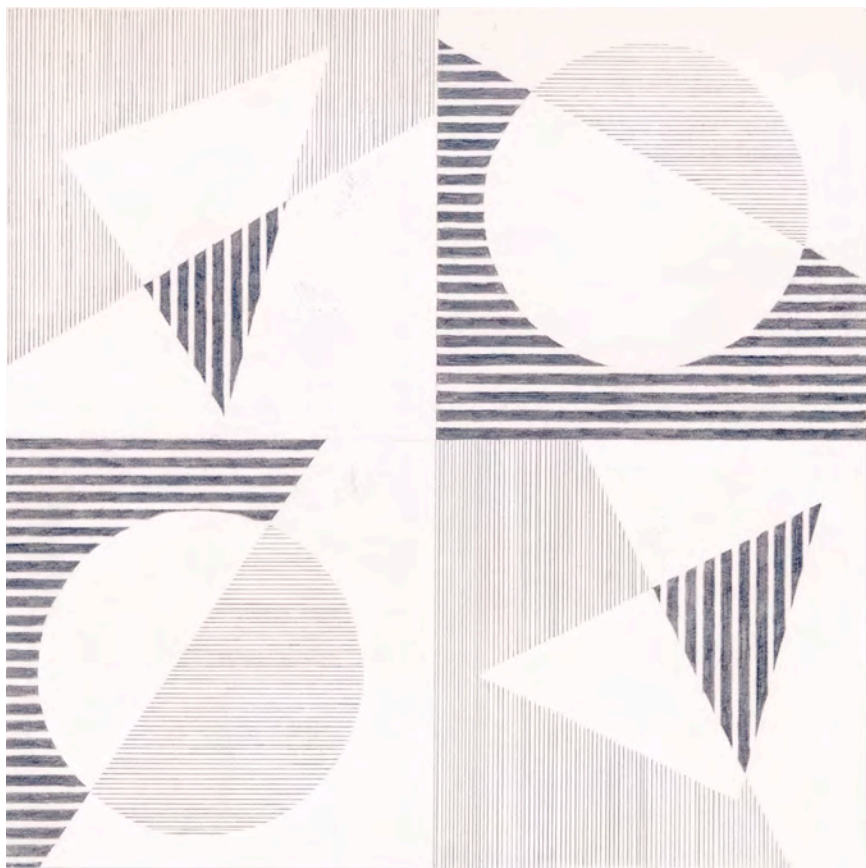
Acrylic on Canvatex  
8 x 10 in.

# LÍNEAS

ARTWORK BY JESSENIA RODRIGUEZ

---

---



Graphite  
8 x 8 in.

# ENCOMPASSING POSSIBILITIES

ARTWORK BY CODY FORNEY

---

---



Archival Inkjet Print  
6 x 9 in.

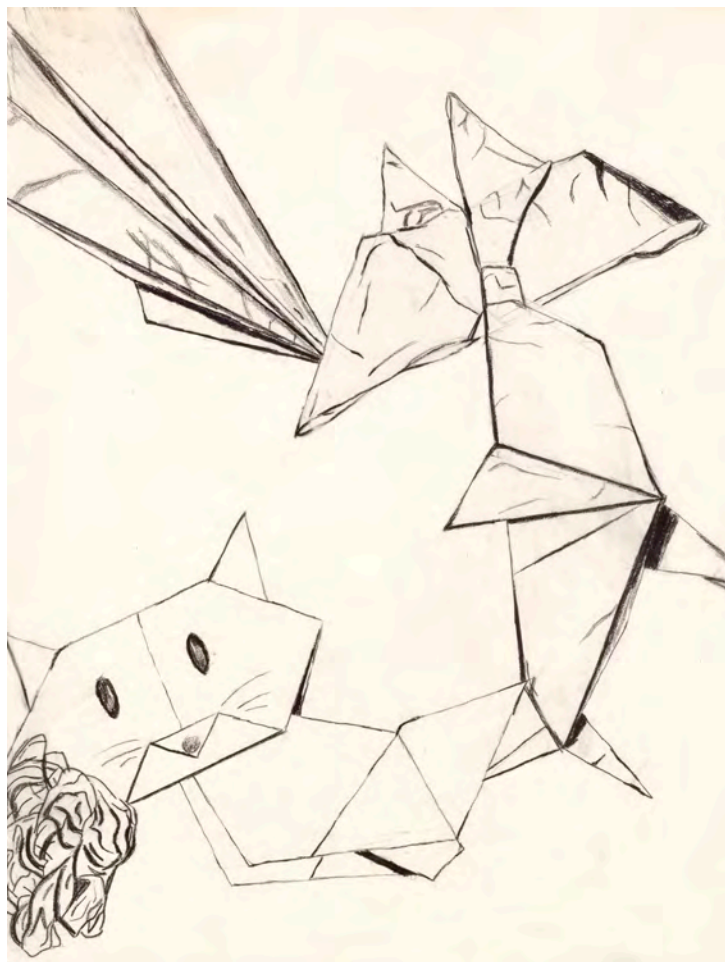


# ORIGAMI STORM

ARTWORK BY LOGAN HAWKINS

---

---



Graphite  
18 x 24 in.

# FEATHERS OF A FLOCK

ARTWORK BY DALLAS DELL

---

---



Silver Gelatin Print  
8 x 10 in.

# AFTERNOON

ARTWORK BY CARLENE LIETZOW

---

---



Oil on Canvas  
24 x 30 in.

# I'LL KEEP COMING FOR HIM

POETRY BY CLAIRE YOUNGMARK

---

---

This is not my favorite place,  
but I'll keep coming back.  
I'll come and sit against this same stone.  
Even though it isn't easy,  
I'll keep coming for him,  
and also for myself.

I always come by myself.  
I sit in the same place  
each time and just think about him.  
I let my mind wander back  
in time to when things were easy.  
I relax my neck and rest my head against the stone.

It's strange how a solid stone  
can be made into a comfy chair all for myself.  
Sometimes I wish these visits were easy  
so I wouldn't flood this place  
with tears from looking back  
at my life with him.

I think about the times with him;  
He could be as soft as cotton and as hard as stone.

No matter what, he had my back.  
He could make me feel good about myself,  
but always kept me in my place.  
He made me an adult and made the transition easy.

He made my childhood easy,  
and for that, I thank him.  
I'm sure he never imagined me in this place,  
but, nevertheless, I'm here against his stone,  
all by myself,  
just thinking back.

I know he'll never come back,  
and that realization is not easy.  
I turn around and make myself  
touch what I have left of him.  
I trace his name carved into the stone  
and my tears begin to fill the place.

Tears flow easily from my eyes and onto the stone.  
I feel him here with me and I'm no longer by myself.  
My tears place themselves gently on the ground and I turn back.

# SHADOW CREATURE

FICTION BY CASSIE LAICA

---

---

“Ee tiil ya,” the crazy old man ranted in the pub. “Deers eh munsteh oot deer. Diis plehs ees dingeerus!” His warnings were glazed over by the bar. All of us knew there was something about the town we lived in, but nothing happened to any of us personally to gain concern. “Diis tahwn ees caauzed,” the crazy old buffoon shouted. His milky eye rolled over in my direction, and I hid my eye contact in the mug of coffee. I tried to finish writing my report, ignoring the dirty, pus popping, horribly scarred face that crept towards me.

His big scar was argumentatively healing, but the pus seemed to state it was only getting worse. It dragged across where his left ear used to be, carved his cheek off, and shot across his nose and eye. Whatever caused the scar, had ruined his eye. His stench of dirt, piss, sweat, and shit got overwhelming as he squirmed between patrons, quickly flailing in my direction. As he crept nearer, all the people shuffled away from him, revolted at the mere possibility he’d touch them.

One of the bartenders gave me a rough look, eyebrows furrowed, creating canyons on his forehead. I lifted my shoulders, widened my eyes, and tilted my head to the side. I’m in the same boat as you, buddy. The message he sent was clear however, so I packed my bag, finished the drink, and left. I could feel the old man’s hand graze my coat as I pranced off, disgusted and grateful for the justifiable excuse I’d have for walking out on my check.

With the same amount of money in my wallet I’ve had since walking in, and a heart weighing no different, I walked off home on a path that coursed its way through town. There was stubble of what remained from previous constructions along the path. From my lifetime, there have been signs and fences, but before, there had been walls.

“DANGER: DO NOT STEP OFF!!” They all warned.

Growing up, these signs were scattered along its borders. As children grew up, I as well, the signs disappeared. One by one, they were removed, because they weren't needed. The rule was ingrained into our society's mind, we had no need for reminders.

When our generation had children of our own, we taught them to stay off the path. As children do, they would rebel, easily. The city put up fences to keep the children on the path, and the problem was solved. The town believed that was what resolved the issue, but it wasn't. The children outgrew their rebellious natures just before the fence was built. The town didn't care about facts, they cared that the children accommodated to the culture, and removed the fence once they had. The path was the only way to commute in this town.

Nothing was special about it. It was a simple, barren terrain, running through the town, winding and turning from each house, to each building, to the park. The town was built on top of an ancient forest, and *the rumor* was always murmured between its citizens. While it was being built, weird things began to happen. People disappeared, animals went crazy or missing, and more strange things that have been forgotten. It happened at such an alarming rate, eventually people rallied up to stop the construction of the town and relocate it elsewhere. The town was still built despite the protest. But again, that is just myth. An urban legend that no one deemed worthy of researching.

Cars were nonexistent in this town since everything was relatively close, walking was manageable. No one living here had a pet. In fact, no one had spotted a woodland creature since this town was built. If anyone saw a deer, the entire population would be talking about it for weeks, if there was a bird singing, we'd all join. During the nights, it was custom to lock the doors and stay inside, until the sun rose again. The town didn't say it was a necessity, like staying on the path was, however it was an unspoken rule with the town's folk. It was so deeply ingrained into our culture that if one were to find themselves in a building and not in their home, they would spend the night on one of the spare beds. The reason for this was long forgotten.

Tonight, I found myself breaking that rule. It was un-

naturally dark, with no moon or stars to light up the night. The town had shuffled into a quiet murmur, almost like a small child's protest against sleep as they feel their body relax and their mind slip into their subconscious. The lights were slowly turning off, one by one in each building, making the darkness laugh with delight as it crept over the town.

As I stumbled out of the pub, the warmth from inside was quickly blown away the minute I passed the doorway. I shivered at the brisk change and proceeded to traverse the path. Although it was dark enough that I could barely see my hands right in front of me, let alone the path, I had traversed this same road so many times that I knew where the boundaries for it began and ended.

With each step, the road wound further and further away from where my house was. The damn cursed path was so tedious to take. It was not direct at all, but a wide, winding pulverized piece of earth that never grew vegetation. Like a snake it slithered around town, sometimes passing a place before winding back around to reach the doorway before running away to another building. Sometimes it would slither over itself, causing shortcuts at times. The most annoying part was, it would dive into the forest surrounding the town, and it would leisurely circle the town a while before slowly creeping in.

The road took me to the forest. Even as a child, it terrified me. The unnatural crunching of the leaves left an unpleasant echo that would sound like a beast crunching on the bones of its prey. Perhaps that is what happened to all the animals? In any case, the sounds thrashed around my head and something would flutter around my face, laughing at my confusion and surprise. I battered the air around me to hit the creature teasing my sense of vision, but I would only be smacking the air.

Eventually this atmosphere drove me insane. I began to walk faster and faster, hoping to get home soon. Behind me the scuttling of claws gripping the earth came closer and closer, and I soon could feel the moisture of its breath falling on my back.

The path wound close to my home, but it would turn further into the forest before it would reach my home again. I



couldn't stand this anymore! I felt so exposed and open, I needed to get home. I needed shelter, I wanted my warm, safe bed. Frustrated and terrified, I stepped off the path to dash home. It was only 3 meters away, I could make it!

At once I could feel the whole forest shake with laughter. "At last!" the nature seemed to cry. And that is when I saw him. Or rather, it. The creature had no features I could depict, for it looked simply like a shadow. I instantly stopped in my tracks. The shadow mirrored me.

It could smell my racing heart, and it was shivering with giddiness. I could feel the thrum of its excitement when it saw my realization that I was not safe anymore. The path was what protected this town and what guided all of its citizens away from the danger. And like a fool, I did what I was conditioned not to do. All because I was terrified and impatient.

The form giggled, but it did not move. It was toying with me. It had not been fed in years and I was the first form of nourishment that it would have had for a long time. After it calmed down, it stared at me. Boring its heated intentions right into my eyes. I was vulnerable, and we both knew it. It did not speak, it did not make a sound, and it did not breathe. We were at an impasse, neither one of us would move.

My heart was racing. Was there any way for me to escape? The answer was a weak maybe. I was far away from safety and the path flinched away the second the creature appeared. If the creature was slow, I could have a shot at surviving, but I had strong doubts that would be the case. Eventually, my burning muscles and adrenaline made the choice for me.

I shifted to take a step, and the white flash of teeth smiled with horrifying glee.

