

WALL

A LITERARY JOURNAL
TWO THOUSAND TWELVE

VOLUME XII

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WALL is a student-produced literary journal of Saddleback College. All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College. The submissions of WALL are reviewed, selected, and edited by the students on the journal staff. We accept entries that embrace all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas contained here in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the SOCCCD Board of Trustees; they are solely those of the authors and creators of those particular works.

*WALL is a community space for creative displays.
It is a fresh canvas, a blank surface begging for decoration,
a vast white page awaiting our words and images.*

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Introduction

One of my favorite things about literary journals, especially ones produced by students, is the sheer diversity of work you find within them. It's easy to stick to what you know and, in that way, you can spend the rest of your life only reading novels about twenty-something aspiring writers who live in Brooklyn. But the work in this journal spans across genres and subgenres: fiction, poetry, dystopian, suspense, experimental poetry, and creative non-fiction. There is also a wide variety of artwork by incredibly talented artists: graphic illustrations, drawings, photographs, oil paintings, watercolors, and mixed-media.

Like the grandfather in *The Princess Bride* promised his grandson, here we have stories of “. . . Fighting . . . True love . . . Hate . . . Revenge . . . Bad men . . . Good men . . . Pain . . . Death . . . Escapes . . . Lies . . . Truths . . . Passion . . . Miracles.” The emotions portrayed in these pieces are rich, heartfelt, and detailed. The authors don't hold back; they don't pull any punches with their readers. Loved ones die, relationships end, memories of adventures in far away lands are taken from a box and reexamined. Even a pan of delicious lasagna is sacrificed.

The complexity of the work is intensified when you consider that the average word count is only about 1,400 words. Writing in such a compact manner is harder than it seems. Each word matters; nothing is superfluous. The pieces here are excellent examples of careful craftsmanship.

As a writer, one of my favorite quotes is by Douglas Adams: “I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.” As an editor, this horrifies me. But it's a credit to our hard-working staff members, many of who served on more than one committee, that we met every deadline. Professor Gina Shaffer did a terrific job of keeping us on track. She and I exchanged countless emails and a few emergency phone calls. This journal simply wouldn't have been possible without her guidance.

I am proud and honored to introduce WALL 2012.

Denise Blike
Editor-In-Chief

Acknowledgements

Word by word, image by image, page by page, the literary collage known as WALL comes together each year through the collaborative effort of creative minds striving to produce a work of art. Now in its 12th year, the publication celebrates the imaginations and inspirations of Saddleback College's authors and artists. United in purpose and dedication to perfection, the staff of WALL merges individual voices and visions into a diverse collection of skillfully arranged short stories, poems, essays, and artworks.

The collaborative process involved in producing WALL extends to an array of supporters. We would like to thank South Orange County Community College District Chancellor Gary L. Poertner and the district's Board of Trustees: Nancy M. Padberg, T.J. Prendergast, III, Marcia Milchiker, Thomas A. Fuentes, William O. Jay, David B. Lang, Frank M. Meldau, and Jordan Larson. We also acknowledge the steadfast support of Saddleback College President Tod A. Burnett and Kevin O'Connor, Dean of the Liberal Arts Division. As faculty advisor for previous editions of WALL, Professor Suki Fisher has been instrumental in making the journal into the superb publication it has become. She has generously offered her assistance in the creation of this volume. English Department Co-chairs Bruce Gilman and Bill Stevenson are also to be commended for their stalwart backing. Foremost among those who have contributed their time and talents are Chris Claflin, who has nurtured a productive collaboration between WALL and his class, which provides the graphic illustrations for the journal; Desiree Sullivan, whose insights, expertise, and experience in design and layout have proven invaluable; and Ali Dorri, who offered sage advice and technical support. Our gratitude also extends to Edgard Aguilar at Orange County Commercial Printing, John Hesketh at Photomation, Giziel Leftwich, Marlene Weintraub, Barbara Anzlovar, and Karen Fong.

The literary journal you now hold in your hands dares to ask provocative questions, dramatizes eternal conflicts, and probes deeply into the human condition. May you be surprised, soothed, maddened, and moved by the words and images within.

Gina Victoria Shaffer
Faculty Advisor
and WALL Staff

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Innocence

By *Evan Myers*

A slight breeze ruffled the leaves hanging above me, the coolness a nice change from the arid desert air. The silence of the street deafened my ears. I turned around to look at all the houses up and down the street. Nothing had changed. Sure, a painted fence here and there. Yet no *real* change.

I turned back around to face my home. The grass was neat; it must have been mowed this morning. The porch still had the same chairs sitting there. The wicker worn out even more. They were easily noticeable against the horrible brown walls of our home.

The house rested in the shade of a large oak tree. The tree must have been two hundred years old. It brought me a little joy, knowing that the tree hadn't changed.

Hoisting my bag, I walked up the driveway and onto the porch. My boots clunking were the only sound on the entire street.

The wooden door dared me to knock. So I took a deep breath and gave in.

A few moments passed before I heard footsteps. The door swung open and my father stood before me.

He was tall and thick. His hair grayer than before. He had a little scruff on his chin; it was unusual for him to look unprofessional. A smirk appeared on his face.

"Didn't expect you until 3." His deep voice hadn't changed.

"Eastern time tends to be different from Central."

"To think I was so naïve to believe the Army might beat the smart ass out of you."

"Can't beat genetics."

He turned his back and walked into the house. I followed him.

“Your sister gets out of class soon,” he said, his back still turned away from me.

I looked at the living room. Everything was just as I had left it.

“Well, that’s fine. I can pick her up if you want,” I said as I plopped onto the couch.

“Sure, if you’d like. Just don’t fuck my car up.” He tossed me the keys. He always thought he was a real hard ass.

“If I can handle a Humvee, I think I can handle your Prius.”

“I’m certain. Do they drive on the right side of the road in Beirut?”

“Baghdad. Didn’t matter what side they drove on. They moved when we drove.”

“I guess the Army isn’t too picky with who they have driving their cars,” he said as he opened his bottle of whiskey. At least the whiskey was new. He couldn’t have made that bottle last a deployment if my life depended on it.

I opened my duffel bag as my dad sat down in his armchair and kept drinking. I grabbed my lighter and cigarettes, and zipped it back up.

“Smoking is bad for you. Did you know that?” my dad asked, as if I had never heard it before.

“So is driving a Prius,” I replied as I stepped outside.

I unlocked the doors and got into the driver’s seat. Then I changed the horribly generic pop station to some classic rock. I backed out of the driveway and drove to the high school.

Sarah went to the same high school as I did. Because of our age difference, it was the only thing we really ever physically shared. It was a small private school where everyone knew each other. I didn’t want to be recognized, so I parked outside of the school grounds.

She had a few minutes before school was over, so I had some time to spare. I opened the glove compartment out of boredom. I saw my dad’s cell phone sitting there. That explains why he never answers his fucking phone.

I realized that Sarah wouldn't know where I was, or that it was even me. I grabbed my dad's phone and sent her a text.

I'll be on the street. Look for the Prius. <3

Less than twenty seconds went by before I heard the buzz of his phone.

Umm, okay. Be there in a sec.

I got out and leaned against the hood. The camouflage didn't help me blend into the background. The sound of kids became prevalent in the distance. The traffic going into the school became heavier and the kids became louder.

An attractive brunette approached in the distance. I squinted my eyes to see who it was.

"Chris?" It was Sarah. "Oh my god, it's you!"

She ran to me awkwardly in her heels. I slowly stepped up to her. Sarah wrapped her arms around me, clutching my jacket. She tucked her head into my chest. Her sniffing weakened me. I embraced her, trying to hold back my own emotions.

We held each other for several moments until she was content. She let go and smiled. Under normal circumstances, a girl her age wouldn't have been seen with make-up running down her face. Sarah didn't even seem to notice.

"C'mon sweetheart, get in the car."

We drove to the diner Sarah had always loved. Since she was a little girl, we would get chicken tenders and split a sundae. Sarah would have it no other way.

Sarah sat down in the booth. She had cleaned up in the car and was happy that I had brought her here. I sat down across from her. She just stared at me and smiled.

"So how's senior year going for you?" I said. She laughed.

"Oh you know, alright. I just want it to be over." We both started laughing.

"Yep, I remember that feeling. Everyone is always so eager to get out in the real world."

“We have prom tonight.”

“Really? You going with anybody?”

She blushed a little.

“You understand I have to meet him?” I said sternly.

“Oh gosh, Chris, what are you gonna do to him?” she said, almost pleadingly.

“Just clean my shotgun, talk about war stories, set some rules.”

“Please don’t, Chris. He’s not a bad guy.”

I had pulled her leg long enough. “It’s fine, Sarah, I won’t do anything. Does he have a name?”

She calmed down. “Kyle Scottson. You know him. He lives down the street.”

“You mean the kid who used to piss his pants for no reason?” I said with a smirk on my face.

“What? He never did that. You’re so gross.” She huffed. “He plays on the football team. He’s pretty good too.”

Sarah was trying to convince me through my love of football.

“What position?” I said, testing her.

“Umm, nickelback, I think.”

“Never heard of that position.”

“You know what I mean.” She rolled her eyes sarcastically.

The food arrived at our table. Sarah began to eat her tenders slowly. When she was little, she would plow through them. I ate mine rather quickly, not missing the “food” from the chow hall in Baghdad. After a few moments of silence, Sarah brought up the elephant in the room.

“When did Dad start to drink?”

I looked away, hoping she would talk about something else. I looked back up into her eyes. There was so much pain in her beautiful brown eyes. It was hard enough growing up with a man distorted by his drink, but for Sarah? She was innocent, unblemished.

“When Mom died.” I struggled to get it out, looking at my empty plate. “That’s why he started to drink.”

“I figured,” Sarah mumbled, her eyes looking down.

I straightened up and forced myself to be strong. I have faced worse in the heat of battle, in the games of life. Sarah didn’t need another absent-minded man in her life.

“Dad has his own issues. Don’t let it bother you.”

“Yeah, I try not to, but it’s hard when I feel so responsible.”

“You shouldn’t feel responsible. Mom chose to carry you, she loved you so much.” Her eyes began to water. “Dad began to drink because he lost someone he loved, but by continuing to drink, he’s losing the ones who love him. You can’t let him make you feel guilty.”

Sarah couldn’t hold back anymore. Her eyes welled up and her lips pursed. Her shoulders slumped and she looked down at the table. I leaned forward and grabbed her hand. She wiped her tears and looked at me.

“I missed you so much.”

The waitress brought our sundae when we needed it the most.