I stumbled around for a little while. It had been a long time since I had a nice meal and something to drink. My swollen tongue reminded me of when I still had all of it. Now, it was only half of what it used to be and more painful. My sight was not what it used to be since the incident. I tripped into a bar to get myself something to drink.

“Uhn aughter,” I gestured to the bartender. He must’ve not heard me because he kept talking to the other customers. I scooted closer, trying to get his attention, but the closer I approached, the further he got.

I realized it was futile, he must be busy. I’ll just leave him alone. I went around the bar trying to find some scraps of food and drinks. Satisfied with leftover crumbs and ale, I left the bar. “Diis tahwn ees caauzed,” I mumbled to myself over and over. “Diis tahwn ees caauzed!”

# SIMPLICITY

POETRY BY BRIDGET BUTLER

---

---

There is tranquility in the curiosity of a busy bee  
Flying from flower to flower, wondering-  
Is there any nectar here for me?

# COFFEE WITH AN IMMORTAL

FICTION BY M.K. PHILLIPS

---

---

In a way, she was writing her life away. Her goal was, in essence, to end her own existence in the hopes of ensuring it would last forever. She pondered on this dichotomy while she stared out the window of her apartment, the trickling water on the other side distorting the ever-shifting view of the city sprawling out before her. One hand ran over the cool metal of the chip-port laid into her neck, where the top of the spine meets the base of the skull. It was the portal through which she and—with any luck—countless others would try to rip their very selves out to be preserved forever. In the other hand, she cradled a warm, black mug of freshly-synthesized coffee. It was the best errata money could buy, with the sort of dark aroma that warmed the entire body to its core. Half her mind wrapped itself in the scent, while the other half started wondering how well it would translate. Could olfactory sensors replace the flesh and blood of her brain and nose? Would the immortal woman she became still have the same deep, nearly spiritual connection to the scent? She wrangled the two halves of herself and spun around to look at her workstation.

The best company-funded hardware running the newest company-funded software, housed in a comfortable company-funded apartment. High in the skyline of the nicest city, in which the company had a foothold, all built to facilitate her quest towards perfection. She set down her mug after a quick sip, which she didn't fully appreciate in the moment, and sat down in front of the monitors. On the screens were her thoughts, memories, movements, every bit of data that her mind had given out over the previous twenty minutes. It was rendered in the form of raw code and a map of her neurons firing in a festive display of quiet existence. She could only

stare. Logically, all of her being was represented here. It could be compiled and run to form a perfect simulation of her, given enough time. Yet, she reasoned, why did she still feel like she was simply herself? If she existed within this code, why was her being still trapped in the body she was born into? She took another sip of coffee, this time reveling in the hot sensation on her tongue; the bitter, earthy taste; the smooth texture. She shut her eyes, and she saw space.

Not space as most would know it—a field of empty blackness dotted with stars and nebulae—but space as she had come to know it. A mesh of data forming everything around her. Streams of information crisscrossed her vision, words appearing like waveforms and sights rendered from raw code to file to image. She could smell coffee, and the image of her mug appeared before her. Every little subconscious thought she had about coffee came to the front of her mind. Half-hearted dates over a cup in a smarmy-feeling café, late nights watching the cars dart by one another on the raised highways below her, early mornings scrambling to make breakthroughs hours before their deadlines.

She opened her eyes with a start. Her coffee no longer had its plume of steam rising up from the rim, and her hands shook on the now-cool porcelain. She wasn't certain how it got there, but she felt the cool metal of a neural connector in her left hand. She brushed her thumb over the pins inside and took a long, shuddering breath. She needed to go back, to see the universe through her world of data. At the same time, she dreaded the perspective she would lose in another transition from the physical world into one where everything was laid out before her. She wasn't certain if she could mentally stand much more of this addiction she'd given herself through her research. She squeezed the connector and ran her finger over the rim of her mug. She contemplated what she truly felt when she was human, what world could even be called that of her human self. She reached a trembling hand up to insert the connector into her chip-port. It snapped into her spinal column, and the streams of data crossed over her vision as her consciousness

became whole with its copy once more. Above the din of information, she could smell coffee.

# VESSEL 3

ARTWORK BY JAMES MICHUDA

---

---



Ceramic  
26 x 16 x 16 in.

---

---

*Horizons*

54

# CHARLIE IN DISGUISE, DECIDES TO MAKE HIS ESCAPE

ARTWORK BY DIANE GIL

---

---



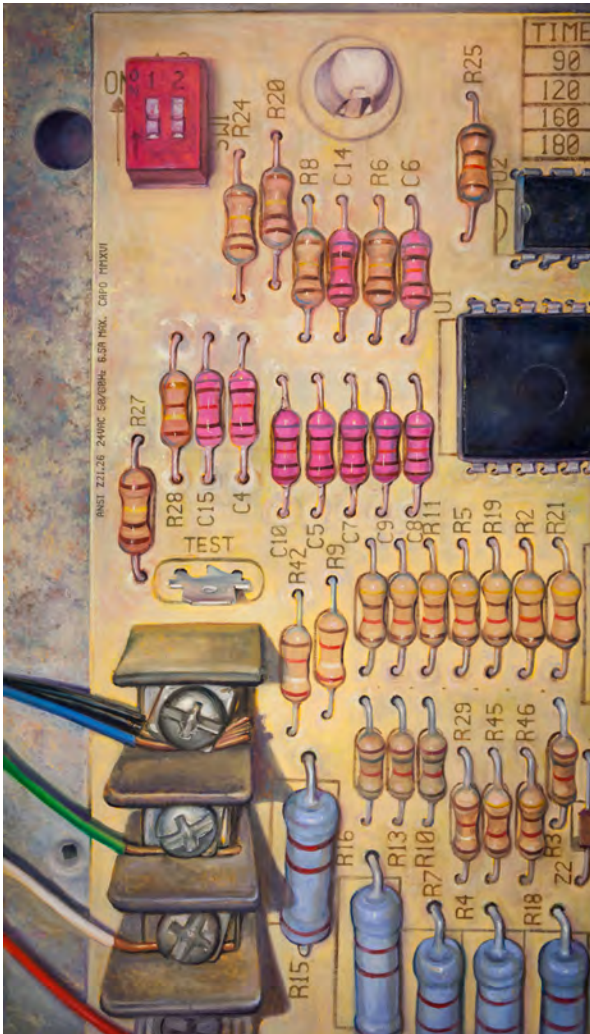
Red laterite clay fired in Anagama cone 12  
6 ½ x 8 ½ x 4 in.



# SHORT CIRCUIT

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO

---



Oil on Panel  
42 x 24 in.

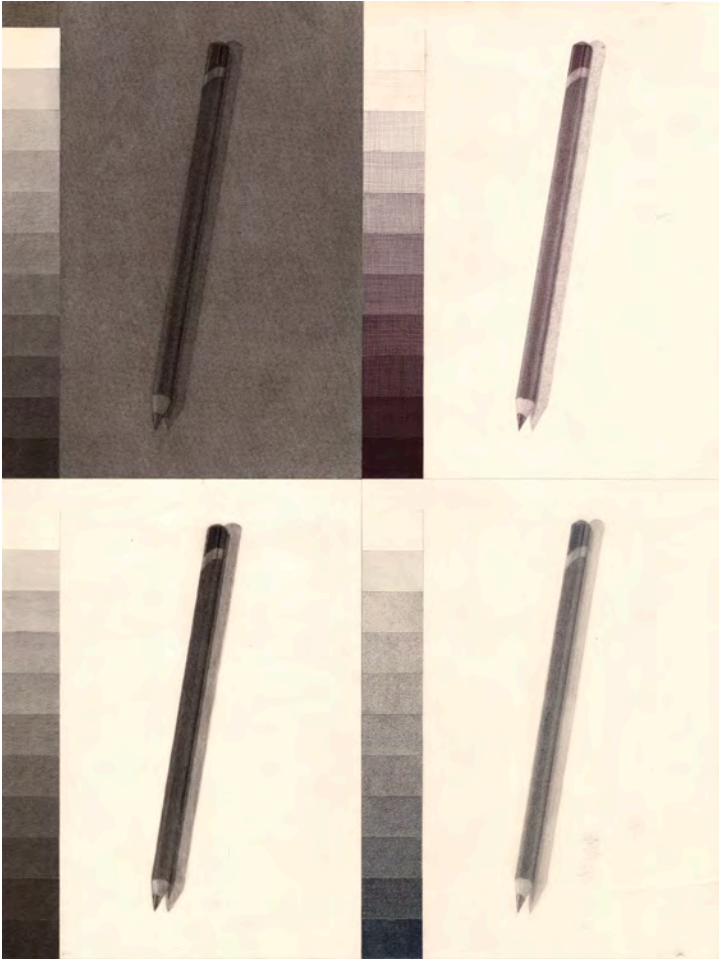
---

# LÁPIZ

ARTWORK BY JESSENIA RODRIGUEZ

---

---



Charcoal, Pencil, Pen  
24 x 18 in.

# RACECAR SPEED

POETRY BY COLIN MINOGUE

---

---

FIVE



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] she looked out [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] it was dark and blurred. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] twisted her body. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] so enormous rattled the windowpanes  
[REDACTED] pounding  
[REDACTED] in and out [REDACTED] in  
[REDACTED] through her mouth. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] racetrack speed. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] gentle woman  
[REDACTED] body both soft  
and limber [REDACTED]

# 33 STEPS

FICTION BY STEPHANIE BURNETT

---

---

The sky was full of dark grey clouds that were half full of rain, and a sun that was hiding behind the fat clouds for the most part. The air itself was crisp. One could feel the bite of the cold on their skin. For Melody, this was perfect weather for a day like today. This was a day that wasn't meant for bright skies and warm breezes.

Melody paused at the tiny, broken metal gate that marked the entrance. Her hand moved across the tiny flowers that were almost worn away. Someone really should replace the gate, but then again, if it was all shiny and new it would look out of place here. The old gate showed its age when she lifted the latch and slowly pushed it open. Its hinges protested against the movement and it let out a groan.

The grass had grown up over the worn cobblestones that once was the well-beaten path. She could see some of them, peeking out against the lush green grass with their outer coats of greys and reds. They also were showing their age, fading against the noonday sun. Melody tried not to pay too much heed to them as she kept on moving. She had stopped once before to look at them when she had tripped over an uneven one. That little adventure had ruined a good pair of her leggings, wounded her pride, and allowed the various birds and other wildlife a show of language never heard there before.

Melody idly reached out and touched a tree before passing, pausing for a moment. The tree was a good tree. A solid tree. One that had been there for so many years now. It had been a tiny sapling when she had first come here, and now it was tall, stretching towards the heavens itself. The tree was special to her: she always gave up her worries to it before venturing onward. She didn't want the worries of her day to ruin what was to come. She was here for a reason, and it had nothing to do with her everyday worries and frustrations.

It was thirty-three feet from the tree to her destination, past more trees, some old, some new, a worn bench surrounded by flowers and a duck pond. It had shocked Melody at first why there would be a duck pond here. It really wasn't used by those who were here. It wasn't until her second or maybe her third time here when she came across an older man feeding the ducks that she learned the truth. They were here for those who came to visit. Coming here was hard enough. Sometimes it was easier to feed the birds and enjoy the day than worry about the past and the pain.

Her worn boots crunched onto something, causing Melody to pause. She moved her foot aside to see that she had stepped on a toy truck. It too was showing its age. Gone was its bright coloring. She squatted down and picked it up. Its wheels didn't turn when she ran her thumb over them. They were stuck even though they wanted to go. "You too buddy?" she asked it, before turning to see where it belonged. She soon found its home, a small bench not far from there littered with more trucks and some cars. She moved over to the bench and set the truck among his friends. She then looked past the bench to the tiny stone behind it. She kissed her fingers and placed them on the stone. "Hey Billy."

She stood there for a few moments, staying with Billy for a moment. Keeping his cars and trucks company. She straightened out the tiny convoy, dusted them off, and setting them all upright. She then nodded to them, before moving onward. They would keep watching over Billy even if they became rusted and colorless.

Twelve more steps from Billy she came to her final destination. It was a stone: not much bigger than Billy's, but a stone all the same. It served the same purpose: to inform others of who was there and how long they had been here on Earth. Melody took a long breath, taking in as much of the cold air as she could before letting it out, slowly allowing the puff of her breath to brush up against the stone. She reached out and touched the top of it, before starting to clear away the debris from flowers left before. They looked to be daisies and lilies. That got a small smile

to cross Melody's face as she kept on working. That meant that her Grandparents had come by before.

Once she was done, Melody sank down on the wet grass next to the stone. She pulled up a knee to her chest and hugged it. She blinked back the tears that were forming, trying her best to be strong. She had been strong. With her free hand, she traced the letters on the stone. N-E-V-A-H. It had taken them ages to pick out the perfect name. Countless fighting back and forth until the day she was born, and even then, the name they had gone in with wasn't the name that she ended up coming home with.

"Hey there baby girl," Melody whispered to the stone. She then sniffled, her throat growing tight. She was on the verge of tears. She cleared her throat and shook her head. She had to be strong. Today wasn't just any other day. Today was... Melody looked up at the sky and let her tears fall. "Happy Birthday, baby girl."

The birds watched on as Melody cried for her daughter. Their song stopped as her sobs filled the air. She curled her arms around her knees and let everything go. All the pain, all the hurt, of this moment. Her tree had all of today's troubles. What she had now was of her yesteryears. Of the night when her perfect world was destroyed. The night when the man thought it was funny to shoot at the playground. He had gone home before he knew that he had killed someone. A little girl playing with her older brother. A little girl whose cute pink dress would forever be stained in her mother's mind's eye as crimson red. Gone was the happy face of a child, with eyes that some could consider being like those of a doe's and curly blonde hair, to a white, ashen face with soulless eyes.

Every year, for the past ten years, Melody has made this trip alone. Things didn't work out for her and Nevah's father. They had gone their own ways a few years after her parting. He had gone off with the old saying that this was destined to happen. A loss of a child would either force people together or tear them apart. Well, he's with his second wife now, and Melody is happy with her son and his family. Melody wiped her nose

on her sleeve before digging into her coat pockets. She carefully pulled out the tiny princess toy that had been given to her for today.

Melody placed the toy below her daughter's name. "Your niece Sophia sends her love." She gave the princess a twirl. "Jacob is doing so well now. They got a new baby on the way. They're thinking it's a girl." She then smiled. A few weeks past, both Jacob and his wife had come to her with a special request. They had wanted to ask her for her permission to allow them to use Nevah's name as their new child's middle name. It had brought up so many mixed emotions for Melody, but she knew it would be okay. Jacob had loved his little sister so much and had been shattered that day along with her. She had ended up allowing it, and that was when Sophia had asked if she could take her Auntie this little toy.

Melody spent the next part of two hours talking about what was happening in their lives. She touched the stone before getting to her feet. She brushed the dirt off her pants, even though she knew that they would be stained. She didn't care about her clothes. She wasn't here to impress anyone. She had come to visit someone very special.

Touching the top of the stone again, she looked up at the sky. "I'll come visit you soon, Baby Girl," she whispered to the skies. "I may even bring Jacob and Sophia." She patted the stone one more time before heading towards the entrance to the cemetery. She paused a moment to touch Billy's stone as well. "Bye Billy."

Melody walked those thirty-three steps back to her worry tree. She reached out and touched the tree, taking back her worries of the day. She then thanked the tree before moving onward. She wiped back a few tears that creeped out, before reaching the gate. When her hand touched the worn metal, she turned around to shoot one last glance back at her special stone among the multiple stones in the cemetery. Some old, some new. Some tall, some short. "Peace be with you all."

She moved through that worn, creaky gate, taking an extra second or two to make sure it latched. Keeping the barrier

intact between the living world that was full of chaos and worries to the one on the other side, where there was just peace.



# ENLIGHTENMENT

POETRY BY DOMINIC CASTELVECCHI

---

Glorious was the day of which I chose,  
To no longer be a man of a detrimental pose  
And to take what the world had to offer,  
And fill myself much more with laughter.

“It is so easy to be immature!” said a great man,  
And even easier to hold out a shaking hand,  
Begging for mercy or a special favor,  
Living life with a most disgusting flavor.

Some people who do this seem to be friends of mine,  
And even if not so, I run into them all the time.  
They float through life like a dead fish in the river,  
The very sight of them can make me quiver!

After seeing enough of this foolish behavior,  
I looked diligently, and found my savior.  
He was tucked away, as if on a lonely shelf  
This great man who changed the tide, was in fact,  
Myself.

# INTO THE TIDES

FICTION BY ISAAC RUSSO

---

---

Diggory sat crouched behind the armchair in the corner of the room, his arms wrapped around his legs like the bow of a present; his parents were arguing again. Their words struck each other like punches as they fought in the kitchen, the tile floors and stained walls becoming their arena for the evening. Diggory could do nothing but listen as his mother yelled about money and his father threatened to walk out the door, it was nothing the boy hadn't heard before. It was almost dark and he was supposed to be in bed; his mother had sent him there when the fight started, but he had never been very good about doing what he was told. Instead he sat there staring at a place on the wall where the wallpaper had peeled away, exposing the bones of the house underneath, and listened to the thunderous roars of his parents. Just then his mother began to cry.

Diggory wasn't sure if it was concern or curiosity that was inching up his spine, all he knew is that he had to find out what had happened, and he would have to venture out of the safety of the chair's shadow to do it. He decided he would simply peak over the top of the armchair, surely he wouldn't be seen, and so he began towards its summit. Diggory moved slowly and deliberately, he knew any misstep could lead to his discovery, and his father would not be happy that he was out of bed, but then the chair creaked.

It was the long creak of tired old wood that rang through the house, and then everything fell silent. Diggory froze; he could have been mistaken for a statue had he not begun trembling. He strained to hear any noise in the house that seemed to be frozen with him, but he found the only sounds to be the beating of his racing heart and his own breath, which suddenly seemed too loud. After a moment passed and no muscular hand came to carry him away Diggory thought he might have been lucky, maybe no one heard the creak, so he decided

to finish his climb.

When his eyes finally rose above the headrest of the armchair Diggory immediately wished he had just stayed in bed. The first thing his eyes set upon was his mother, standing in the doorway to the kitchen, her eyes gleaming with tears. It was the next thing he saw that made him long for the touch of his pillow, where he could fall into the grand escape of sleep. His father lumbered over the boy like a tree in the forest; he didn't say a word, he didn't have to, Diggory knew exactly what he was thinking.

Before he even realized what was happening, Diggory was being swept up the stairs in the thick, unbreakable chains that were his father's arms; the entire time his mother stood by the doorway to the kitchen, staring blankly through tear-soaked eyes. Diggory didn't call out for help, he knew there was no use, he didn't even let out a cry when he hit the hard floor of his bedroom. He couldn't, not after his father tossed him in there like the trash he saw him to be, he couldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing his body ached all over. The door slammed before Diggory had even dragged himself off the floor, and just like that another day ended in the nightmare that was his life.

The room was small and dark, the only light came from a single window on the wall opposite the door. Diggory had spent countless hours staring at the distant ocean through his personal spy glass; he liked to imagine a great ship rising through the sea mist to carry him away to strange new lands and exciting adventures. He crawled into the small bed in the corner of the room. To call it a bed would be generous, as it was nothing more than a mat laying on the ground with a blanket that felt like sandpaper and a pillow that looked to be stuffed with hay. He laid there for a time, watching as the sunlight retreated through the window and the shadows descended from the dark corners of the room. As everything grew darker, the boy's eyes got heavier, and soon he drifted off into the oblivion of sleep.

The birth of a new day was on the horizon, and the sunlight was beginning to flood into the room like the slow trickle of a stream. As he sat up in bed, Diggory opened his sleepy green

eyes, allowing them to meet the sun for the first time in hours. His little feet landed on the unforgiving cold of the wooden floors for only an instant before he dashed out of bed for the nearest patch of sun-bathed warmth. After a moment, he dressed himself in fresh clothes, complete with a soft cotton shirt that fell loosely over his torso and shorts that were constantly pulled down by the bully that was gravity. “Diggory, your favorite!” called the warm, kind voice of the boy’s mother from another room. Just then a scent intruded upon his senses, it was one Diggory knew well, and his mouth began to pool with saliva as he stormed out of the quaint bedroom, bound for the kitchen.

Upon entering the dining area, his eyes confirmed what his nose already knew. On the counter, in all their immaculate glory, sat a stack of golden brown pancakes topped with a mound of melting butter and a generous amount of maple syrup, which cascaded down the sides like an avalanche down a mountainside. Diggory couldn’t help but notice that his mother was nowhere to be seen, she always made pancakes after a rough night, let alone the fact that there was no evidence of the treats being cooked. It was as if they had fallen through space and time and landed in his kitchen at that very moment. Nonetheless, he began shoveling the sticky hot cakes into his impatient stomach. All at once, his mouth was assaulted with a myriad of flavors, the sugary taste of the syrup mixing with the creamy butter and the sweet accents of the dough itself to create the most divine of sensory experiences. Before he knew it, the once bountiful pile of pancakes had been reduced to crumbs, leaving his stomach feeling as if it was moments away from bursting forth into the room. With his hunger now more than satisfied, it was time to satiate his curiosity as well, and so Diggory left his humble abode and began to walk along the beach, his obsidian curls fluttering in the ocean breeze like the wings of a soaring raven.

The sun now hung high in the sky, the heat beaming down on Diggory as if the gods were holding out a magnifying glass and burning him like an ant. Flushed and sweaty, he had started to contemplate turning back when something suddenly

began to take shape through the sunny haze of the distant sand. As he inched closer to it with each step, Diggory fantasized about what could lay in store; perhaps it was a great wooden chest full of heavy shining doubloons, or better yet an opening to a hidden cave, where infinite exploration and adventures await.

Finally, Diggory reached the object of his long quest, and he was not disappointed with what he discovered. Buried there in the soft white sand of the beach was a small wooden rowboat, swallowed by the forces of the wind and sea. The boy took a few minutes to free his new vessel from the sandy clutches of the beach, but before long he was paddling his way out into open water. On the floor of the boat was a rudimentary fishing pole, comprised of a hook and line tied to the end of a long wooden branch, and so after rowing for a time, he stopped and decided to try his luck.

Diggory was skeptical of his ability to catch a fish, as he had no bait to entice them, but he dropped the hook into the murky water regardless. He focused on the line of the fishing pole for hours, watching as it swayed in the breeze, and then it happened. A sudden tug from somewhere beneath the watery veil nearly pulled the rod from his young hands, and with great difficulty, he began to heave his prize up from the depths of the great dark expanse of ocean. The battle was long, and more than once Diggory found himself on the verge of heat stroke, the mist of the sea sticking to him like the hot breath of the Earth, but eventually he emerged victorious.

After his clash with the herculean forces of the deep, Diggory was rewarded with a most appropriate catch. The beast that sat across from him in the suddenly crowded raft was a hideous creature of undoubtedly horrible origins. With dark, oily skin and a large gaping mouth full of teeth that resembled needles, the sight of it sent a chill down Diggory's spine. Nonetheless, the glassy, unblinking eyes of the creature served as constant company for a boy that found himself all alone in the middle of the ocean.

Exhausted and eager to begin the long journey back to

land, Diggory began scanning the horizon. Unfortunately, he soon discovered that the small strip of coastline he called home had disappeared into oblivion, leaving nothing but shimmering blue water staring back at him like the eye of a fish. With virtually no knowledge of marine navigation and little sense of direction, poor Diggory was lost at sea. The boat that had been his sanctuary had now become a prison, and may soon be his grave.

As the anxiety began to build, Diggory could feel the blood rushing through his body, his hands seeming to pulse with the drumbeat of his heart. He quickly decided on a direction and began to furiously row the boat homeward, occasionally assuring himself he knew exactly where he was going. This continued for a while, but the prepubescent arms of a child lacked the strength and endurance needed for such prolonged strenuous activity, and so he stopped, leaving himself to the mercy of the waves.

As the sun began to fall through the western atmosphere, a cold, harsh wind swept through the boat. The sky was darkening at alarming speeds, as if a light bulb in the sun had suddenly burned out, and a legion of menacing clouds had begun marching in from the east. A clash of heavenly forces was about to unfold and Diggory was trapped in the middle; all he could do was look on in awe at the unparalleled powers of nature. As the storm finally snuffed out any remaining sunlight trying to burst through its ranks, a great wave started to swell in the distance, and it wasn't long before Diggory realized his tragic fate.

Diggory, the boy they never found, that is what they would call him. For no one knew of his spontaneous expedition on the waves, and once the sea swallowed his fragile body, it was unlikely that it would even be seen again. He watched with horrible wonder as the colossal wave came hurdling towards his little boat, and as it grew, it blocked everything from his view, so that all he saw in his final moments was the formless void of the sea.

As the crest of the wave came crashing down, Diggory shut his eyes in acceptance of his fate. He was surprised, then,

when he found that no surge of water came to sweep him away from the land of the living and leave him forever alone at the bottom of the ocean, and when he opened his eyes, he found the greatest surprise of all.