I stood at the bottom of the stairs waiting for Sarah. The evening had settled on our small town. Her date was supposed to be here in a few moments, so she was touching up.

“I’m ready.” A soft voice came from the top of the stairs. I turned to face her.

She wore a beautiful pink gown that sparkled in the light. Her brown hair was up and her make-up applied perfectly.

“You look absolutely stunning.” She smiled and came down the stairs.

“Well, Kyle should be here any minute. I feel bad for leaving you like this.”

“Please, I’ll be fine. But don’t leave until I get to meet this guy.” I smiled.

“You better not do anything bad.”

“My shotgun is upstairs. What can I possibly do?”

The doorbell rang. We both stopped. Sarah looked nervous. I opened the door and greeted her date. He seemed like a good guy, but I still had to lay down the law.

“Keep your hands to yourself, no means no, yes means no, and be a gentleman. Oh, and be back by midnight.” Kyle nodded nervously.

Sarah kissed me on the cheek and got into the limo with all of her friends. I waved as they drove off into the distance. When the car was completely gone, I pulled out my pack of cigarettes and lit one. The street was quiet; nothing had changed. Not really. It was quiet as always and the breeze floated softly through the trees. I liked that nothing *really* changed.

I sat down in the wicker chair and thought. I can't protect Sarah from the world. Not from boys, not from her father, not from anything. There is only one thing I can do. I can be there for her.

I promised to never let that change.

Words as Knives

By Shirley Eramo

No permit required to carry these weapons
And yet they can make someone bleed.

With precision we use them to stab and to cripple
Those whom we once thought we'd need.

We choose them carefully, ones that chop or dice
Ones that poke, jab, and skillfully slice.

Our arsenal leaps from our minds through our lips
Then swirls through the air, making direct hits
At targets deserving . . . or so we say,
Until we successfully drive them away.

The injured will weep and reel from the pain,
Permanently wounded they forever remain.

The Maw of Kern

By Conor Powell

Many days in our lives we wake up, with no inkling as to how our day will begin, or what it holds in store for us as soon as we walk out of our bedroom door. When I woke up on that cold morning in May, I had no idea what would be in store for me for months to come. Previously, my girlfriend and two close buddies of mine had set off on one of our more infamous camping trips, going up to the “Great North,” as I called it. Our destination was clear: trek through Kernville, drive past Lake Isabella, and reach the Sequoia National Forest. Our campsite was undeveloped and, after some major off-road driving, we set up base camp. Hours later the rest of our merry band of pranksters had arrived, with the exception of two extremely important cast members, though none of us knew this yet. First things first; it was time to get a feel for our grounds, to survey our surroundings.

I had hiked over three miles around the actual base of our Mesa of Paradise (as I called our campsite), after some stumbling around the graves of massive sequoia trees. I realized one hollow giant had fallen over in such a position that it led me over the ferocious Kern River onto the other side of the river-bend. On this newly discovered side, I found a safe haven. There sat a cave, chiseled between a humble rock face, sitting next to a stagnant pool of river water. The beauty of these natural surroundings would come to intoxicate me. After finding this secret Garden of Eden, I returned back to camp to roast hot dogs and barbeque.

The next day came on; the sun was early to rise while the embrace of the wind enveloped me. It was brisk and chilling. Commotion seemed to rise just as the sun did. People all around me were drawn like insects to a heat lamp, huddled and encircling two extremely strange fellows. The garb these strangers wore was so peculiar. It seemed as if they had stolen and hybridized, fashionably, the

very costumes used to make the movie *The Matrix*, with a heavy influence of industrial steampunk and neo-gothic mixed together. These two figures, these entities, Wesley and Chuck, had arrived. Shortly after greetings were exchanged, we helped them set up tents and smoked success joints.

The fun began as I talked to the other camp patrons, speaking about the natural cave I had found on the Kern River and how excited I was to show my fellow campers. Unfortunately, my camp was composed of lazy stoners and, what seemed to me now, budding alcoholics. Only one man accepted my challenge, Wesley, whom I will now refer to as Neo because of his strange resemblance to Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix*. Unfortunately for us, the log which had originally led me on my safe travels over the river had washed away sometime during the night. There was only one other way of getting to the other side, though I already knew the dangers of crossing the Kern River on foot.

For someone experienced enough, I was able to traverse the rocks and harsh current, which flowed furiously without a problem. However the steel-toed Doc Martens that my dear Neo was fatefully wearing that day did not agree with the river. As I traversed over the rocks, reaching the other side without a hitch, I watched Neo fall, to his death (it seemed). As I saw my newfound gothic deity of a friend fall to his seeming demise, instinct consumed me. The drive to fight or flight—so many emotions flew at me as if I had so many hours to contemplate what I would do to save him. Fear enveloped me like a cold blanket. Panic would be my downfall, and I was not about to be the reason for his.

I flew over the river, or so it seemed, as I dashed across the almost completely submerged rocks. My feet were struggling desperately to grab hold of a firm base on the top of the rocks. Now totally submerging my feet into the raging stream, I threw the upper part of my body toward Neo as he continued to be pushed into the maw of the river. Looking over at the end of the stream, I could

hear the waterfall roaring ahead of me, the sound barely overpowering my racing heartbeat. The stream was getting worse; Kern River had turned into a rapid. The rocks where Neo lay wedged acted as a natural funnel, pushing all the water down on him and me. As I grabbed him, one pull towards me allowed Neo to grab hold of dry boulders for a better grip. Another heave in my direction and I had finally freed him from the grips of the rapids.

The first thing I can remember Neo saying was “Dude, do you think that all my rolling supplies are gonna be ruined?!” Happily, I gave Wesley a pat on the back. “My friend, I think I’m just going to dub you Moss-Walker. All your gothic steampunk friends are going to rage over your boots.” The Doc Martens that he was wearing were now covered in algae so that he now started to resemble some kind of forest giant I had seen in a video game. It turned out that his rolling supplies were not ruined! As we walked back up the face of our mesa, I asked him who accompanied him to the campsite.

“Well, I had come with Chuck and Olivia,” he said. My heart fell into the pit of my stomach as I replied, “We share a mutual interest then, my friend.” The discussion of how we “shared” affectionate feelings for a certain gypsy, Olivia, had now been sprung. Imagine that. I just saved the life of the man who stole the once love of my life from me. The irony of the situation was that Wesley was currently dating my ex-girlfriend and that they both decided to attend. The ties of hatred and jealousy would not wear me down though. I shed that former self once I rescued his life. It didn’t matter any longer to me what they were doing; that gypsy could have him for all I cared. I had shed that mask of petty feelings and superficial values.

After reaching our mesa haven, Wesley only knew one way to repay me. He handed me a small jar filled with a curious gold crystals; I could only call it Wizard Dust.

The greatest reward, DMT crystals aside, was being able to save someone from the grips of death and shed the jealous shell that once encompassed me. I was able to be at peace with myself. I expressed my affection and love towards the now true love of my life. Wesley and the gypsy lover Olivia would never stop thanking me, once the mutual feelings of gratitude and respect for each other were exchanged between Wesley and me. He proceeded to show me a part of me that I had never experienced before. With the right kind of eyes and the Wizard Dust, I was given a peek at what magic really had to offer me.



Illustration by Nelson Whitney

The Third Eye

By Jerrica Sibley

And he slipped down off the roof straight into the great trough and was drowned. Then Little Red Riding Hood went cheerfully home and came to no harm,” said the mother. She had finished the story just in time to see her son drift off to sleep. She combed his hair to the side as she kissed his forehead, sending him off in reverie. Closing *Grimm’s Complete Fairy Tales*, she detangled her arms and torso from her ten-year-old son’s sleeping form. Before slipping through the crack of the bedroom door and out into the lighted hall, she took a minute to look around at the disorder that was the young boy’s room.

The lighted tiger zoetrope on her son’s bedside table spun, distorting the room’s appearance, but she could nevertheless see the chaos that entwined with the cyclical image of the dancing tiger. Since her son was practicing to be a photographer like his father, there were photographs on almost every inch of every surface of his room. Going to turn off the light of the zoetrope, she picked up a photograph under a notebook lying on his table. The picture was of his father—her husband. It showed him directly aiming a camera at the camera with which the picture was taken. Her son and her husband had taken pictures of themselves at the same time. What a lovely memento.

Clothes coated the bedroom floor, mixed with the pictures. She didn’t know what it was about being a boy that gave him the inability to put dirty clothes in a laundry basket. Looking back at her son’s motionless figure, she shook her head and plastered on a hopeless smile. When do they start learning?

She began to pick up the clothes when she heard a slight creak by the bedroom door that stood ajar, the stream of light still intact. Thinking that she read too many grim stories with her child, she disregarded the disruption and proceeded to turn off the light of the dizzying zoetrope. She opened the door, minding not to let the light hit the face of her unmoving boy. Slipping through the

crack she gently closed the gap of light that the door was shining into the room. Turning around she came nose to nose with her husband.

“Hi, honey. I’m—”

“Jesus Christ, Dante! You scared the crap out of me...” She muffled a silent yelp of shock.

Laughing, Dante combed his wife’s hair, moving it out of the way to kiss her neck. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you. I was hoping that I’d be home in time to put Tom to bed. I see I’ve made it just in time.” Pushing her up against the wall, he started to caress her hips, inching her shirt up a little at a time.

She let out a hushed giggle. “Baby, stop it. Tom’s sleeping on the other side of this wall. He’s going to hear and wake up, and I just put him to bed.” She tried to grab his hands and lower her shirt.

“Ah, c’mon. Haven’t you ever wanted to do it in the hallway?” He moved her hands away, moving his hand from her shirt to her pants.

“Okay, Dante, seriously, that’s enough. Tom is asleep, which means that we need to sleep.”

“Baby, c’mon. It won’t take that long. Stop worrying about a damn child when you have a man right in front of you.” He forced her zipper down.

Her fortitude utterly dissipated whenever her husband got like this. She knew that there was no way to attenuate his need for violence, especially when it came to people getting in the way of what he wanted from her. Once, she was talking to their neighbor two doors down. He was a nice, clean-cut single dad who was having trouble with his son. Empathizing with his situation, she would go over to his house once a week to comfort him and give him some advice. For some reason, her husband had translated this as a threat and ended up interrogating the guy for an hour without her knowing about it. Since then she hadn’t seen or heard from her neighbor. Sometimes she would watch the house from her front yard to see if he or his son came in or out of the house. There was never any movement. She contemplated that they might have left for a vacation, or just left in general. Either way, she had to assume that her husband’s interference convinced the

neighbors to leave.

“I said that’s enough. Dante, stop!”

She violently tore at his hands, ripping them off of her clothes.

“I already told you once, and that should be enough. If you have a problem with that, then you can go sleep on the sofa.”

He grabbed her wrists as he flung her against Tom’s bedroom door.

Tom could hear his parents fighting again. They always fought when Mommy was too tired to do what his father wanted. It’s true that she quit her job and was a stay-at-home mom, but Tom understood that he could be difficult at times. He always took pictures of everything. He would rearrange the furniture as best he could with the little strength that only a ten-year-old possessed. Once, he tried to move the television, but it decided to land on his leg instead of the floor; he was in a cast for two whole months and his father was mad, to say the least.

He loved his mom. She did all she could to encourage him with his camera. She thought that it was sweet that he wanted to be just like his dad, and at first he did. His father also took photographs of almost everything in the house and of almost everything that people did. He would take pictures of people walking their dog or of old Mrs. Fikler watering her strawberries. Curious as to why his dad enjoyed it so much, Tom decided to take up the hobby. However, as time went on, Tom discovered that you could do a lot more with a camera than take pictures: you could create perspectives. Everything looked different with a camera as your third eye. It was like the camera could capture certain details or moments that couldn’t be seen by normal human sight. It was a superpower, a power that he could use to help his mom.

Trying to overcome the darkness that enveloped his room, Tom grabbed his camera from under his bed and quietly ducked into the bathroom adjacent to his room. He heard his mom’s hushed yelling on the other side of his bedroom door: “I said that’s enough. Dante, stop!” Tom

hurried to open the bathroom door that would lead to the hallway. Crawling towards the opened crack of the door, Tom peered out of the bathroom in time to see Dante grab his mom's wrists. He reached for his camera.

A flash redirected his father's attention just when he pinned her to the door. Taking a minute to realize what was peeking out of the bathroom, Dante examined the figure in the doorway like a child would examine a bug he's about to eat.

"Tom? Tom! What are you doing out of bed?" Dante released his captive in order to pursue his prey.

"Come here, boy!"

His mom was rubbing her wrists.

"Tom, you shouldn't be out of bed. Dante, it's ok, he was just taking a harmless picture of Mommy and Daddy, right?"

Still on his hands and knees, Tom attempted to swiftly creep back into the dimness of the bathroom. Faster than his son, Dante reached out and hauled Tom to his feet.

"I swear to God, Tom, if you keep up this daily crap of taking pictures of every damn nook and cranny I'll cut you so bad you won't be able to see through the camera! Just one, Tom, just one more fucking photograph and you're dead! Do you understand?" Dante's eyes were as vacuous as the space between two stars.

Tom looked back at his mother. He knew that she couldn't do anything about his father, and it was his own fault for disrupting them with his sudden flash.

All she could do was watch as her husband grabbed her son by his arm and disappeared into the void of Tom's connecting room.

Abruptly, she heard a crash in the bedroom on the other side of the door. Confused, she tried to go into the bedroom only to be prevented by a locked door.

"Hey. Hey! What's going on? Dante, Tom! Open the door! Why is it locked?" She hastened

to the bathroom. Seeing that the door connected to her son's bedroom was closed, she tried the knob. Locked too. She banged on the door, "Dante! Dante, open this door right now!"

"Dammit, woman! Shut up! I'm trying to put your damned son to sleep!" She could hear Dante's voice breaking up on the other side of the door.

"Why does the door have to be locked? Open the door!" she said with dread in her voice. She trailed back in the hallway, not knowing what to do.

She contemplated calling the cops, but she knew that it would just upset Dante and then Tom would never get any rest. She put her ear up to the door to try to hear something—anything—at all. All she heard was deafening silence—not the sheets of the bed moving or her husband's footsteps, just silence.

What seemed like ten minutes later, Dante came out through the bedroom door with a myriad of photographs in his hands. Before she could say anything, he looked down at her, "No more damn pictures. Do you understand? No more fucking pictures." He crossed the hallway into the room at the far left—his darkroom. It was understood that no one but Dante ever went in there; someone might ruin the materials inside.

Dante had dropped three pictures on his way to the end of the hallway. All three pictures were of her: one of her cooking, another of her smiling at the camera, and the last of her sleeping. Knowing that Dante would confiscate them, she decided she would give them back to Tom. She looked at Tom's bedroom door, wondering whether or not she should go inside. Her hand was on the knob when she started to turn it.

"He's sleeping, so leave him be," Dante said closing the door to the darkroom.

"I just wanted to check on him."

"I swear to God, stop it with Tom. He's fucking fine and if you stop mothering for five seconds, then you'll see that you have much bigger things to deal with. Now, where were we?" Dante strode towards his wife and grabbed her by the wrist, forcing her to release the doorknob.

“Wait, Dante. I said I wanted to check on him real quick.”

“Jesus, he’s fine! Now let’s go.” Dante yanked at his wife’s arm and she felt as if it was going to get pulled from the socket like last time.

“Dammit, Dante! I said no! Let . . . let me go!” She struggled against her husband, shoving her other hand in his face as a desperate attempt to break free.

Quickly adjusting to her lack of cooperation, Dante snaked both arms around her waist, freeing her arms. Screaming for Dante to let her go, the wife struggled to get to Tom’s doorknob. She just wanted to see, just wanted to make sure he was okay. Using her foot to kick Dante in the right knee, she loosened his grip around her waist. She stretched her arm out just in time to grab hold of the doorknob. In that moment, Dante recovered, gripping her so hard as if her waist absorbed into his hands. Dante tugged at her once again and, in the process, allowed her grip on the doorknob to slightly open the door.

“Let go, you stupid bitch!” Taking one of his arms from around her waist, Dante pried her hand off of the door.

“No! No! What did you do? What did you do to my baby?” she screamed back at him.

At a futile attempt to see her son, the wife yelled towards the dark, open crack of her son’s door as her husband dragged her across the hallway. “Honey! Tom, baby! If you can hear me come out! Please come out! Don’t be scared of Daddy; just let me see your face!”

Nothing but silence came from the darkness of Tom’s room.

Tired and defeated, she went limp in her husband’s arms. Dante turned her around to reveal a deadpan look. Grabbing a handful of hair in one hand, he forced back her head and whispered in her ear, “He’s not coming out of that room and do you know why? Because this is my house and if I don’t want him to come out of that room, then that is how it’s going to be. And because this is my house and because you are my wife, I’m going to do whatever I want. If you ever fight me like that again, I’ll kill you.”

Aggressively kissing her neck, Dante started to drag his wife into the darkness of the other end of the hallway.

Looking back towards the sinister opening of her son's bedroom door, she couldn't help but wonder why Tom's zoetrope wasn't working. Tom was afraid of the dark. Before she and her husband turned the corner into the master bedroom, she stole one last glance, hoping to see a speck of life coming from the bleakness of his room. She could have sworn she saw the shining reflection of a glass by the bottom of the door, as if from a camera lens.

Elemental

By Aiden Cox

elemental *adj*

1. fundamental; basic; primal *the elemental needs of man*
2. motivated by or symbolic of primitive and powerful natural forces or passions *elemental rites of worship*
3. of or relating to earth, air, water, and fire considered as elements

My skin shapes itself around the scars seared mercilessly
Into my mind, soul and body.

I breathed you in.

The salt and tobacco, overwhelming

As I recall your twisted embrace

Enchanting and toxic

Suffocating my soul, diminishing the blaze.

And I must rekindle myself

To find that place

where you can't be.

There is a part that wants

To feel your presence, once again.

Holding me

Back down, into the dust that shapes

and folds under

Crushing waves

Of water

as they are colored by the sun's flames

here resides an ever present rage

The fibers of forest green are darkened beneath

The weight of wet

assimilation

Transpires, enveloping you into a distant memory

Of nothingness.

My scars seared on like armor

Remind I burn through air

And earth

Transcending creation,

Destruction's my curse.

You, as the maker,

Took more than I was worth.

Maybe you knew in the wisdom

That sometimes comes with

strife

The life you had given

Was not yours to claim.

These walls I built for water

stand sturdy, scorched by pain.

Too Animated

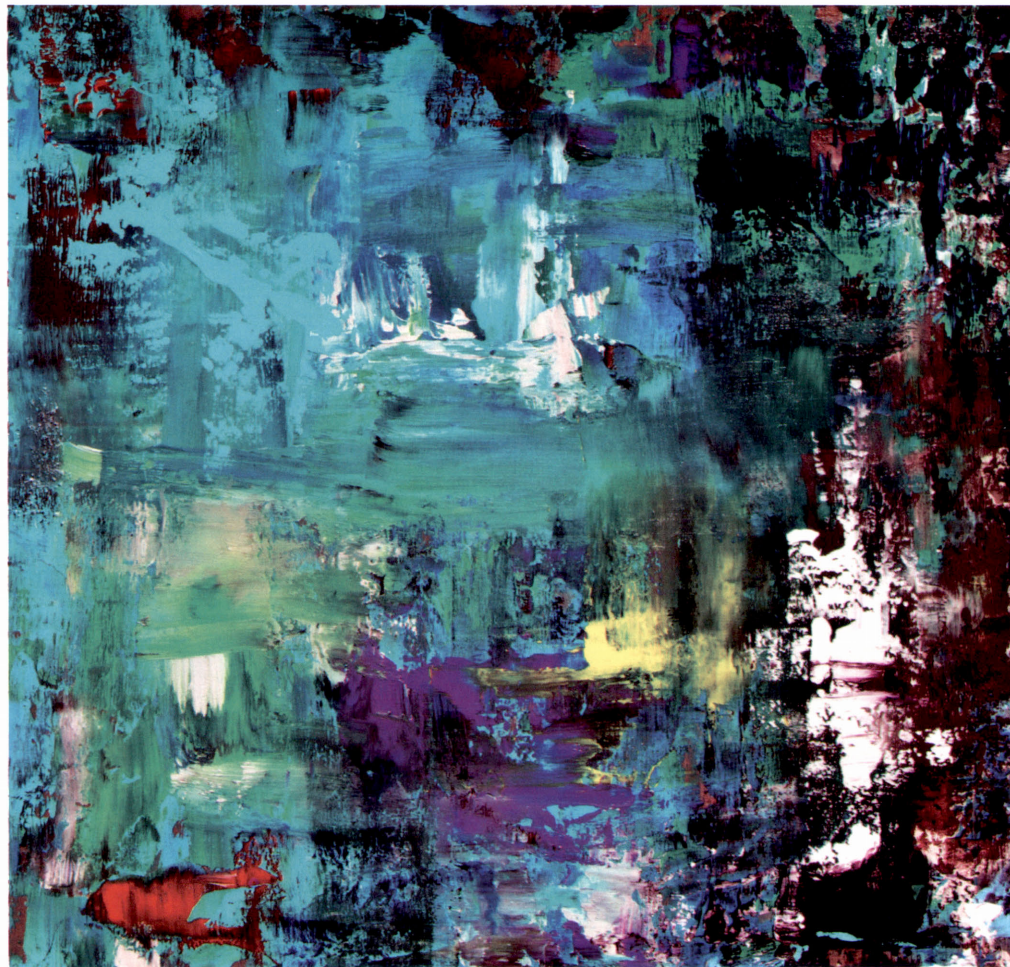
By "Jimie" Shiovan Céspedes

You illustrated me
In the hardest light,
My baby,
Subjugated me
In my hardest times,
My crazy.
Too animated we
Sinned into the helpless nights.
So unfazed we went
Two too together seeing,
Elevated we as one so high.
Elementally free we'd endeavor to be
From a life we'd long since begun
Sad into the night, remember?