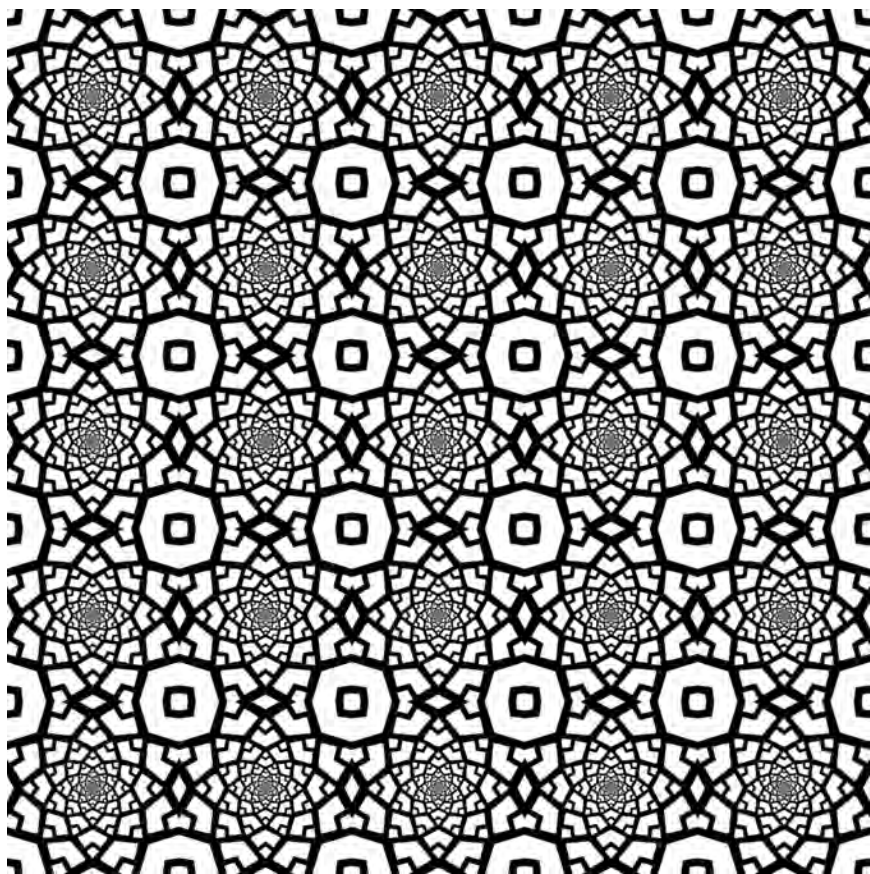
There he was, laying in the discomfort of his own bed, the sunlight just beginning to knock at the window. Diggory shut his eyes and laid there for a while, desperately trying to cling to a dream that had faded like vapor through his hands. He longed for release, for the freedom of the waves, whatever the cost. Oddly, he found that his clothes were soaked in salty water, but it was not the result of a voyage on the seas, but rather that of a journey into the whirling tides of his mind.

# PYRAMIDS PATTERN

ARTWORK BY JACKSON HAZLETT

---

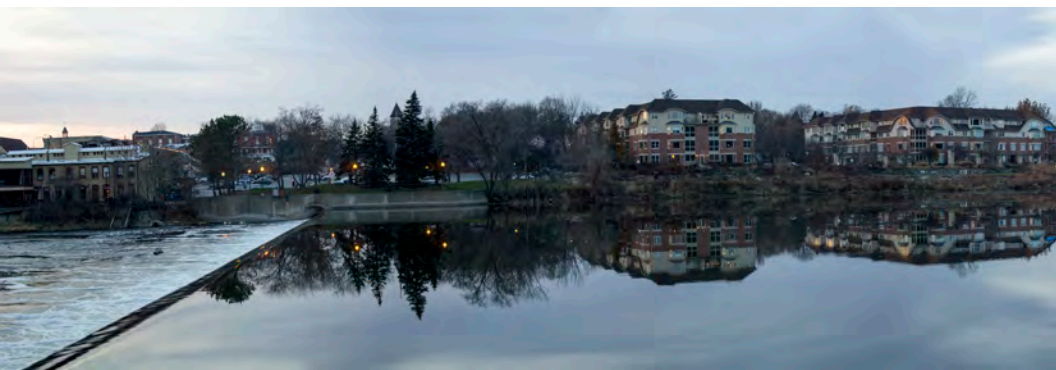
---



Digital Illustration

8 x 8 in.





# *THE FOX*

ARTWORK BY NATHAN KLINGER

---

---



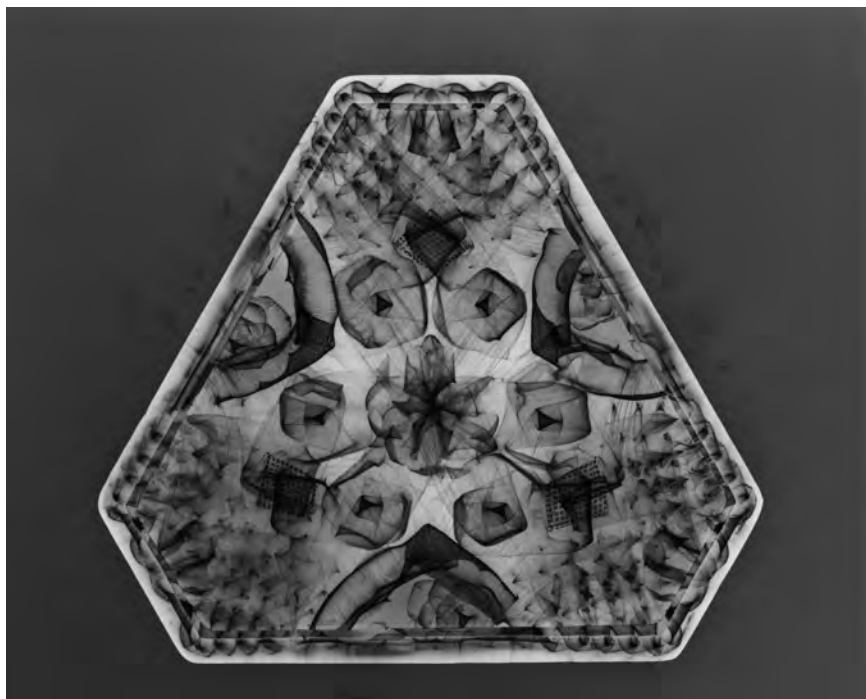
Archival Inkjet Print  
Diptych: 8 ¼ x 16 in. each

# CRYSTAL LID

ARTWORK BY MICHAEL WILLE

---

---



Photogram, Silver Gelatin Print  
8 x 10 in.

# TWO TREES

ARTWORK BY NATHAN KLINGER

---

---



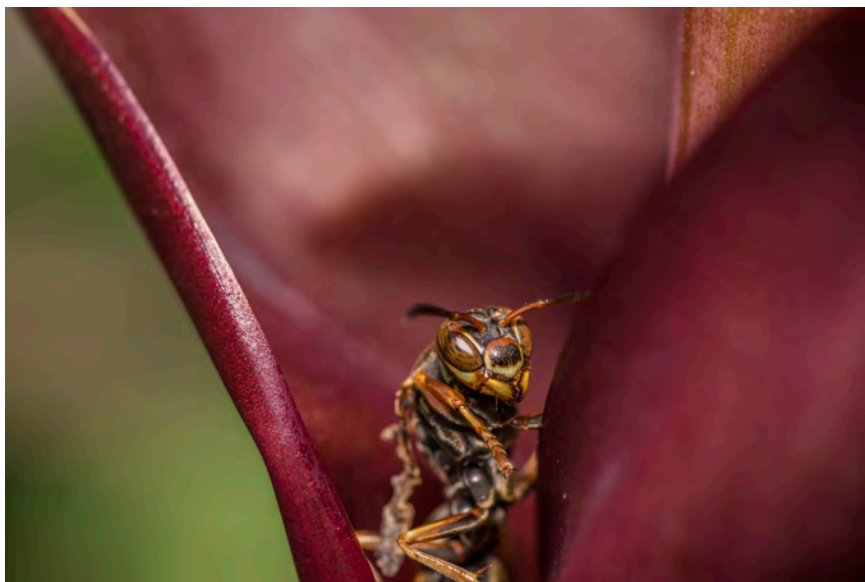
Archival Inkjet Print  
8 ½ x 11 in.

# BROKEN WINGS ON DYING WASP

ARTWORK BY MICHAEL WILLE

---

---



Archival Inkjet Print  
13 ½ x 20 in.

# NIGHTMARE

FICTION BY AMANDA ZEDWICK

---

---

It's just your everyday mission. Our job is to get in, take out the drug lord, and get out again. Maybe, if we're lucky, we can even round up his cronies. That's the plan, anyway. But plans can easily go wrong. I should know- I've seen it first-hand. The first squad I joined was wiped out in seconds, leaving me as the lone survivor. I look at these missions differently now. They're dangerous, and I approach them as such. Maybe, if I'm careful enough, I won't lose anyone else. At least, that's what I'm hoping for.

"Lyssa, you in position?" Aurora asks. She's our leader. She makes the strategies, keeps Gage and Rika in check, and runs right into danger right alongside the rest of us.

I reach up and turn my side of the comlink back on so she can hear me. "I'm ready."

"Great. Gavin, Kaylee, what's your status?"

Kaylee's voice comes over the comlink, laced with static. "We're in their system. The cameras are ours now," she says. She and Gavin are our tech support. Kaylee can hack into anything, and Gavin has a thing for games. Both of them are great with most technology and actually made our com system.

"I'm ready too, in case anyone's wondering," Gage adds. He's Kaylee's twin brother, and probably our best combatant (although I'd never actually tell him that). His job is basically to take out any enemies.

Someone blows into the microphone, probably Aurora's exasperated sigh. "Let's move, then. See if you can locate the leader, Kaylee. Gavin, make sure no one leaves."

"Got it."

I inch closer to the side of the building and run my hand over the glass. Except it wasn't glass, it was a camouflaged force field. It doesn't come as a surprise, really, but I'd never actually seen one up close. The design is practically perfect.

Except that while they're a lot harder to smash through, Kaylee can hack them in just a few minutes.

"They have CFF windows, Kaylee. Can you get rid of them?" I ask.

"On it."

"This drug lord is rich," Rika comments, stressing the "r" in rich. She's our resident thief, and good at it. Too good. She'll walk through a crowd and come out with a fortune if we don't stop her. Which means that she's probably about to steal something.

"Rika, whatever you're planning to take, put it back," Aurora snaps. "We aren't here for that."

"Aw, but he just left 'em hangin' 'ere."

I spot Rika through the CFF, standing on top of a bookshelf. She's fingering a fancy looking chandelier, a wide grin on her face. The CFF disappears then, and I crawl through the window. "Honestly, Rika. It belongs there. Anyway, where are you gonna hide a chandelier?" I cross my arms.

"I could take a couple of the little crystals," she suggests. "No one would notice..."

"I found him!" Gavin shouts.

I glare at Rika, and she rolls her eyes. "Fine, I'm coming."

"You're too loud," Gage mutters. "Anyway, where's the target?"

"Top floor. Having dinner, apparently. There's a whole reception. Lots of guests."

"Great. I love crashing parties," Keith says, finally speaking.

"Glad you've decided to join us," I mutter. "Where did you go?"

"I'm the serving boy."

"When did you... actually, never mind. Just keep an eye on the target," Aurora instructs. "I'm halfway to your position. Lyssa, Rika, Gage, meet me by the elevator. Kaylee can direct you."

The elevator isn't far from our position, and it only takes us a few minutes to reach it. "Keith, how are things up there?" Aurora asks.

"No one knows that we're here yet, far as I can tell, but there are three guards by the elevator. They know someone is coming up," he replies.

I hit the button to the top floor and pull out my pistols. The doors slide open a minute later, and the three guards come at us. Gage slams his fist into the first guard's face, and I shoot the guy behind him. The gunshot sends the whole party into chaos, and everyone starts screaming.

Keith whacks the last guard in the head with his serving tray and the guy collapses on top of his other fallen comrades. Aurora jumps over the guards and runs into the room. Most of the people are running for the stairs or hiding under the table. Among the people fleeing is our target. He pushes through everyone else and runs down the stairs. "Keith, Lyssa, follow him!" Aurora yells. "We'll take care of the guards here."

"Alright."

More guards come running up the stairs, joining the fray. Keith joins me, several throwing knives in his hand. "We can't take these stairs," he yells, grabbing my hand.

He pulls me back to the elevator and presses the ground floor button.

"They're heading to the garage," Kaylee tells us. "Go left from where the elevator is and go through the first door you see. You should be able to cut them off."

"Got it," Keith says.

He's grinning- I can see how much he enjoys this. He loves the thrill of the chase and getting the chance to test his limits. There's a quiet ding, and the elevator doors open. A dozen guards stand in front of us, holding guns out. Keith's grin fades. "Kaylee, why didn't you warn us?" he demands.

There's no answer. Deep down, I have a bad feeling. Somewhere along the way, something went horribly wrong. Kaylee can't fight, and Gavin is mediocre at best. I shouldn't have



left them. What if they were found? They should have been safe, but that was never a guarantee. If they were found, it wouldn't take much manpower to get rid of them. "Kaylee, Gavin, are you okay?" I ask.

"Drop your weapons and step out of the elevator," one of the guards commands.

There's still silence on the comlink. Someone should have answered by now. The only reason they wouldn't is if they weren't able to. It's happening again. I've been through this before. This same scenario. The more I think about it, the more familiar the mansion seems, and the more familiar the face of the drug lord becomes.

We obey, and I reluctantly set my pistols on the elevator floor. Without them, I feel defenseless, like a small, insignificant person. Keith drops his knives, but he's still ready to fight. He hides it well, but I've known him long enough to recognize the spark in his eyes.

"What are you going to do?" he asks. "It's not like we're alone."

"We have your comrades. Now come." The guard that first addressed us gestures with his gun, pointing in the general direction Kaylee told us to head in.

Since we don't have much of a choice, we follow them. They surround us, and lead us through several corridors, until we reach a dark red door. The guy leading the guards opens the door and we're pushed inside. The door slams shut behind us and the lock clicks, leaving us alone in the dark.