Or was it just me imitating we, yet to be realized?
Seeing far into the heart of the way
And the light and the truth's eyes
In the only place we can go to see us together
Without sin, without bein'
Helpless into the nights
That see us joined forever
In a world without plight
Elementally free
We'd endeavor to be
And ever to be
We
Eternally.

Free

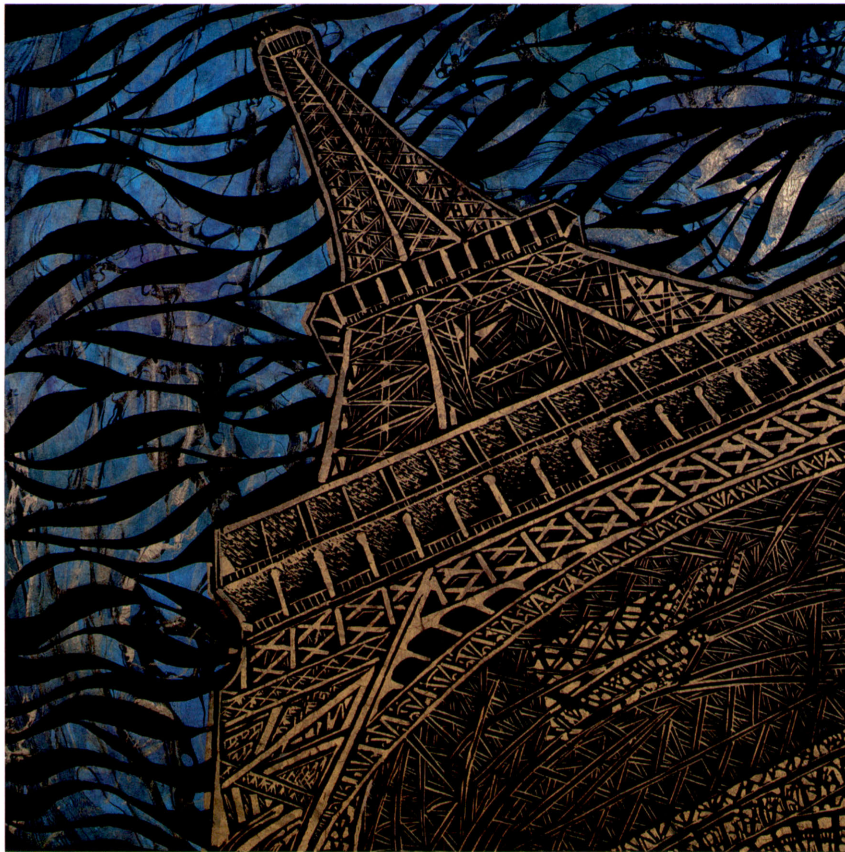
By *Chris Justice*



Mixed media on panel
Original size 24" x 24"

Eiffel Tower

By Varsha Patel



Linocut

Original size 24" x 24"

Sibling Affection

By Helen Lantt



Watercolor

Original size 14" x 18"

Birdman of Laguna Beach

By Pat Satterthwaite



Oil

Original size 20" x 24"

Washed Up

By Claire Vinet



Watercolor

Original size 16" x 19"

Cycle of Life

By Jayne Osborne-Dion



Oil

Original size 16" x 20"

INS # XXX-XX-094

By Caroline Verhagen

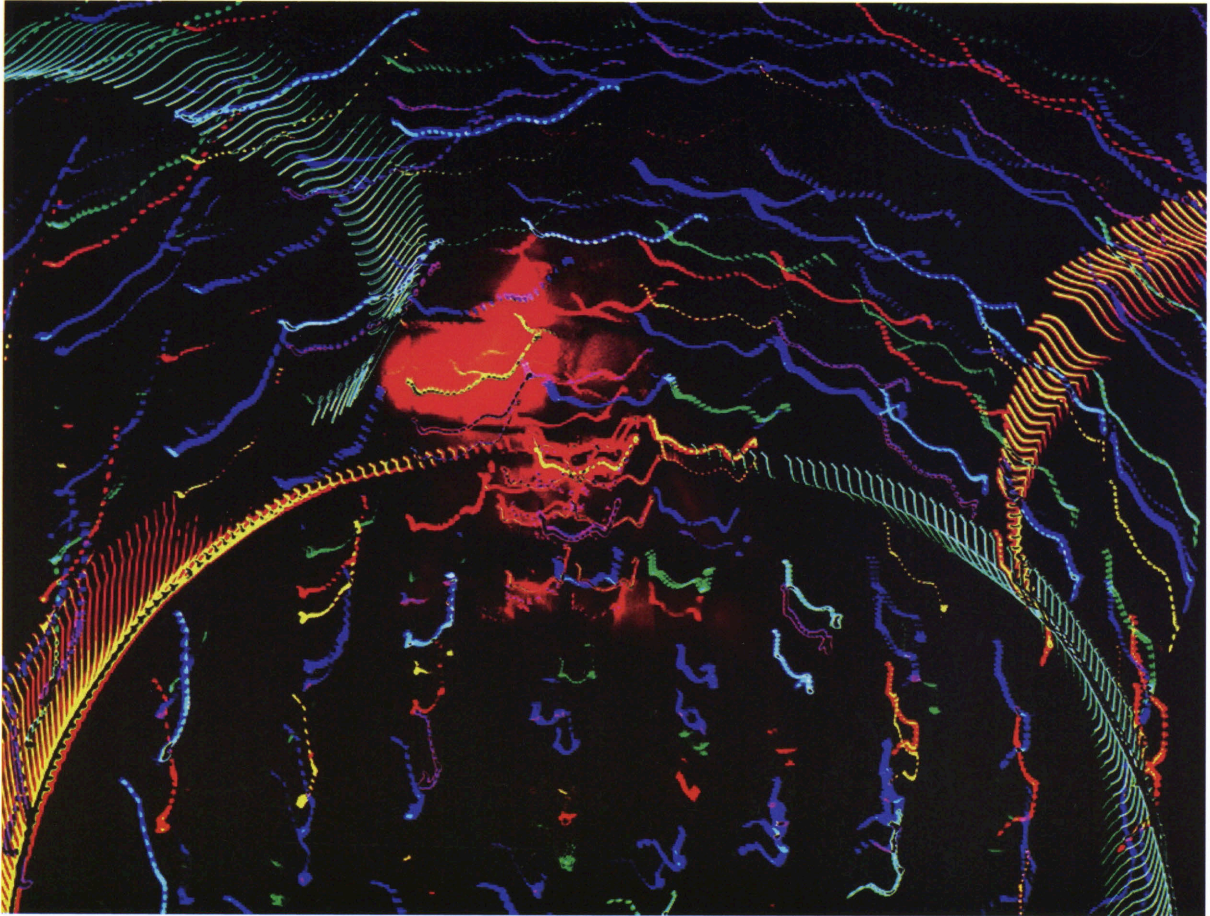


Oil

Original size 18" x 24"

Fractured Heart

By Susan Brown-Matsumoto



Digital image

Fracture

By *Matthew Devine*

He paused sporadically, waiting for the thunder cracks to stop so he could be heard. The sky was falling all around them, and he felt urgency take hold of his gut. The field that they had known as children had changed: what was once green and peaceful was now brown, lit with the unnatural orange glow of the burning sky.

His house had been destroyed and, with it, his parents. A piece of falling debris had shot down from the chaos above and had collapsed the roof as he stood only four feet away, watching his life cave in. But here, in a meadow that overlooked the burning corpse of their frantic civilization, none of this mattered. All that mattered was her.

Her parents had made it out, and she was shaken but breathing. Her eyes were wide, and she had shed tears when she saw that his house had caved in. His eyes, however, were calm, and his lips were drawn into a thin line of determination.

“Listen to me. I have something important to say.”

At the sound of his voice, he saw her come out of whatever shock she had sunk into.

“I am going there,” he said, pointing past the meadow into the flaming jungle of chaos that once was a city.

As she opened her mouth to protest, another crack boomed as the sky’s fractures deepened.

“Why?” she mouthed to him.

When the noise stopped, it was he who spoke: “That’s not what I need to say.”

He looked at the girl who had been his only friend since birth.

The girl with whom he had fallen in love and whom he knew would never love him back.

Her skin was smooth, colored like dark cream, and her lips were full. He loved her eyes.

They were vast caverns and ridges of brown that flowed with rivers of green. Those eyes now looked at him fraught with worry.

He met that worry with a smile.

“What I need to say is—” Another explosion interrupted.

But, as the sky fractured and the Earth shook around them, words no longer mattered to him.

With a swift and delicate motion, he leaned in and kissed her lips. For a moment the destruction around them ceased, and there was only them: two children, lost in each other in a meadow by the city. He pulled away from her, his breath heavy. The smile never left his face.

“I love you,” he said, finding an interval in the thunder. “And I’m going out there because I have spent my whole life waiting. Somewhere, out there, there is someone that needs me, and, I mean . . . I’ve loved you for as long as I can remember . . . and I’ve—”

But as the sky cried out in pain, it was her turn to move.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, resting her head on his shoulder. The feeling of her breath fluttering down his chest would be the last conscious thought he would have on this Earth.

As the embrace ended, he gently wiped some dust off of her cheek.

His smile was serene, and his eyes reflected this.

Her eyes, however, had become heavy with sadness.

He ran one of his hands through her sand-colored hair.

On the day the sky fell, the day the Earth bled, the day the cities burned, he had found his purpose.

He breathed in deep and coughed from the dust and smoke in the air. As he left the meadow, he never once looked back. The smile had never left his face, and he was determined to face the apocalypse.

As she walked away from the meadow, her heart grew heavy. She thought of their childhood together and the feelings that she wished she could return. She turned around to see him once more,

only to find a small black stain against the blood red horizon.

His breath had grown heavy, and his lungs itched. The calmness had never left his face. It was a long walk across the scar of land that had once been countryside. The city loomed in front of him, and though his body was tired, he moved on, determined.

“I’ll find somebody that needs me. I’ll make my mark on—”

Before he could finish his sentence, a large piece of crumbling tile that had once been the sky snapped and fell. It landed on top of him.

He did not die immediately.

The tile was very hot. He opened his eyes slowly, quickly recognizing the smell of burning flesh. He lay flat on his back. With a great effort, he managed to strain his neck up and look forward. He did not register that the thing had decimated the lower half of his body or the sizzling noise of his skin. Rather than see where his waist violently disappeared, his gaze was drawn to the thing itself. It looked like a thick, shimmering piece of glass.

After staring at it for a while, he looked up to the place that the tile had come from. It was as if beyond the sea of orange and red, there was a vast, backlit canopy, with holes punched through it.

Though it was merely a sliver, the thought of the vastness, at this layer beyond the boundaries of the sky, made him very still. It frightened him. He coughed again. He could feel the life leaving him.

With much concentration, he managed to tear his gaze from the hole in the sky. Though death was steadily upon him, his mind raced.

If there was so much more than the place he existed, what did this place, *his* place, matter? He became frustrated at his own insignificance. He had spent an entire lifetime waiting for something to happen. He had lain dumb and still against the world around him. He had helped no one. He would be remembered by no one. Nothing mattered underneath this infinite darkness.

And what of his world? What of the people who were dying in the city, the millions of people

that had lost their lives already? What did they matter? His family didn't matter. His family, who had already suffered the same fate that he was staring in the face, was less than dust compared to the terrible blackness above. His life meant nothing. Her life meant—

He paused.

In the face of eternity, walking hand in hand with death, her life meant something. Because he loved her, it meant something.

Finally, as the last of the energy bled out from his body, he remembered only the small flutter of breath making its way across his chest.

Through the Dark

By Brianna Ortega

My stomach screamed while being hauled to the first day of my fourth high school. As usual in Washington State, the car fought through the fog and falling tears. The flooded streets reflected the grayness of the air. Moss-covered trees lay frozen in the wind. Suddenly, the exhilarating air whipped me out of the car.

I was there.

I gave permission for the weight of my books to pull me down as I scurried through the corridors. I pushed my way through the thick air of anxiety. While facing my locker, I felt a piercing stare, striking my body from behind.

“Hey, how about we kill that girl?” suggested an eerie voice.

“No, not her,” casually responded another boy. “Let’s get someone else.”

Their accumulation of uninviting words crippled my every limb. Trying to ignore their shady sentences, I hesitantly glanced over my shoulder at the darkness slithering by me. Unanswered questions piled up in my mind with anxiety. *How could anyone casually toss such words around?* I had felt the iciness of their hearts reverberating coldness through that hall. One way or another, I suffered the consequences of letters and syllables that forthcoming night.

After that first disquieting day, I never stayed at one bench for too long in that enclosed place of learning. The school’s walls battled against the harsh churning of rain. Feeling alone in every crowded room, I didn’t want to be singled out. Jumping from bench to bench, I counted the days until my release out of that disastrous pit.

I studied various shades of characters, floating through the thick drizzle effortlessly. Drenched in masks of plaster, Hollister-covered girls whispered bruises into each other’s souls.

Baseball players stomped through the halls with their flame-spreading egos. Groups of boys and girls exchanged a bouncing light of laughter. A few strange, lost adolescents formed identities by wearing sweeping cat-tails and black ears. Insecurities and low self-esteem plastered the halls. Identities searched for themselves and the meaning of life throughout the classrooms. The drive to be fake and to “fit in” propelled many students. I never fully fathomed why teenagers valued the opinion of outsiders over their own opinions. I didn’t understand the purpose of covering your face with a mask of chemicals. I didn’t laugh at any of the disgusting humor of my classmates. I felt older in mind, but I was time-warped into a seventeen-year-old’s body.

I don't belong in high school.

A week crawled by. Bells rang with the shrilling pitch of a death cry. I peeked into the vast space containing organized compartments, dividing the various types of adolescents. The students naturally filtered to their unique tables of security or shame. I scanned the place of food consumption with hundreds of eyes glaring back at me. *Am I really that noticeable? How can I possibly not know one student in this huge place?* I seeped back into the shadows of the halls.

I don't belong here.

The weight of moving often and changing schools pulled me down. Where was my ocean? I had always lived near the breathing waves of life, whether on an island or in Southern California. Now, I was landlocked and stuck in a place of a million evergreen trees. I felt isolated from their culture and people. *How could I connect with them? And there's nobody from Hawaii or California here.* I was a traveling nomad; these students were born and cultivated in the same dreary, over-watered forest. I was a surfer; they had never gazed upon an image of a surfer. I was a product of all the diversity I had ever encountered. The students rejected being touched by anyone or anything unfamiliar. Hypocritically, I was also unconsciously rejecting them. I tried hard to shatter their solid, glass bubble.

Stumbling into my first day of AP Language and Composition class, I scanned the chattering students. While making my way to the back corner, I awkwardly gave a stick-on smile to my classmates. I sank into my chair, drowning myself in memories of surfing the warm water swells at home.

“Hey, are you from Hawaii?” woke me up from my dream.

Those words ignited the beautiful friendship between a Hawaiian girl and me. While proceeding through the semester, she shared feelings of hope with me. Her name, Biancalei, transported me back to the island with a sense of peace. Biancalei and I whimsically skipped through the halls in our Sanuk slip-on shoes, doodled pictures of waves and hibiscus flowers, and blasted reggae music in our cars. We giggled while cultivating the epitome of simple Hawaiian characteristics. Classmates smirked at our bubbly nature and eccentric singing of songs. She introduced me to her friends: a few “dorks,” lovely oddballs, and the down-to-earth types. We never had parties with alcohol; instead, we organized *Star Wars* movie nights, filmed our own sensational “television” show, and hung out under the stars. We were all lone individuals floating in a pool of typical high school conformity.

The water droplets trickled through the air on the last day of the semester. The rain painted a gloss of silver over the white cherry blossom and evergreen trees. The sun glimmered through the clouds, and the heavy gray air transformed into beams of light. Walking through the campus with Biancalei, I studied the way the leaves shimmered lucid green in the sunlight. Smiling at the bright blossoms existing on the gentle grass, I thought to myself:

The sun will always conquer the darkness.



Illustration by Andrew Douglas

Quality and Comfort in MJUK Black

By Denise Blike

Jack and Jill went up the hill and turned right into their driveway. A small couch was lashed to the bed of the borrowed truck. In the cab, Jack was tense from driving up and down the steep streets of San Francisco without being able to see out the back window. Jill held her breath as he turned sharply into the angled driveway; for a moment she thought the whole car would tip over.

They had just completed Step 1 of Cohabitation: The IKEA Test.

In the depths of the ocean-colored warehouse, Jack had followed Jill through the rat's maze of showrooms. They walked from living room to living room, Jack eating \$1 Swedish meatballs while Jill narrowed her eyes and fingered leaf-patterned ALVINE KVIST duvet covers.

She thought of her mother twenty years earlier, picking out a new couch in the cramped, dusty thrift store on Gresham Road in the Midwestern town where she had grown up. There were only three couches to choose from, but Jill remembered her mother taking her time to examine each one.

She sat down on the first couch and leaned back unflinchingly even though it was hardly in the best condition. It was small and covered in a nubby brown material. She invited six-year-old Jill to sit next to her and see if it felt comfy. Jill shifted on the cushions but was quiet. Her mother said, "No, you're right, a little too hard."

Her mother was by no means a delicate woman, so when she sat down heavily on the next couch the seat sunk down almost to the ground. She turned red but grinned up at Jill. "This one's a little too soft."

The last couch was actually a futon. It had a dingy cover of faded palm trees and the wooden frame was chipped in places. But Jill felt comfortable enough to climb into her mother's lap and rest her head on her mother's chest like she did when they read stories together. She felt her mother's sigh, "Yes, this one is just right."

Jill closed her eyes as her mother stroked her hair and began mumbling about refinishing the wooden frame of the futon and what color would be best for the new cover. Jill wondered if her father would like the new couch. Like usual, her mother seemed to have read her mind. "I think Daddy will like watching TV from here, don't you? And look, it folds down so Grandma and Grandpa can have somewhere to sleep when they visit."

She picked up Jill and they went to go pay for the futon with the envelope of crisp bills her mother had pulled from an ATM a few hours earlier.

Jill reflected on this now and it seemed that her father hadn't cared much at all about the new couch, only grumbling when he had to go ask the neighbor for help dragging the old one to the curb. He had probably been in the middle of writing his second book on beetles found in the Ohio River Valley and resented the interruption. But, of course, his distractedness was the perfect time for Jill's mother to take fifty dollars from the tightly-controlled budget for the new couch. She reminded him that they had discussed this after the royalty checks began to come in from the first beetle book.

He grumbled but didn't argue. And the futon's fold-out capabilities *were* useful for when they had guests.

Jill wondered a little at the machinations of her childhood. But she, with the help of her therapist Dr. Christopher, had come to the conclusion that her father wasn't a bad man, just a little disinterested in anyone who wasn't a beetle. And simple disinterest didn't score very high on the list of Things Parents Can Do To Screw Up Their Children Irrevocably.

Besides, unlike half of the people Jill grew up with, her parents were still married and had

just celebrated their thirtieth wedding anniversary. The futon in question had been thrown out right before she left for college. Her parents now had a couple of La-Z-Boy recliners side by side in front of the TV. Her father had just published his sixth beetle book.

She wasn't sure what it was about looking at couches in IKEA that suddenly made her childhood flash before her eyes. She wanted to leave Jack here eating his damn meatballs with sticky globs of lingonberry jelly and get away from under the harsh fluorescent lights. She wanted to drive far away, maybe into the ocean, and sink down so far that the weight of the Pacific might relieve the pressure of her aching heart.

Good grief. It was a couch. They weren't getting married or having a baby. Not that either of these things would necessarily be bad. Jack was certainly nothing like her father. He was sweet and listened to how her day went at work. He kissed her on the forehead and told her that he loved her. And that was good. Much preferable to being on her own.

For his part, Jack couldn't give a flying fuck about which couch to buy. He was still transitioning from poor graduate student to professional computer programmer and couldn't quite shake the habit of simply scouring dumpsters if he needed a new kitchen chair. But Jill had bit her lip in that heartbreaking way of hers and said, "I just thought it's something we could do together."