"They're alive, Lyssa," Keith whispers.

"I didn't say they weren't."

"You were thinking it." His hand slips into mine, and he squeezes. "We'll get out. Now come on. Let's get out of here."

I tap my comlink, hoping it'll help, but everyone is still maintaining radio silence. *Come on guys, say something. Please say something.* I want to be calm, but I can't, because this is almost exactly what happened last time. If we don't get out soon, the others will die. That is, if they haven't already.

Even six floors down, I can still hear the sound of gunshots. It's a small bit of hope, at least. After all, why keep shooting if the enemy is dead? "Alright, how do we get out?"

There's a click, and suddenly the room is lit up. It's small and empty, with white walls and one light bulb hanging from the ceiling. "I've got this." Keith holds up a multi-tool. "And the doorknob is old. We can just take it out and leave."

Despite our situation, I can't help smiling just a little. Somehow, Keith manages to be prepared for anything. He was lucky we didn't get checked for weapons, though, or we might have lost our way out. "Sounds good." I snatch the multi-tool and open the screwdriver. "I'll do it."

It takes me several minutes to get the door open. Just as I finally get it, there's static on the comlink and Kaylee finally speaks. "Guys, they found all of us. They're coming back for you." Her voice is a hushed whisper, so she probably isn't alone, but she's alive. I breathe a sigh of relief.

"Where are you?" Keith asks.

"The basement." It's Aurora this time, still whispering. "Get out of here. Find reinforcements or something, but don't you dare come for us. It's a trap. They want you, Lyssa."

Keith huffs. "We're not leaving you."

"I'm telling you to go. There are at least thirty guards down here," Aurora hisses.

"Then the odds are in our favor," I say. "We're coming to get you." Then I turn off the comlink and open the door.

Five guards are walking down the hallway toward us. I charge at them, dropping to the ground just as they fire their guns. My fist hits the first guard in the jaw, and then I'm armed. Keith is right behind me, and I move back as he engages the rest of the guards. "Get down!" I yell.

He drops to the ground, and I open fire. None of my shots miss their mark. It'd be hard to, from just a yard away. Keith pushes up from the ground and surveys the area. All of the guards are dead, bullet wounds in various places on their bodies. "Nice shooting," he comments.

“Thanks.” I pick up a second gun and a flashlight and toss them to him. “Let’s go.”

\*\*\*

The basement hasn’t been renovated, so the floor and walls are all made out of concrete. Poles are positioned in several places, and tied to them are the rest of our team. They don’t move or make a sound as we approach. Something’s dripping. The sound is soft but constant. It sticks in the back of my mind, and I get the feeling it should mean something.

Keith shines the flashlight around, probably looking for the guards. There doesn’t seem to be any sign of them. “Guys,” I whisper. “Are you okay?”

None of them answer. Someone is missing though. I only count four of them. Where’s Aurora?

“Lyssa,” Keith whispers.

I turn and find the source of the dripping. It’s Aurora. She’s hanging on the wall, a long slit across her throat. Her brown hair is stuck to her skin, and blood drips steadily down her arm and into a little bucket on the floor. Her clothes are ripped, and there’s another cut in her stomach, letting out more blood.

It takes a minute for the image to fully sink in. I swallow. “They killed her.”

Then what about the others? I run over and check each of them. “They’re okay.” It’s a bit of a relief, but not enough. Aurora should be here too. Alive. Ready to give orders. Ready to lead.

“Funny, isn’t it. You came to kill our leader, and instead we killed yours.”

The voice comes from behind me. I lash out, but the guard catches my hand and pulls me into him, pressing a gun to my head. Keith doesn’t move. He’s glued to the spot, still staring at Aurora’s body.

“Keith!” I yell.

He turns, and my flashlight illuminates his face. There’s so much anger there. His eyes are blazing with it. There’s so

much more hate there than I've ever seen, and it almost scares me more than the guard does.

"You didn't have to kill her." He takes a step forward and lifts his gun, pointing it at the guard.

"I'll kill her," the guard threatens. It isn't a threat made out of fear either. He says it calmly, like he knows he's the one in control of the situation. "And if I don't take you out, someone else will. There are dozens of us."

"Why did you kill Aurora?" Keith demands.

"She asked to go first. The boss decided to let her."

If I wasn't angry before, I am now. I'm practically shaking with rage. "If you're doing this to get me, then you don't need to kill them. Why kill them?"

The drug lord steps out of the shadows, a sinister smile showing his perfect white teeth. I want to kill him. I've had moments when I wanted to hurt someone, but this is the first time I've ever wanted to kill someone. "So you don't forget, of course."

"Forget what?" Keith asks, pointing the gun at the drug lord.

"That she's ours."

"I'm no one's," I growl. "I wasn't yours then, and I'm not yours now."

"I spared your life, all those years ago, and instead of being thankful, you come back to kill me. You've forfeited your life, and the lives of your teammates," the drug lord says. He comes closer and leans down to whisper in my ear. "But you won't die today. Oh no. Seeing you survive is so much sweeter."

Then he moves away and gestures to Keith. "Kill him first."

The rest of the guards emerge from their hiding places then, and I'm dragged out of the way as they fire. Keith is cut down in seconds, but not without taking down several of the guards with him. The guards turn their guns on the rest of my squad. "No!" I'm screaming, but the guns drown me out.

I fight, not to live, but to die with them, because I can't go back alone. Not again. In the end, it doesn't matter. No

matter how much I scream and struggle, the guard holding me doesn't lose his grip and doesn't shoot. They'll force me to survive, because they know that's what will hurt me the most.

When they finish shooting, the guard holding me finally lets go. My legs give out beneath me, and I collapse, my eyes glued to the bodies of my friends. They were dead. They hadn't even gotten the chance to fight back. I should be crying, but the tears don't come. *I couldn't protect them. I wasn't good enough.*

The anger comes then, sweeping through me like fire. I jump to my feet, and sweep my leg out, knocking the guard who had been holding me over and stealing his pistol. Then I fire it until there aren't any bullets left. The guards don't shoot back. They just stand there and let me kill them. Even the drug lord doesn't seem to care when I send a bullet through his heart. He's still smiling when he dies.

When I run out of bullets in the pistol, I grab Keith's gun and keep shooting until there's no one left to shoot. I realize there are tears streaming down my face.

"You didn't have to kill them!" I yell at the guards, but they can't answer. Not anymore.

Somewhere along the line, a light got turned on. It shines down on the bodies of my friends, giving me a perfect view. There are bullets in all of them now, even Aurora. Keith is on the ground, blood oozing from at least a dozen bullet holes. He still looks angry, even in death, but his warm brown eyes are dead. I'd fallen in love with those eyes and the personality behind them. But it's gone now. He's gone.

I don't want to see the others, but I can't help looking. Gage is the closest. His blond hair hides in his face, but I know his gray eyes are just as lifeless as Keith's. Kaylee and Gavin are next to each other, holding hands. I'd seen something between them recently. Something more than just friendship. They could have had a life together. Not anymore.

More tears roll down my face. It's my fault. There's no arguing that. I'd been told as much. The drug lord killed them because I came back for him. *But I didn't know. I didn't know it*

*was him. If I'd known, I never would have gone near this place. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.*

Rika is the last one. There's a little crystal in her hand. A piece of the chandelier. *You took it anyway, even after we told you not to.* It's funny, how she makes me want to laugh, even when she's dead.

"This is wrong. I should have died, not you. Not any of you."

Someone's hand touches my shoulder, and I whirl around, ready to kill them. Instead I find myself face-to-face with Clarissa, the leader of the first squad I joined. The leader of the squad that was killed.

"That's impossible," I whisper. "I saw you die. His cronies killed you. I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Lyssa, it isn't your fault. Stop blaming yourself for our deaths."

"Why? Why shouldn't I? Everyone else does. Everyone else will."

Clarissa points at the others. "They don't."

"Maybe they should have. Maybe if they didn't let me join them, they'd still be alive!" More tears blur my vision, and I look away. I don't want Clarissa to see me cry. It shouldn't bother me, but I can't let her think that I'm weak. I swallow back the tears and face her again. "I kill everyone I love."

"Wake up, Lyssa," Clarissa snaps. Her voice has changed. It doesn't sound like her anymore. It's distorted, like it's coming through a filter of sorts.

"What?"

"Wake up!"

\*\*\*

My eyes snap open and I grab Rika's hand. It's inches from my face. Kaylee is hovering on my left and Aurora stands behind Rika. I realize I'm holding Rika's hand. She's alive. And she looks annoyed, although I can see concern hidden in her gaze as well.

"You were yellin' in your sleep," she says. "It woke us up."

“Are you okay?” Kaylee asks, sitting on the bed next to me.

I sit up and rub my eyes. *Just a dream. I should have known. How else could Clarissa be there?* It had been horrifying when I experienced it, but it was over now, and everyone was fine. No one was dead.

“I’m fine. Sorry I woke you.” I throw off my blanket and climb out of bed. “You can go back to bed.”

None of them look completely convinced, but they know me well enough to realize that if I say I’m fine, I’m not going to tell them anything. “If you need to talk to someone, I’ll listen,” Kaylee tells me, before heading back to bed.

Her offer is tempting, but I don’t want to tell her that I watched her and the others die. It was just a dream anyway. It won’t happen. I’ll die before I let any of my teammates suffer.

I walk out on the balcony and breathe in the cool night air. “You saw us die, didn’t you?” Keith asks, startling me.

“How do you know?” I ask.

“Because it’s your worst fear. That it’ll happen again. That you’ll lose everyone you care about again.” His voice is soft and calming, and the best part is, I don’t have to tell him. He already knows. He’s figured it out on his own.

“We weren’t close, me and the other squad members. But you guys... You tore my walls down in a matter of days. I can’t lose you.”

“And you won’t. We’re the Outlaws. The best squad the Midnight Core has. Right?”

The corners of my mouth turn up in a slight smile. “Yeah.”

He wraps his arms around me and whispers in my ear. “Try not to worry so much, Lyssa. I’m staying right here, and so is everyone else.”

I turn and hug him back. “Good. Then I won’t leave either.”

“As if we’d let you,” he says. “It wouldn’t be nearly as fun without you.”

We stay there for a while, staring up at the night sky and talking about different things. It's probably one of the most peaceful moments I've had since joining the Midnight Corps.

I make a promise to myself then, that there will be more peaceful moments like this. Moments where I can spend time with the people I love. And if I have to fight for those moments of peace, I will. I'll fight with everything I have, because that's what I do. I fight, and I struggle, and I live. And I'll keep fighting and protecting my friends until the day I die.



# HONESTY

POETRY BY ZORAIZ ASIF

---

---

I ran off distorted, I was vanquished and frail  
I buried my shadows and I embraced a veil  
I was heartbroken by the deity by whom I was never denied  
I was absorbed by forests, concealed from light  
There, I bowed down to a reflection that got murky in rain  
Then floating in the wind, I whispered my aim  
Was lifted like magic then I offered some vows  
Honesty woke inside while the astray still drowse.

# FOREST FAMILY

## NON-FICTION BY ANGELICA SALGADO

---

---

The night before Electric Forest I could hardly sleep. I guess I would say it felt as if I was five years old again, waiting for Christmas morning to arrive. Through the blinds of my window, I could see the moon and the sun fighting each other as a new day was starting. At this point, I wondered to myself if I should even try to go back to sleep. Every year, I watched my friends pack up their things to attend this four-day weekend music festival only to return with the most amazing stories of what the Forest unfolded for them. It held a strong reputation beyond its music to be a place people could go to break social norms and build a new-found perception of the world around them. “Would this weekend be everything I was told it would be?” I thought to myself. The tickets had cost me almost a whole year of savings, and my calendar was marked with giant x’s on each day leading up to that weekend of the festival. There I lay, hours before we would leave, and it would finally be my turn to experience the Forest for the first time.

My best friend Nina arrived at my house at 8am sharp to pick me up. It would take us about five hours to get to Rothbury, Michigan where the iconic festival was held for the last ten years. Along the way, we scooped up four more of our friends. One by one, each jumped into the van we had rented for the weekend. We packed it with a number of belongings and camping gear we would need to build our home away from home. The ride up was nothing short of a prelude to the weekend. We snacked on our favorite junk food and jammed to every single artist we were excited to see perform live. I could feel myself getting more and more anxious with every hour that passed as we crossed state lines. Every single person in the vehicle considered themselves veterans of Electric Forest, each

of them having attended the festival numerous times. Hearing all their stories of past years again I felt a little left out, but my friends reassured me that with each coming year the festival only grew and got better, leaving me with confidence that I would have my own stories to tell when I got back.

“Welcome, Forest Dwellers!” read the gas station sign we passed right before arriving to the entrance of the Good Life Village camp site. Fidgeting in my seat, I could not contain my eagerness to get out of the van. “We’re here!” yelled Nina from the driver’s seat. We all sat up attentively like we had just arrived at military school. As fast as we had jumped into the van, we jumped out. There was an endless line of cars, campers, and buses, each unraveling a sea of people who had traveled to spend a memorable weekend here at the Double JJ Ranch. Music was echoing from all angles. Smiles and hugs were given frequently from passing strangers. “Happy Forest!” I heard. “You too! Happy Forest!” said another. I had never been somewhere where I felt more welcomed in a place where I knew very few people.