Any of the damn couches appealed to Jack. He could picture them, Jack and Jill, watching Season 3 of *The Wire* on the narrow white KLIPPAN. Or eager, drunk, and completely horizontal on top of the KARLSTAD over there, the one that could be pulled apart. Halved. He imagined that they bought all the couches for sale and built a network of them throughout the apartment. The living room connected to the bedroom to the kitchen to the bathroom and back. Neither of them would ever have to stand up and walk away from each other.

Careful, careful. They were so careful of disturbing what was in one another's heart.

Jill was bewildered by all the choices while Jack was slightly bored. Instead of living with this indecision and unspoken uncertainty, they bought a white VRETA, which they now unload from the car and bring up the steps to their apartment. It is sleek and modern, which in reality means it is rigid and upright with stiff white cushions.

Jack and Jill discover that the leather rubs rashes on their bare skin. They must kink up their knees to fit their bodies lengthwise along the couch. They snap at each other not to spill anything.

“Don’t you remember how much it cost?”

“I didn’t even want it in the first place!”

When the relationship ends, the nearly new couch is left at the curb. The breakup is no one’s fault in particular. Sometimes compromises don’t work, and sometimes being careful not to hurt someone is not the same as loving them.

A Form of Opus

By Steven Sheley

Black lines surrounded by white borders
Deaf pages, from inappropriate grammar
Three hundred exhilarating pages to turn
Careful not to tear while ruminating
Treasuring something old and musty
Salivation brought on by emotional triggering
Rekindling in view of what was or could be
So precise, that the sound was not mistaken
Fragrance, expressed through punctuation
Acridity, eye candy induced by words
Hard-bound, lasting, usually dark in color
The slightest ruffle, when turning the pages
Cerulean images, floating forever

Lasagna

By Pauline Minns

“Is Daddy coming home today?” asked a voice. I struggled to pull myself from the swirling depths of my dreams. Pushing back the cocoon of sheets and blankets, I surfaced into the reality of the day. Gina’s bright face was there: a fuzzy halo of tight, auburn curls; flushed, baby-plump cheeks; and depthless blue eyes.

“Morning, sweet girl.” My first words of the day were slow and raspy. “I need a cuddle!”

My daughter climbed excitedly onto the bed, lifted up the layers of bedclothes, and dove inside. I wrapped my arms around her small warm body and pulled her close. Gina wriggled to find just the right spot against my belly. I smelled remnants of last night’s bubble bath in her soft springs of hair and felt the reassuring rhythm of her heartbeat against my embrace. My own heart spilled over with joy.

“So, is Daddy coming home?” Gina asked again.

“Yes, darling. He’ll be home tonight,” I answered.

“I miss him!” she said. “Why can’t he be home more, Mommy? He missed my ballet recital. All the daddies were there.”

“I know you were sad about that. Daddy’s office is a long way away,” I explained.

“But, I miss him!” she pouted.

I hugged her tighter. “It’s hard, but we do fun things together, don’t we?”

“S’pose so,” she allowed.

“You like going to the movies? Just the two of us? More popcorn for Gina!” I said. “Come on, we need to get you ready for school. I can’t believe you’re in first grade already!”

“Mommy! You always say that.”

The whirlwind of our morning dance—oatmeal and apple juice, hair-clips and toothpaste—sped past. Soon, the carpool picked up Gina, and the house was quiet. I showered quickly, then pulled on my uniform of V-neck and yoga pants, ignoring the smear of yogurt on one leg. Giving myself more than a cursory glance in the bathroom mirror, I could see that my appearance needed more effort. My thick, brown hair should be restyled, instead of always being pulled back in a ponytail. I never wore make-up nowadays and rarely made time for the gym. Bill used to say that he wanted me to look more sexy. *How could I achieve that?*

The week-high pile of jumbled laundry demanded my attention. Kneeling in front of the washing machine, I began to sort the dirty clothes. I sprayed collars and food stains, and checked pockets for forgotten tissues. Holding up a small pink tutu, I felt a flash of nostalgic sadness. Memories of Gina as an infant flooded into my mind. I savored the milestones that had marked her six years of life: her first steps, her quirky toddler tantrums, her first day of school.

We hoped to have a second child one day, but had delayed because of our precarious finances. Now, at last, Bill was earning a good salary. However, his new employer was based two hundred miles north of our home, too far away for a daily commute. Bill stayed with some friends during the work week, and every Friday afternoon, he drove home for the weekend. The transitions were hard for all three of us, but were especially difficult for little Gina. As I thought of her, the craving for another child gnawed me. *We still have debts, but time's ticking!* The telephone's ringing intruded upon my thoughts. I abandoned the laundry room and dashed into the kitchen.

"Hi! It's me!" Bill said, slightly breathless. "Is Gina still there?"

"No, you missed her again," I answered.

"Sorry, I got sidetracked," he said. "What do you have planned for this weekend?"

"Well, my step class is on Saturday morning," I told him, "and I want to visit the garden center. You don't mind planting on Sunday, do you?"

He hesitated, "Well . . . the game?"

“You and your soccer!” I brushed aside his objections and asked, “When do you think you will be back tonight? I need to plan dinner.”

“About seven, I think. The traffic was hell last Friday.” A longer pause, and then he said carefully, “Listen, I’ve been thinking. I won’t be making the trip back next weekend. If I stay here, I can rack up some overtime.”

“What! You can’t do that!” I argued. “What about Gina? She has another dance recital next weekend. She’d be so disappointed if you weren’t there again!”

“Right,” Bill allowed. “Okay, I’ve got to go. We can talk later. I’ll be back around seven. Bye.” With a muffled crack the phone line went dead.

I walked slowly back to the laundry room, confused by the abrupt phone call. Dropping to my knees in front of the piles of laundry, I started pushing the darkest heap into the machine: gray bath towels, black T-shirts, and denim jeans. As I turned Bill’s favorite jeans inside out for washing, a small scrap of paper, folded sharply in two, fell from a pocket. Unfolding it, I saw it was a torn-off cinema ticket: a midweek showing of the latest Jennifer Aniston offering. *Bill hadn’t mentioned the movies.* Throwing the ticket into the trashcan, I slammed shut the washing machine’s round, glass door. Automatically, I added the soap powder, my thoughts still with my husband. *He should want to come home on the weekends!* Water hissed in the bowels of the machine and the clothing began to tumble. I thought, too, of the possibility of that second baby. *Tonight, I’ll put on that purple lace dress he likes.*

An hour before Gina’s school got out, I started to prepare our evening meal. It was always easier to cook without her demands for my attention. We would be eating lasagna, Bill’s favorite meal. Happy in my domesticity, I gathered all the ingredients. From the chilly depths of the refrigerator, I found the tray of ground beef steak: bloody and bulging like a raw wound. I nudged the gaping refrigerator door closed with one knee, ignored my image reflected in stainless steel, and began to cook.

Soon, the kitchen windows were steamy with condensation, and the heady, garlicky aroma of meat sauce permeated through the house. I made space for a casserole dish on the now cluttered, food-stained work surface and then spread a ladleful of meat sauce over its barren bottom. Lifting the saucepan from the stovetop, I drizzled some of the thick, yellow cheese sauce over the meat, and layered the floppy wet noodles, nose to tail, on top. *He's always hated romantic comedies!* I reconsidered the ticket stub, now discarded in the laundry room trashcan. I ruminated as I spooned alternate layers into the casserole dish. Bill's choice of movie seemed out of character. A thought twanged, as sharp and sudden as a stretched elastic band released against skin. *Did he go to the movies with someone?* I scraped the congealing cheesy remnants from the saucepan. My husband spent so many evenings, so many nights, away from us. He was a handsome, gregarious man. I thought of the faceless women working at his office. Slim, attractive, sexy women. The dagger of jealousy stabbed and panic rose up in nauseating waves.

Heart pounding, I ran back into the laundry room. Frenzied, I pulled Bill's work shirts from the piles of dirty laundry. I balled them up under my nose, desperately smelling them for foreign perfume. *Nothing?* I scrutinized the collars for traces of lipstick. *Nothing.* Gradually, my panic receded. I pushed down my doubts and began to feel guilty for my suspicions. There was no reason to doubt Bill's integrity. Surely, he would never betray his family. He should be able to go out to watch a silly movie without me checking up on him. *I'm overreacting!* I decided.

Calmer now, I returned to the kitchen to continue with my chores. I lifted up the lasagna dish, shocked by the weight of it, and stored it inside the refrigerator. A vision in purple lace, I would present it, baked and bubbling, perfectly timed for Bill's return. Satisfied with my plan, I began to stack the dirty bowls and utensils into the dishwasher. I sprayed pine-scented cleaner and wiped away the splattered remnants of food.

Looking around the kitchen for the next task to tackle, I noticed the pile of unopened mail. I picked up the stack and began to thumb through it. Most of the mail was addressed to "Mr. and Mrs.,"

but a few letters were for Bill alone. When I saw the envelope containing his cell phone statement, the flood of doubts and suspicions returned. I tore open the envelope and unfolded the crisp pages inside. Feverishly, I scanned the lines of dialed telephone numbers. Stunned, I noticed a pattern revealed on every page: the same ten digits repeated over and over.

That evening unfolded, first with accusations and denials, but finally with his begrudging confession. The dish of cold lasagna exploded against the wall. Bill flinched, but kept on walking towards the front door. Numbly, I watched the congealed layers of pasta as they slid down the wall. Smears of blood-red sauce and globules of fatty cheese slithered slowly, inevitably, towards the floor. I watched with blind eyes, my head swirling with the ugly, bitter words we had thrown, those savage, scathing words chosen to plunge as deep as any knife blade.

Later, I stepped into Gina's bedroom. Oblivious to the turmoil, she was snuggled under her duvet. I could hear her soft snores in the darkness. Carefully, so not to wake her, I climbed into her bed. I wrapped my arm around her sleeping form and pulled her close. As I smelled again the bubble bath in her curls, I finally began to cry.

A Blank Piece of Paper

By Laurel Anne Glover

A blank piece of paper I see today
Lets my reality slip away.
From a world of wonder and a world of fear,
From a world where time is never clear.

A blank piece of paper I see today
Starts an invigoration of my imagination,
Planting seeds, stemming forms of creation,
Setting no limitation to any destination.

A blank piece of paper I see today
Opens the door to an affinity of infinities
Beyond life, love, galaxy, and star
Inviting you in
Whoever you are.