Our first order of business was to set up camp. We decorated it with bright colored tapestries, lights, tables, and chairs. As I looked around at our neighbors’ humble abodes, it was astonishing to see what some people brought to make this weekend as comfortable as possible, from couches, to room-like areas with yoga mats and candles. It wasn’t long after, the group began to get ready for the first artist to perform.

Once inside the festival grounds, it felt as if I had entered an alternate universe. Art hung from the trees, and colorfully dressed performers walked on stilts. The very ground under our feet lit up with every step we took. It was a modern-day *Alice in Wonderland*.

Just as we found the perfect spot in-between the crowds near the main stage, Nina put me on top of her shoulders, insisting I needed to see from higher up. From up

above, I saw waves of faces: women, men, the young, the old, people from every background possible. All strangers but collectively interacting with one another for the love of the same thing: music and unity. I began to understand what made this place so special. Back home I was just an average-suburban-working-class woman. Where I lived, how I made ends meet, all that mattered beyond the Forest, but from within the Electric Forest I felt a part of something bigger, a community not built on social differences but rather thriving on equality and acceptance. I knew at this point I would return for the same reason other people came back here, year-after-year, to escape the barriers of the “real world,” because there were no barriers here.

As she set me down, Nina grabbed me by my hand and whisked me away zig-zagging through the crowd. “We have to get on the ferris wheel! Com’ on hurry!” We took our seats and circled around twice before pausing at the very top for a few minutes. Nina looked over at me, nudged her arm against mine, and smiled. Neither one of us had to speak to know what the other was thinking. These were the kind of moments we read about, saw in movies, and made us feel alive. In my view was the entire music festival, all thirty-thousand human beings moving as one, a sight I will forever remember.

At the end of the show, we found our way back to our campsite where the rest of our group was already there re-grouping from the long day. Completely exhausted, I crawled into my tent, with the moon and the stars as my only form of light. I lay there contemplating the outside world I lived in today and the problems I still faced with daily: racism, inequality, and separation through socioeconomic class. I live in a society where my beliefs to eliminate social segregation did not fit in and I would have to continue to break barriers in the “real-world” because that was the world I lived in nonetheless. As I closed my eyes, I couldn’t help to think that

Electric Forest was a little microcosm of what the world could be.

# THIS IS NOT AN EXPLICITLY POLITICAL HAIKU

POETRY BY PAUL COFER

---

---

The ship of state sails  
with some rafts of lies in case  
it does hold water.

# MY PIECE OF SHIT CAR

NON-FICTION BY SABRINA SZIGETI

---

---

You got your first car around when I met you. The abuse from an unstable confused teenager is still shown in the cracks and paint, dents from other people, you said. It still runs, but it's mine now.

The scars are gone from your fast and furious disclaimer, do not try this at home, or in a 2004 Ford Focus in the parking lot of a Home Depot at 4 am slamming into the curb. Of course, it was just a raccoon, or maybe a goose, that decided to be in front of your car. You forgot which it was, too. But I know the memory, the feelings of fear and adrenaline, even if I wasn't there. I felt them through you, through all the remaining scars of the car, and they're mine now.

The stereo you reminisced with old embarrassing bands we enjoyed in a previous life. It's gone, finally swapped from something so-less-last-decade but there's a gap where it fit. The CDs you left me were thrown out. They were mine, but they weren't right. The memories were too strong. I can't even remember when I lent them.

I threw your stuffed animal to my dog to destroy. It was not mine to do so, but I did. You didn't seem attached to it even when you were at my side. But this car of memories of you, of yelling out lyrics together, of late night nicotine filled talks and crying, sobbing even, kisses at the stop lights, hands held watching the rain, snow, leaves, and wind blow our lives by.

They will continue to be mine, and I will continue to be selfish, looking out for myself.

These memories feel stolen, like I was a conman buying a car for the price of a large iced-coffee only on paper and ran off with these good times of us together, friends or not, lovers,

or not. Anything to each other, or not. They make the car feel larger, the speakers need to be louder so I don't hear your laughter in my head.

The car is mine now, still, even though I can no longer call you my friend, my dear, my love, my ghost.

I will never be able to outrun these memories, even if I get the car fixed. You're already in the passenger seat next to me some days. But, it may not even be necessary to run from them; they will just be here for the journey.



# PINK FLOWER

ARTWORK BY COLLEEN BROWN

---

---



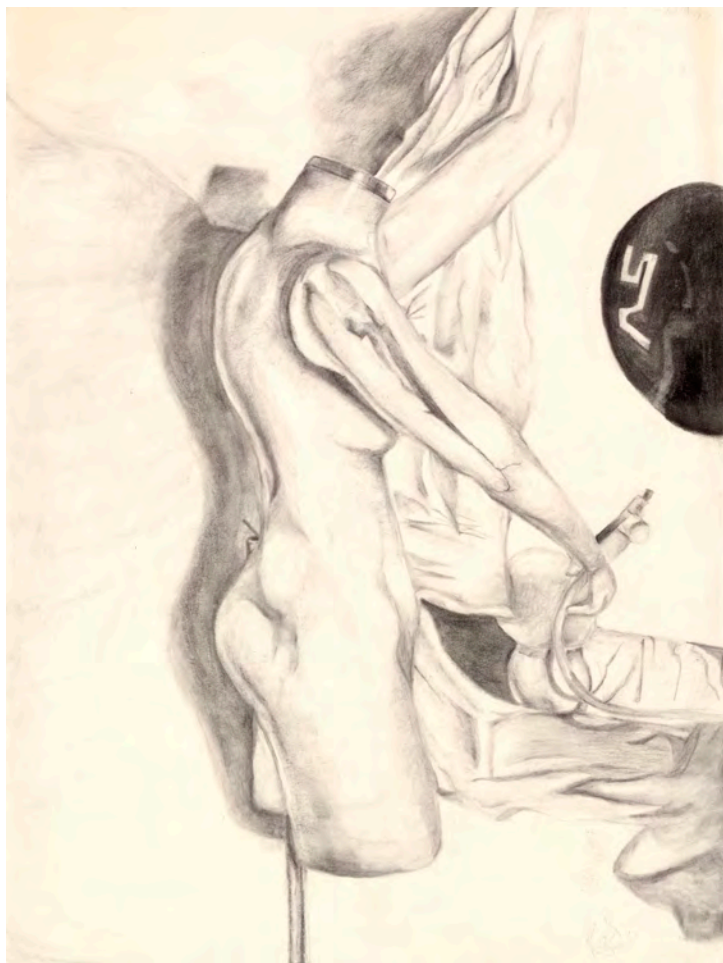
Acrylic on Canvas

19 x 21 ¾ in.

# MANNEQUIN STUDY

ARTWORK BY ROSANNA C. SASSANELLI

---



Charcoal  
24 x 18 in.

# AFTER THE FLOOD

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO

---

---



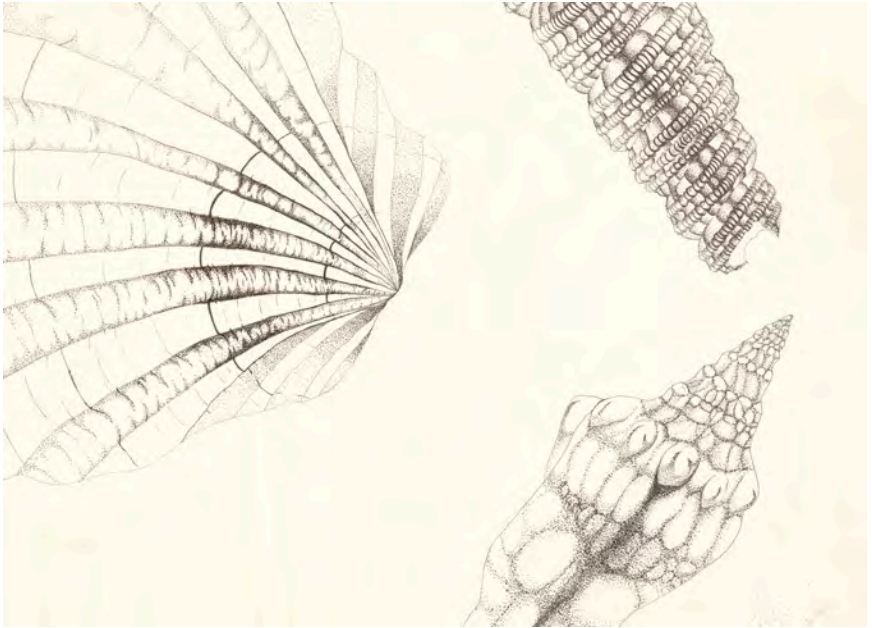
Oil on Aluminum  
20 x 24 in.

# SEASIDE

ARTWORK BY MEGAN COE

---

---



Ink  
18 x 24 in.

# COOL

ARTWORK BY NATALIE MELCHIORI

---

---



Oil on Canvas  
22 x 19 ½ in.

---

---

# GRANDPA'S PIPES

ARTWORK BY JESSICA DRIESSENS

---

---



Charcoal  
25 x 19 ½ in.



# FAREWELL REFLECTIONS

FICTION BY DOMINIC CASTELVECCHI

---

---

The sun was just creeping its way over the horizon as I pulled out my chair and collapsed into its fairly welcoming embrace. I closed my eyes, and, after not enjoying the experience very much, opened them again to try and take in my surroundings. The way in which the sun's rays hit the leaves of the vegetation around me made them glisten like pearls in the moonlight. Their flowers were holding on for dear life against the cold and putting up a valiant effort. I was glad I had dressed warm; the air was quite unforgiving. After I felt secure, I lit up a Lucky Strike. The matches were from a restaurant my mom used to like that had gone out of business a while ago, and the thought of it put a smirk on my face. Needless to say, it didn't stick around for very long. The cigarette smoke kicked my brain into a higher gear, but my lungs were begging for mercy. I sank deeper into my chair and focused on the boat across the river that was ever so slightly moving back and forth, ricocheting off the rotten old dock and getting yanked back into place by the imprisoning rope attached to it. The sight of the poor boat made my stomach ache a little more.

Everybody told me I wouldn't go to jail. In fact, I had been rained upon by positive sentiments from the people around me for quite some time now. "You'll be alright" they said, "It would be crazy to lock you up," and, "You've done all the right things to get out of this." The crazy thing is I believed all of them. I thought that I had paid my dues several times over, and would even go as far as to say I deserved to have something good to happen to me. Unfortunately, the prosecutor, or the judge for that matter, didn't agree. So he slammed the gavel down with great force upon my already unstable existence. It was hard to



believe that tomorrow I would be thrown into an orange jumpsuit and locked in a cage with the rest of the degenerates of society for a couple years. I guess I can't really complain. When you damage a good deal of property in a nice and quaint town, you should expect some type of harsh repercussions. Especially when the property is owned by men of the rich and white variety. They don't really care if you had been pounding whiskey all night or if you didn't have any idea what you were doing.

A bass rocketed out of the water and crashed back down again, causing the formerly slick surface to ripple till each tiny wave gently faded into obscurity. I became sick of the cheap tobacco covering my lips with each puff, so I tossed what was left of my death stick and abandoned my perch in pursuit of breakfast.

Still groggy, I stumbled into my local diner and slouched onto a rickety stool at the bar. I was immediately approached by the server. She had dry hair, a large gut that surely didn't contain a baby, and a face that must have been drooping for quite some time. Her eyes screamed "I'm dead inside."

"What can I get you honey?" Her breath carried a strong aroma of cheap rum, causing me to fake a sneeze in order to cover my face, which I'm sure bore a blatant expression of nausea. I've had some bad experiences with cheap rum.

"Just a cup of black coffee please," I muttered quickly, trying to get her to scurry away as fast as possible. She gave me a wink and disappeared into the kitchen. "Jesus Christ." As I waited for my coffee, I casually looked around the diner. There were a couple of saggy men to my left who were wearing thick glasses and ugly sweaters discussing politics, all the while emitting a stale stench of rotting flesh. Miss-matched stools lined the bar, the booths were a faded red, each table had its own sad tale of decay, and the tiled floor was cracked in lot of places, creating a spider web that seemed to keep people trapped here. Luckily the bottoms of my shoes were worn down and didn't grip very well. The overall boringness of the establishment caused my mind to drift off again. I found myself back in the courtroom on my

sentencing date. After the plea deal was made, I briefly spoke with my lawyer outside the courtroom, alone, while my family was escorted out of the building for crying too loudly. His usually piercing, cold blue eyes were soft and empathetic, and his words began the stomach pains that I still have today.

“I’m sorry buddy, I did the best I could.”

For better or worse, my trance was broken by the words of one of the old dogs.

“Hey young man,” I suddenly became interested in staring at the ceiling. “Young man!”

“Yeah?”

“We just wanted to get your perspective on something. Do you think Hillary belongs in prison?” He asked with a deep frown and a spotted, crinkly forehead. I chuckled inside. Who was I to say?