Illustration by Jennifer Hanly

The Fishing Pole

By Alexander Kusztyk

An engine rumbles to life in the distance. I shut the car door and step out onto the moist ground. The air is dry and a light breeze rustles the needles of the pine trees. There isn't even a cloud in the sky. This is the perfect day to go fishing with the family.

I look down at the dock. The boats gently bob up and down in rhythm with the water. This whole place seems to calm my soul as I close my eyes and breathe in the fresh air. A bait shop sits right next to the dock ramp. With its door propped open, the shop seems to beckon us in. My dad tells me to grab my fishing pole so we can start our adventure.

I reach into the trunk of the car and retrieve the rod. Its sleek form glistens in the sunlight. I hold it firmly and smile to myself. This pole has helped me catch so many fish. It almost feels like part of the family. In conjunction, we can reach a blissful state.

I begin the descent to the bait shop. Another boat engine starts and the smell of gasoline wafts into my nose. I enter the shop with my parents. My dad walks up to the counter to purchase worms while I look around. Spinning reels and lures line the walls. I gaze up at the various nets and wonder if there are actually fish that big in the lake. My mom taps my shoulder and hands me a life jacket. We exit the shop and step onto the dock.

The boards creak as I walk the length of the landing to our motorboat. I snap the life jacket securely over my shirt and, still clutching my fishing pole, step into the boat. The boat trembles as my dad starts the engine. I cannot help but smile. This is what Heaven will be like. My dad skillfully maneuvers the boat out of the dock and hands me the controls. I gun the engine and excitedly steer the boat towards the center of the lake. My mom pulls out the camera and captures my beaming face

full of joy and laughter. We come to a stop and my dad heaves the anchor into the water. I watch as it splashes and begins to sink into the depths. The time has come to relax on the water.

Like a medieval knight wielding his sword, I make my first cast into the lake. I sit and wait. This can be the hardest part about fishing, but I have learned to embrace it. An opportunity to be at peace in a fast-paced world such as this is truly a rarity. I patiently watch my bobber float in the water. After a good thirty minutes, I decide nothing is on this side of the boat. I glance over at my parents. My mom, propped up on the cushions, is reading a book and my dad is silently watching his own bobber. If I am going to have any luck today, I must try the other side.

I lift the line out of the water and shift over to the other side. Out of the corner of my eye, I see my dad staring at me. Empowered, I hoist my rod high over my head. With all my strength, I make my cast.

My jaw drops as I watch my fishing pole sail out of my hand and into the lake. Immediately my dad grabs for an oar and stretches out to try and coax the now-sinking rod back to safety. All I can do is watch as my heart sinks with the rod. I watch as my friend drowns. In its last effort for life, the bobber strains to float, but the weight of the rod brings it down, too. I peer into the murky depths and get a final glimpse of my rod as it catches the last rays of sunlight. I raise my hand to say farewell as my fishing pole slowly disappears from my life.

Ten years from that day, my first fishing pole still remains at the bottom of Lake Mary. It is hard to witness the demise of something you love. The loss of my fishing pole helped me to fathom how the things of this world perish. Even I will perish. From that day forth, I made it my aim to live each day as if it were my last.

Mourning over personal loss will do no good in the grand scheme of things. Learning to move on from the past is the critical step one must take in order to be at peace. Continuing on after a loss may be challenging, but is profoundly important.

The following year, my parents gave me a new dry fly fishing pole. I have become an avid fisherman and even tie my own flies now. Dry fly fishing is not a sport, but a lifestyle. Patiently sitting at water's edge relaxes the mind and body, and helps one realize the simple beauty of nature. Watching the water for many years has yielded a secret: to live life like a river, always flowing until it is no more.

Swings

By *Samantha Putt*

We swung forth and back.
That dark, cloudless night.
You asked what it meant to be forever,
 We were parallel.

In the same moment,
Making the same mistakes.
Never meant to be
Forever *together*.

You swung forward
Higher, farther away you would go,
So high you touched the black, starry sky.
I swung back,
Never coming close to filling the space between,
We're not on the same plane anymore.

When you asked what forever meant,
I whispered what you would have wanted to hear,
But you were far ahead, and I was behind.
You never heard the one thing I said to you:
 We were never meant to be forever.

Tide Pool

By Trevor Parker



Digital photograph

Cosmic Thoughts

By Stevie Friend



Acrylic/mixed media
Original size 10" x 12"

Polo, Tibetan Refugee, Darjeeling

By Chris Lee



Gelatin silver photograph
Original size 8" x 10"

Les photos d'un vieux visage

By Christine Huynh



Graphite

Original size 8.5" x 11"

Illustrated Man

By Ellen Rose



Acrylic
Original size 30" x 40"

The Duck Hunter Master

By Tyler Newman



Pencil and ink
Original size 8" x 10"

Savate

By Michael Clute



India ink on Strathmore paper

Original size 18" x 24"

Johnathan

By Celia Wu



Oil
Original size 18" x 24"

Brotherhood Lost

Ethan Baker

I don't want you to go," she said plainly.

Standing firm, motionless in his shadow, she waited desperately for him to respond. Seconds became minutes. Turning around so she could see his half-cocked smile, he crossed the room and took her in his grasp.

Whispering effortlessly into her ear he said, "As you wish."

He then swung her around and they fled out of the room. Dodging the sentries walking the halls, they ran for their freedom towards the giant factory doors. Breaking out of the musky, copper-scented air, they stood facing the street of a once-thriving city. Looking beyond the scars of fighting and bombing that had been inflicted upon Los Angeles, they saw hope in the rising peaks off in the distance. The war, the collapse of the economy, the revolution, all of these things seemed unimportant now. Taking each other's hands, they let it all fall away and began drifting towards the giant, snow-covered skyscrapers, praying to live out the rest of their days without war.

Snapping back to reality, she immediately realized all she saw was a dream. It was just her natural instinct to want these next few seconds to play out her way. When he did actually turn around, it was not with that half-cocked smile of his that sent shivers of joy down her back. What she saw instead was his hard face, unshaven with a look of sternness upon it; his eyes penetrated the ground before his mud-caked boots. As he brought his hands up in front of him to begin thumbing the underside of his middle finger on his left hand, she knew what he was going to say. It was a dead giveaway, always the left hand and never the right. Bringing his eyes up to look into hers, he started to purse his lips for a response when she threw herself into him, landing a kiss dead on.

They held each other for what seemed like days until she finally stopped to say, "I know you have to do this for her, but that doesn't mean I have to like it. I just wish the past could remain the past so we can cherish what we have. Now. Between us." As she ended she took his hand and placed it on her belly.

He let his forehead fall forward onto hers and finally replied, "It's not just for her, Steph. It is for us, too. He will never stop hunting us until we are wrung out on the front of his tank for all to see." Pausing slightly to reach for a firm grip on her hip, he added, "I can't let that happen. I will not let us keep living a life of running and hiding. Sooner or later it would have come to this. It is better this way." He kissed her one more time and turned around to their bed to continue his gearing up. Picking up a bandolier, he tossed it over his neck and around his shoulder.

She then replied more forcefully, "Do you really think that this is what she would have wanted for you? To have you mongering for your own . . ."

He quickly interrupted her. "It doesn't matter. I don't think she could have imagined it coming to this point." He sighed deeply and hung his head with one hand resting on the handle of his revolver, the other rubbing his eyes. There was a great pause before he finally said, "But it has. And I know deep down, even though it pains me, I want him dead. I will never be able to move on until he is." Reaching for his knife, a long, slender blade reminiscent of a gladius, he slid it into its place along his right, outside thigh.

Grabbing a handful of grenades, he began slinging them onto his vest when she retorted, "If you think that killing him will bring an end to your guilt, you are most definitely wrong."

Scoffing at her last remark, he reached for his rifle and said, "You think I don't know that?" He brought his leg up onto the bed and put the butt of the rifle into his hip, barrel angled up. He pulled back the bolt and began examining the chamber for dirt. "You just don't understand."

Crossing her arms and taking a more firm stance, she went on, "I don't understand?" Walking over to her husband's periphery, she threw her hands out from her sides and said, "Then fucking make me understand! What is the whole thing about then?" Releasing the bolt, he set down the rifle on the bed and began shoving rounds into a clip. "Don't you dare do that now, Mark. Not now. This is not the time to be shutting me out. Come on. Tell me why."

He simply replied, "Just let it be."

Forming a fist with her right hand, she punched his arm as hard as she could and yelled, "No, I won't just let it fucking be! What the hell is really bothering you? Tell me, dammit! Tell me." As she lunged in for another punch, he dropped his clip and caught her fist in his hand.

He threw it aside and bellowed, "Stephanie! Let it be for fuck's sake. It is not for you. I don't want it for you." Turning around he paced to the other side of the room and faced the wall, hands fiddling with his flashlight, staring at the concrete as if searching for a way out of this conversation.

Picking up some nine-millimeter rounds off the table, she began pelting his back while saying, "You don't have a choice. I am your wife. Have you forgotten what that means? It means we share. We share each other's fears, our hopes, our desires, and even our burdens. If you did not want that, then you should have never married me. Now tell me, dammit. Tell me!" He quickly turned to his left and threw the flashlight against the mirror hanging at the other side of the wall, shattering it into a rain of glass.

Startled by his outburst, she fell back on her heels as he screamed, "You want to fucking know why? Why I have nightmares in my sleep? Why I have to do this? Do you?" Before she could even reply, not that she could have anyway, he finally said with tears welling up, "Because I don't want my mother's death to mean nothing. I don't want this all to be for nothing. It's not enough." Falling back and slumping against the wall, he slid down to the floor with his knees bent in front of his chin.

Then it hit him. Steph and the room dissipated all at once, swept away like a plume of clouds caught in the afternoon breeze, floating further and further away until all was dark. The only sound that could be heard was the slow droning of his heartbeat, echoing in the empty void. Dryness plagued his palate, followed by a sudden icy chill that slowly prickled along his spine. Then there came a new change. In sync with his heartbeat, a new image began replacing the darkness.

Soldiers garbed in green camo and flak jackets piled out of two Humvees, quickly forming into tactical columns. The first began moving into position to assault the front of the house while the second flanked down the side yard to enter through the back door. There was no resistance, only screaming. From the tree line, Mark could make out the form of his mother being forced out the back with the others. Cowering together in a tight knot of shaking bodies, they stood at the mercy of their captors. Then he saw him, the traitorous wretch standing next to the ranking officer. Every part of him wanted to scream out and unload his whole magazine into his body because he knew all too well what was going to happen next.