I shrugged and replied, “I don’t know man.” The old fart frowned and looked at me with dark, narrow eyes that had lost all of their sparkle. Luckily, my waitress arrived just in time with my coffee. I turned my back on the old men and placed my sights on the commotion outside through the large window that was heavily decorated with handprints and cobwebs. Traffic was nice and easy today, but still mesmerizing. Each passing car had its own story; a trip to Montana, the drive to an interview for a new job, a nice morning cruise. What symbolized freedom more than a car? My thoughts were interrupted once again, this time by the waitress and not one of the half-zombies to my left. She asked if I wanted anything to eat, but my stomach currently felt like it had a hole in it, so I told her just coffee would suffice. I left out the part about how it tasted like motor oil. I soon realized that the diner was only worsening my mood, so I took out my peeling wallet, threw a crummy Andrew Jackson on the counter, and flew out the door. I figured that would cover the coffee and tip.

The sun was shining with profound determination, but its rays weren’t working their magic like they usually

would. I decided to take a drive, hoping my mood would improve as a result. I lit another Lucky Strike and drove in silence down the road, putting little effort into avoiding the treacherous potholes and carelessly forgotten litter. The trees earnestly waved their red, yellow, and orange leaves to me, as if they knew I wouldn't be able to enjoy their presence much longer. The trees soon gave way to cracked buildings, miserable people gathering, and the ever so welcoming smell of pollution. Eventually, I reached a park that was quite frankly gorgeous and so out of place I felt compelled to take a visit. I slid into the curb and sauntered out of my car to a surprisingly beautiful bench. The surrounding bushes and trees formed a fabulously colorful painting and freshened the air. However, the sour smell from the surrounding factories maintained a noticeable presence. The demon that had been ripping apart the lining of my stomach began to calm down, but my heart weighed down my whole body. As I pulled out my matches and smokes, I was approached by a depressing sight. He had on a greasy white shirt, a ratty beard, slimy long hair and a stench that could repel a maggot. One of his pant legs swung around loosely on his squeaky wheelchair, on account of the fact that there was nothing there to support it. "Can I bum a smoke off ya?" he asked.

I looked into his bright blue eyes and replied, "Sure." He thanked me with a toothless grin and lit his cigarette with his own lighter.

"So what are you doin' here?"

"Huh?" I had already forgotten that he was there.

"I've seen every goddam person who's sat at this bench for the past three years. This is the first time I've seen your sorry ass. What brought you here?"

I wasn't in the mood to talk. "God, I guess." The man let out a long, wheeze induced chuckle and I shifted in my seat, trying to transfer my focus to anything besides him. Finally he gained back his breath.

"Is that right? God put that sorry expression on your

face, had you drive that piece of shit car here, and made you sit on this bench? Is that what you believe?”

I perked up at this and looked him up and down. “How ‘bout yourself there, buddy? Why are you wheelin’ around here bummin’ smokes off of random people like me? Wearing dirty clothes and living on the streets. How did that happen?”

“I made way too many bad decisions,” he said. I looked away again, took a deep breath, and slowly released it as fog back into the atmosphere. His ice blue eyes caught mine and he leaned his wobbling head towards me, “I made a lot of bad decisions, but I accept the results of ‘em. Looks like you probably should too.”

I flicked what was left of my cigarette into the swaying grass and rose from the bench. My legs were as stiff as plywood but I didn’t wait for them to loosen up. I turned towards the bum and addressed him one last time. “Thanks for the advice there, chief.”

“You’re very welcome. Thanks for the smoke, keep your head up and your eyes peeled!” He opened his eyes real wide when he said it, and gave me another toothless grin before squeaking away. I got into my car with a small smile and a lighter heart.

After arriving at my humble abode, I went through the back door and crept up to the door that led to my mother’s bedroom. The door was quite thin, but I still put my ear up against it. My heart was starting to gain weight again. I didn’t hear anything, which meant she wasn’t crying, which made my chest feel a little better. I entered my room and started emptying the contents of my pockets onto my incredibly disorganized desk. Beer caps, broken pens, lighters, important documents, and too many other random items were scattered all over. Overall, my room looked like it usually did, which was not a pleasant sight. Dirty laundry served as flooring, scratches and holes in the wall marked past fights and drunken stupors, and my bed clearly hadn’t been made in months. I insisted on organiz-

ing everything and packing up my belongings, for I was going to be gone for a while and my mom was hell bent on moving. Yet, my mother refused, telling me to leave everything as it always had been. She even made me keep all my dirty laundry on the floor. Right as I was about to flop onto my bed to rest my aching bones, I heard a knock on the door.

I literally jumped when I swung the door open and saw who it was. “Chuck! How ya doin’ man?”

“Not too bad Henry, how ‘bout yourself?” he replied with his usual pearly white-toothed smile.

“Good man, come on inside! What’s that you got there?”

“A few Coronas.”

“Sweet, let’s put on some TPB and you can tell me all about Montana. Feels like you’ve been gone forever.”

“Yeah, I didn’t have any plans of coming back either, but I heard about the sentencing and I figured I’d come out before they shipped you off.”

“Well you came just in time, I have to report in tomorrow.”

Chuck nodded his head and narrowed his eyes a little bit. “How you feelin’ about it?”

“I don’t know man. I guess it’s not the worst thing ever, one of my coworkers is gonna keep me supplied with good books to read.”

“Well, hopefully by the time you get out, the world will have calmed down a little bit,” he said. I raised my eyebrows and smirked. “And if not, you’ll have the knowledge to fix all of our problems.” We both smiled and popped the cap of our bottles. My heart was starting to feel normal again. “Cheers?”

“Cheers.”

# FOUR SKULLS AND FOUR CROSSBONES

POETRY BY PAUL COFER

---

---

*(for Dean Ripa and an unnamed lady)*

Unlike the giant tortoise or your lips  
which curved into a smile as I observed,  
the man himself went serpentine and dark,  
but registered his presence in your gasp.

We dressed our pork with vinegar and walked  
the neighborhoods where well-kept Volvos slept  
below the bloodshot magnolia trees  
and my temples were throbbing Cheerwine red;

I thought, what would I do if you were to  
back me against the wall, as if a viper  
or a Red? What circuits would then fire  
would I envenomate your heart, or worse?

I'd course your arteries, a mamba's bite,  
a shot, a knife, the inf'nite range of life.

# ONE DAY

FICTION BY SHANNON GILKEY

---

---

One day, my mama says I could be president. But, I could also be a doctor, or maybe a lawyer, whatever they do. She says I could be an engineer, but she also says they have to do a lot of math. I hate math. Last week I got a C- on my division test. You think you have all the answers, you check them over and over, even with a calculator, but then your teacher still writes a big and red C- on your paper. I just don't get math. But my mama says I will get better and one day I can be an engineer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, whatever they do, so then I can take care of us. I don't get why she always says that. Every day when I come home from school she says, "Janie, one day you're gonna have to take care of us." Isn't that her job? As my mama she takes care of me, not the other way around. That's like the baby ducklings raising the mama duckling. That would be flat out dumb. They'd never learn to fly, they'd probably get hit by a car! I can't imagine a baby duckling ever taking care of their mama. But that's what she says. She says it all the time. "One day" I'm gonna have to help her out, "one day" I'm gonna have to take care of her, "one day" this "one day" that.

One day though, she was quiet when I got off the school bus. She looked sad like my sister did when her boyfriend with the curly blonde hair told her she needed to lose weight and dumped her for Sally Janson, who was like 10 pounds lighter than my sister. That's how my mama looked when I got off the school bus that day. As I walked towards her I was picking at my fingernails not sure what to say. She cracked a little bit of a smile when I got closer. She even took my backpack from me, the backpack we got last Spring, from Walmart. It had three colorful ponies and stars in the background. I begged my mama for it, I said "Mama, all the kids at school have pretty backpacks like that one! I NEED it!" And although my mama always said no to

“non-essentials” that day she said yes and I got to carry the pony backpack out of the store and on the bus to school.

But most days, my mama didn't take my backpack from me when I got off the bus. Most days I grabbed her hand and we ran up the dirt road together, fast like the racehorses on the track. We'd always get a snack, sometimes apples, sometimes peanut butter crackers, and I'd tell her all about my day and she'd tell me all about hers. But on that one day, she did grab my backpack and we didn't race up the road together. She sat down straight in the dirt and looked at me a real long time. I said, “Mama, I'm hungry let's go get a snack.” But she just stared back at me, her eyes still looking like a puppy dog, still looking like my sister when her curly-haired boyfriend told her to lose weight. I pulled at her hand but she sat still as a brick.

She finally said, “Janie, we have to move again.” Her eyes looked at the dirt and she dropped my hand. And even though I felt my insides tangling up, like my tummy was gonna jump out of my mouth, even though I really liked my new school and just became friends with Jenny Brookes, who had brown eyes and a chipped tooth and the same backpack as me, I smiled at my mama and I said, “It's okay mama, I'll study real hard at my new school. I'll do better on my division tests. I'll use the flashcards and calculator and I'll get an A instead of a C-. Then one day you won't have to worry anymore, we won't ever have to move again, one day I'll take care of us, Mama.”



# RELAX

POETRY BY ELIZABETH HOLMBERG

---

---

He says lighten up  
I say take my load  
He says be free and easy  
I say don't tease me  
He says relax  
I say what about the stacks  
of work, of chores, of things to do,  
plans and repairs, and taking care of you!  
He says it can wait  
I say yes but for how long  
He says to enjoy  
I say when everything's done  
He says relax  
I say what about the stacks  
of work, of chores, of things to do,  
plans, and repairs, and taking care of you!

# BATHERS

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO

---

---



Oil on Aluminum  
24 x 36 in.

# CLAUSTROPHOBIA

ARTWORK BY GINA STRUBHART

---

---



Archival Inkjet Print  
26 x 17 in.

---

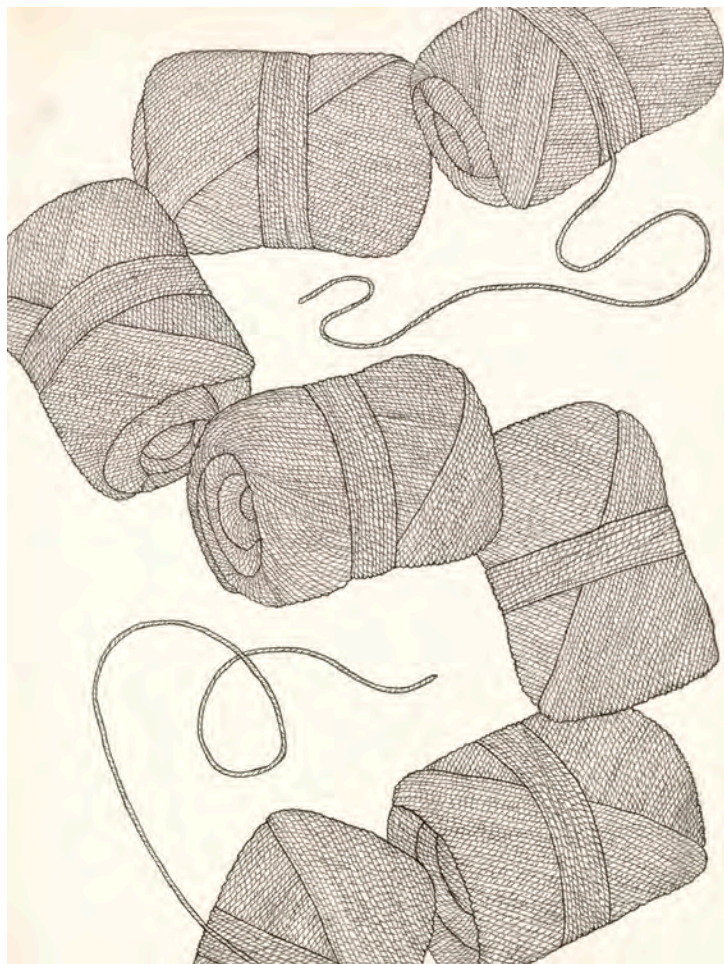
---

# ESTAMBRE

ARTWORK BY JANICE RODRIGUEZ

---

---



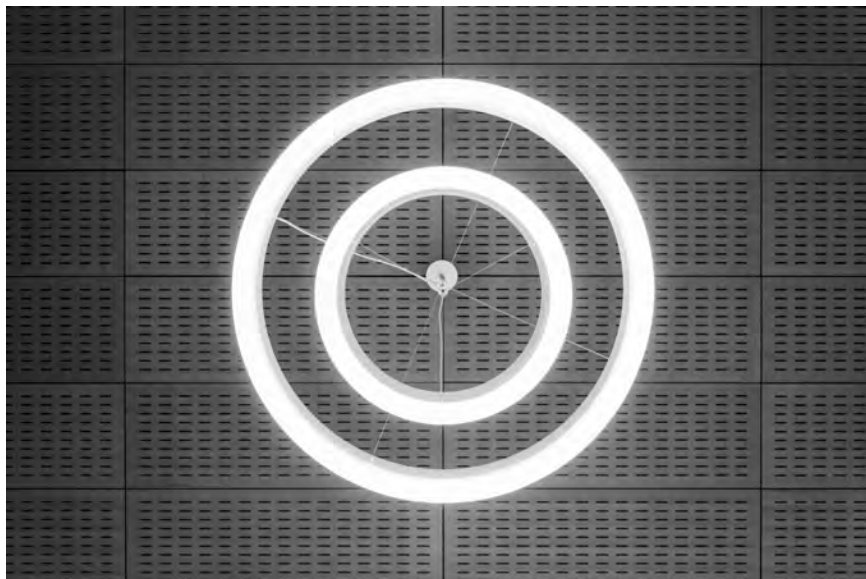
Charcoal Pencil  
24 x 18 in.

# TARGET

ARTWORK BY GRACE BALES

---

---



Archival Inkjet Print

8 ½ x 11 in.

# THE FEELING

POETRY BY CLAIRE YOUNGMARK

---

---

I stand  
Staring blankly  
I get the look  
That's how they know its happening  
My hands come together in front of me  
They feel numb  
I can't speak  
I clench my teeth hard  
I swallow over and over as my mouth fills with saliva  
Nothing feels real  
Nothing is how it should be  
Has that always been there?  
How did I get here?  
What's happening?  
Where is she? I need her.  
"Honey, are you ok?"  
"Keep breathing."  
"Just sit down, it will pass."  
Will it?  
Will I be ok this time?  
I sit down  
Feeling starts to flow back through my body  
Things start to look familiar  
I won't remember this later today  
I won't remember what I do over the next few minutes  
But next time it happens  
I'll recognize the feeling

# MY DAY

NON-FICTION BY MATTHEW S. BURTON

---

---

Yesterday was good. Today was way better though. Yesterday I had ice cream with my dad whom I hadn't seen since they locked him up four years ago. Even still, today was way better. They locked him up when I was twelve. I'm seventeen now because I was twelve and a half when he went to the pen. Four years is a long time. I am a senior in high school now. I couldn't believe he was taking me, a seventeen year old son out for ice cream. Like sheesh, he could have done something else, like maybe buy me a beer. What's the big deal? My uncle let me have a few beers on my sixteenth birthday. He told me it was a coming of age thing or something like that. I even told my dad in a letter I sent him, and still he takes me out for ice cream.

So my dad got out and yesterday was a good day. Doesn't even compare to today.

My dad was released around noon yesterday so I was still in school when he got out. I asked my mom if I should skip school to see him but she wouldn't let me. I thought he might come to my school and see me but I guess he's not allowed to. He was waiting for me at home after school. Damn, he had aged. His face was worn and looked much older, like an old catcher's mitt; leathery, stretched, and faded. Speaking of faces, I'll never forget my mom's when the judge laid down my father's sentence. It was a mixture of resentment and embarrassment as the bailiff put my dad in handcuffs and led him away toward the door to the side of the court where they took the guilty ones. She refused to look him in the eye when he walked past us, putting her face in her hands hiding her shame and guilt of the verdict that has stained our family ever since.

She divorced him a year later.

My dad has a face. Well of course he does. But he has a

very forgettable face. He always looked worried, like he was expecting to be caught doing something he wasn't supposed to. It was pathetic. My mother always hated it when he would zone out and have to be snapped back to reality only to return with a deer-in-the-headlights look. It was like he wasn't able to hold his interest in his family, ever. Even at my baseball games I always saw him talking to other kids, ignoring me much of the time not even acknowledging when I got a hit.

It was four in the afternoon on a Saturday when they showed up and arrested him. They were pretty brutal too. They came in waving a search warrant like those cops on TV. They went straight for the computer. I saw my dad's eyes. That stupid look he had. When the cops found what they were looking for they arrested him immediately with no remorse. My mother had a look of disgust on her face while my dad looked bewildered. He started to resist a little bit so they pressed his face against the wall with so much force his face looked like a fish. He tried to argue with them and deny the allegations in only a manner he could by feverishly looking and sounding as if this was as much of a surprise for him as the cops and my mom. You could tell he wasn't letting them take him as easily as he could; flexing his muscles turning his head almost all the way around to try and look the cop in the eye and plead his innocence. My mother stood in silence and disbelief at what she had just seen. I was staring in silence and amazement. I had never seen police in action before. They always seemed so much nicer at school when they'd come in and give some D.A.R.E. lecture. Or when they came in with the firemen and taught us how to stop, drop, and roll if we were to ever catch on fire. It was hot in the foyer watching my dad being escorted out of the house by the boys in blue.

Four years, and then yesterday. And he took me out for ice cream. Truthfully, it didn't feel too much different from before. He always was a little awkward to be around, I just never noticed it as a kid. He was very quiet not saying too much just asking me about school and my friends. I did most



of the talking but it was mostly in vain. He didn't want to tell me too much about what the last four years had held for him. I could tell he didn't have much of an idea what he was going to do now he was out. He told me he would see me the next day when he dropped me off at home. My mom refused to talk to him anymore. She saw him while he was in jail so I think she said everything she needed to through those plexiglass meetings of theirs. To tell you the truth, I didn't want to see him again, and I meant it.

I still wish none of this had ever happened. All he did was ignore his family and pay way too much attention to the other kids, but still, at least my mom was happier back then. So today, today was great. I'll never have to see my dad again because of today. Neither will my mom. She wasn't as happy as I thought she'd be, but I think it'll sink in and she'll realize it was for the better.

I came home from school today to my mother sitting at the kitchen table, crying with mascara running down her face, that same face that looked at my father with disgust, and told me what happened. I already knew. I just sat there with an expressionless look that almost gave me away. I realized as she was explaining what happened I would never be able to tell her the truth. It was something that only I would be able to handle. This burden was mine. She already had so many. I can bear this one. Oh well, at least I'll never have to see my dad again.

Today was a great day.

# LIVE MY LIFE

POETRY BY ELIZABETH HOLMBERG

---

---

It's always there  
the deepest care,  
the painful gnaw  
the aching raw.  
The gentlest touch  
I once knew,  
the lightest whisper  
I once heard.  
The subtle dream  
when I awoke  
The easy laugh  
when I spoke.  
Replaced with cries  
and hidden lies,  
a trembling heart  
that awakes with a start.  
Will this be all,  
am I doomed  
to live my life  
in a state of gloom  
Can I survive  
will I prevail  
and not melt  
with each travail.  
The heart will bleed  
but now I need  
to give up on strive  
Just live my life.

# AMAZON 2047

FICTION BY TREVOR MINOGUE

---

---

“Hey ho kiddo, you wanna buy some cheese?” the overweight, middle aged, and greasy man bellows, saliva dripping from his sore covered lips. “It’ll make ya feel better.”

I briskly reply no and continue walking down the dimly lit and slug-ridden street of New Willow Brook City. I almost slip on a crumpled McDonalds receipt dated February 15th, 2047, yesterday’s date.

After my long and shitty trek, I finally get to my minimum wage job. “Hey Crusty Carl, did you watch that fuckin game?” spouts Dan, my colorfully-mouthed coworker.

I work the night shift at an independently operated, synthetic toast company. It is my job to clean crust off the hose-like dispensers that shoot out the artificial, crunchy toast flavoring. I am always covered in crust, that’s how I got my nickname.

“Yeah, the way that dude exploded was pretty rad.” Dan and I are good buds; he is the only person I talk to at work besides the Alexa and my boss. “Can’t wait until hand grenade badminton airs again next week.”

After a couple hours of work, I get a notification on my smart watch. My boss is summoning me into his office. He is an old bastard, a 72-year-old businessman and one of many geezers who got fucked by the social security shutdown of 2035. He cannot retire, but he can complain about everything. He complains about politics and the past most of the time, but, to be fair, he was right about many things. He always rambles on about why we shouldn’t have nuked North Korea or conquered Canada. However, he is a heartless fucker too, saying that we need death camps for the poor to help with overpopulation. At least he was a hand grenade badminton fan.

“Hey Crusty, you saw the game? The directions that man’s limbs flew were fuckin hilarious! It was like a firework of

organs!” my boss chuckles.

“Yes, I did see that, sir, it was fascinating,” I reply.

“It’s so good to live in a time when death is so mass marketed. Makes good entertainment,” he says. He changes positions in his sturdy, padded chair and takes a big puff from his vape. “But I did not summon you to my office to talk about sports.” I am not surprised by this, though I always fear bad news.

“Kid, as you know, you are always covered with valuable crust, a loss of a potential product if you will. You cannot just throw out this crust that you accumulate on your body. It is a waste of money.”

“But, sir-” I stammer. I try to explain that the crust is very uncomfortable and trying to save it would not be very clean of me.

“No buts! We have a policy with Amazon. 90% of all crust must make it onto the toast and 15% of total crust is not found according to Amazon’s monitored toast scanning system.” A realization of fear and frustration shadows over my boss’s face. “As you know, this is the third complaint from Amazon we’ve had this month, do you even know what this means?”

Amazon owns most businesses in the country and has more than a few feet in politics. In Illinois and a couple other states, they pay off the law and the government to do whatever hellish business practices they want. One time I saw an intoxicated man yelling at an Alexa powered street lamp near a police station. The cops arrested the dude for “public cyber sexism.” Calling an Amazon product a bitch can screw you over big time if you’re not careful. This corporation really protects their name, but they protect the productivity of their suppliers even more. Sometimes they’ll even do it with force. Every supplier is allowed no more than two complaints from Amazon, or they’ll face severe punishment. The first complaint this month was because we had to shut down our factory and sanitize it for a few hours when a depressed coworker cried all over the machinery after his holographic anime wife broke up with him. He was fired and

shortly after, committed suicide by consuming laundry detergent. The second complaint was when it was found that a co-worker was streaming Netflix on company wifi instead of Amazon Prime. Nobody ever saw him again.

I think I know what my boss feared, but I was never actually informed on the truth of what receiving 3 Amazon complaints really meant.

“I’ll tell you what you’ve done! You’ve killed us all you monster!” I can tell he was sincere and I was so scared, I almost pissed my pants. He continues by saying, “So far, I haven’t noticed anything sketchy yet. Maybe I will be okay if I fire you now.”

I respond, “What about my safety, what will they do to-” Suddenly a poison dart flies through the window and sticks in my boss’s neck. He turns green and with a look of horror on his life-drained face his stiff body falls forward, hitting his head on the desk. Well, shit.

I run out of the office only to find the bodies of my fallen coworkers, they look to have died the same way my boss did.

I remember Dan said he had an upgraded Uber Plus subscription that covered rideable drone travel. I go to his body and take his phone. Out of nowhere, a man jumps down from the ceiling about 3 meters in front of me. He is wearing black tactical gear and a balaclava with the iconic Amazon smile weaved in over where his mouth would be. He stares me down and motions a dart gun towards my head. I’m fucked, but I am not even afraid, I am relieved. My life sucks, and to be fair, this is a pretty cool way to die.

“Alexa, end my suffering” I whisper.

# EXPRESS CONNECTION

POETRY BY PAUL COFER

---

---

I sat there, transferred to my train, the R  
on pilgrimage to Bay Ridge I was bound  
And meditate I did, until I found  
You on the express track, and in my heart

I wish my gaze could forge us two as one,  
So that my heart might bear your hand and seal.  
Wherev'r it went, your express Brooklyn D,  
I'd join, if to the end our line could run.

And side-by-side, like zoetropes we flashed  
Your tresses, amber, steed stainless and bright  
And like Helios' cart you took your flight  
Five car-lengths, then to the void we were lashed.

But though you left with such sound and fury  
You've got your route, still imprinted on me.



## Attention Writers

| Do you have a passion for literature?

| Do you want to be a part of a supportive community of writers?

| Do you want to be a part of future issues of Horizons?

| Join the Creative Writing Club!

---

---

## Creative Writing Club

Wednesdays from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM  
Student Center, Room 120 (Back of the Student Life office)  
Sugar Grove Campus

For further information, contact Dan Portincaso at  
[dportincaso@waubonsee.edu](mailto:dportincaso@waubonsee.edu)

---

---

# THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Zoraiz Asif

Grace Bales

Alison Brackett

Colleen Brown

Stephanie Burnett

Matthew S. Burton

Bridget Butler

Daniel Capobianco

Dominic Castelvechhi

Megan Coe

Paul Cofer

Peter De Guzman

Dallas Dell

Jessica Driessens

Cody Forney

Elle Fortman

Diane Gil

Shannon Gilkey

Michael Gregg

Logan Hawkins

Jackson Hazlett

Elizabeth Holmberg

Casey Kirk

Nathan Klinger

Cassie Laica

Carlene Lietzow

Nathalie Martinez

Natalie Melchiori

James Michuda

Colin Minogue

Trevor Minoque

W.H. Mollohan

M.K. Phillips

Janice Rodriguez

Jessenia Rodriguez

Isaac Russo

Angelica Salgado

Rosanna C. Sassanelli

Alexa Scheckel

Gina Strubhart

Sabrina Szigeti

Sammie Virella

Michael Wille

Andrew Willit

Claire Youngmark

Amanda Zedwick