The soldiers began separating them all and putting them into a single-file line, facing towards the trees so that they could not see it coming. The sound of crying and pleas echoed forever, it seemed, tormenting his auditory senses. It kept rising, pushing towards its climax like a great crescendo of despair. Then it all fell away, his eyes meeting his mother's. They froze together, accepting that this was their final moment together. Looking on helplessly, he saw her yield one last smile just before she fell to the ground as the bullet exited her skull.

As his tears began dripping down the side of his cheek, Stephanie put down the last two bullets in her hand. She crossed over and stood before him, rewinding the conversation in her head and realizing that she might have gone too far.

Mark brought up a hand to wipe the tears from his face and continued, "This cause, whether anyone out there is willing to admit it or not, is failing day by day. Every man we kill is just replaced

by another. It is just a matter of time. We can't win." Taking a big breath, he brought back his head against the wall to stare up at the ceiling. Wiping his nose, he continued, "That's why he must die, so that this all has some meaning. The rebellion, our family's death, all of it. I cannot walk away until I have done at least that. I owe them that much, Steph." He raised his eyes to hers and said, "Do you understand now, love?"

Tears breaking the dirt smudge across her face, her amber eyes welling with compassion, she fell down next to him and wrapped her arms around him. He rolled his head onto her shoulder. There they stayed, enjoying their embrace in silence as she gently rubbed the hairs on the back of his neck.

After some time listening to the sound of *drip drop drip drop* coming from a broken water pipe, she finally broke the silence, "I am sorry for pushing you. I just had to know." He inhaled deep and let out the air slow, calming his nerves and regaining his composure.

When he had taken two more long breaths, he finally responded, "It was your right. I just was not sure if I was ready to tell you. I am going to end it. For the both of us." He kissed her more passionately than he ever had before then. Until that moment, no one had ever been able to break down his guard. Being a leader, he could not show weakness and with everything that had happened, he had learned well to hide his emotions. It was important not only to keep them withheld from the ones that looked to his strength and leadership but also from his enemies. Only Stephanie had earned that luxury. And he loved her for it.

Rising to his feet and then aiding Steph to hers, he finally felt what he needed all along. Staring into her burnished eyes, wiping her dirt smudge clear and then taking it upon himself to dust her off, he began to chuckle.

Brandishing a smile, she asked him, "What's so funny?"

He responded, "Oh nothing. I just never could figure out how to wrestle that damn gorilla off my shoulders . . . until now." Giving him a puzzled look, she began to chuckle as they brought each

other close again. Just before they kissed, two loud knocks came from the door.

“Perfect timing,” Mark muttered under his breath. He then looked towards the door and said, “Enter.”

As the door opened and the billow of cigarette smoke cleared, a stout fellow with dirty blonde hair stood gazing at them. Both sides of his head were crudely shaved, leaving a Mohawk down the center. Clad in dirty camo pants and a vest that was riddled with all sorts of munitions and grenades, he rested his assault rifle across his shoulder, aiming it up at the air. Underneath a layer of sweat, the outside light illuminated an amateur tattoo of an upside down American flag with tally marks underneath it. Above it read *Reborn . . . 2032*.

Noticing the destruction their conversation had wreaked upon the room, he drew an incomplete smile from the missing teeth that an artillery round had taken from him. As he blew out the last of the smoke from his cigarette he said, “Damn. You two sure know how to enjoy each other.” Shaking his head and laughing, Mark let go of Steph and began donning the last of his gear.

Steph retorted, “Yet again you are too late for the show, or is it too early? I have heard a lot of the women talking.”

Stepping on his cigarette while smirking, he simply retorted, “You always did know how to hit a man below the belt, lass. I will miss that.” He brought his gaze up to meet hers, letting that moment of silence they shared say it all. He gave her one last nod and then looked to Mark to say, “Sir, everyone is ready.”

“Thank you, Captain, I will be there shortly,” replied Mark. As the Captain left, he slammed home a fully loaded mag and pulled back the bolt, making the assault rifle ready to bark. As he threw his pack over his shoulders he made his way towards the door, giving Steph one last kiss as he passed her.

Before he reached the hallway, she called after him, “What if when you get there you can’t do it? He is your brother after all.”

Stopping before he turned the corner, he looked back over his shoulder at her and said, “Not anymore.”

New Light

By Trent Cooper

Thirty pumps to two breaths” is what they tell you to do in CPR training to keep them alive while you wait for the paramedics to show up. Unfortunately, even if you do that, there is no guarantee that the person will live. Honestly, I thought I would never be in a situation where I would even need this training in my life; I only took the class for a job I wanted. I pumped my brother’s heart for five minutes and watched the life leave his eyes right in front of me, right in my hands. His body was still, just like a doll, but remained warm. An hour before, we were making lunch together; now I lay over a lifeless body. Why? How? What happened? At that moment not only did I lose a brother, but also a part of me that I won’t ever be able to regain.

Growing up, my brother and I were always opposites. He was a quiet boy, very reserved, while I was the outgoing one and wanted to be the center of attention everywhere we went. We got along for the most part; he was three years older than me but was always willing to help me out in school. He was always a gifted child when it came to brains, but not when it came to athletics. Not only was he not that athletic, but also not very sociable. He was the quiet awkward child of the family who was always there but not “there.” In high school, I would have to say he only had about three friends at best and even then, they were not that good of friends. In high school, I had a ton of friends, played varsity sports and was always going out on the weekends. This was the complete opposite of my brother and for some reason I found this a fault in him. I wanted him to have a lot of friends, to be out at nights and live like I was living instead of staying in Friday nights to study for school. Even though that is what I wanted for him, I never offered for him to hang out with my friends and me because I was embarrassed by him. He was that socially awkward kid at school, but no one knew who he was; he was there but not “there.”

After high school he got into Chico State and went away to college up north away from our

family. I thought it would be good for him to start new and become sociable. I was wrong about that.

For his freshmen year, he spent most of the weekends at my sister's house about an hour away from the campus. I was never like the way my brother was in school; I was more of the partier, and social life always won over studying. After his freshman year and not hearing him tell me about crazy nights of drinking or anything like that, which was what I thought college was all about, he told me he did not like his roommates and did not make any new friends, but at least made the honor roll. Even though this was good, I truly did not believe that it was at the time. I was the opposite of him; I drank and smoked weed all the time, what I then thought was a brilliant idea. I started inviting my brother to hang out with my friends and me over the summer. At first he would come just because it was better than just sitting in a house doing nothing. I finally convinced my brother that if he smoked weed and drank, he would make a lot of new friends and become more sociable. He spent the rest of the summer with me and it actually made him more sociable. Even some of my friends started to like him. Once the summer was over, he left for college again, but this time was going to be different, I believed, and it was.

One year later, when my brother came back home from college, I did not recognize him at all. He told me about all these new friends he had, parties he went to, and all the stuff I wanted for him, but I did not realize what had happened to his grades. He went from being a 4.0 student to a 2.5 in one year of school. At the time this was of no concern to me because now I finally had the brother I always wanted. When he would come home from school, he would bring a lot of marijuana for my friends and me. He even had friends from college come down with him. He was a new person and we got along great. I never believed this would happen. The socially awkward kid that was my brother had friends and was outgoing now.

After a great summer with him, something happened to me that changed my views on my whole life and what I have done to my brother's life. We were never really religious, but after getting

a DUI and hitting my rock bottom, I found God and began to change my life around. Now I was clean and living the sober life whereas my brother kept going in the opposite way. I would call up my brother to see how school was going and what he had been up to, but the conversation always ended up going back to drugs. I would tell him about what I was doing with my life and, of course, he never wanted to hear any of that but instead would brag to me about what he and his roommates had done. I introduced him to marijuana and I believed that it was harmless, but now he had moved on to “bigger and greater things” as he would call it. His roommates started doing cocaine, ecstasy, prescription drugs, and I know he tried heroin once. When he told me what he was doing, I was in shock and did not know what to do or say to him. I will never forget when I asked him why he believed he needed to do those drugs. He said, “I need these drugs. They make me sociable and people like me when I do them. What happens when I stop doing it? I do not want to go back to being that awkward kid with no friends.” To this day, those words ring inside of my head. I had told him that drugs would make him sociable and that people would like him if he did; now he believed that he could not stop. This was my fault—no other way to say it. I truly believed this was my doing and I had to fix it.

By now his grades were horrible. He was averaging just barely a 2.0 and my parents started to become concerned for him. They asked me at least thirty times if he was on drugs and if he needed help. I thought I was helping him by lying to them to protect him while I tried to convince him to get off the drugs. Out of all the mistakes I have made in my life, that was the biggest one. What was I afraid of? Why couldn't I rat out my brother to my parents to protect him? I honestly think I was afraid of losing him but also of what my parents would think of me since I started him down this path two years ago.

I started to try to convince him to go to church like I was and to start changing the way he lived but, like he said, he was too afraid to lose his friends. I went up to visit him, showed him the twelve steps of AA, and told him to read number two: “Come to believe that a power

greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” I was not trying to convert him to Christianity or anything. I just wanted him to know that he could take back control of his life by admitting that there is something greater than him, just how AA has used it for alcohol. This was one of our last conversations together. Later that day he took Oxycontin and drank too much, and this caused his heart to stop right in front of me. There I was, the reason why he started doing drugs, but not a good enough reason to stop. Pumping his heart, my brother’s heart—the awkward kid that was amazing at school and was going to be the first one in our family to graduate college. Instead, I was kneeling over him, praying for God to give him back to me, and screaming at him with tears running down my face. There are no words to describe that moment of my life, watching someone that you love, that you changed to be more like the way you wanted them to be, suddenly being taken away from you.

Instead of my brother graduating college that year, I had to call my parents and tell them what had happened. I had to come clean and tell them about his drug problem, something I knew about for more than a year and yet did nothing to stop. Instead of celebrating all he had done and was going to do, I had to mourn him. How could I face my parents, my whole family? In a way, I killed my brother. Not only that—I had to write a eulogy for his funeral. I can never describe the pain I felt standing in front of family and friends, talking about my brother and how much I loved him yet did nothing to help him.

The next few months felt impossible to go through: to wake up and look at my family each and every day knowing that, even though they will not admit it, they blamed me in some way for his death. These were the months that taught me the most about how much my life was really worth and what the meaning of life was. Instead of mourning my brother and regretting what I have done and have not done for him, I decided to make a change in my life. I celebrated the time I had with him and started sharing his story with my friends and with their friends. I chose to take the lessons that I learned and all the heartache of not just losing my brother but a piece of me as well, and turned

it into a positive aspect of who I am. I now speak to schools about the problems of drugs and how it affects your life, but more than that, I also speak about how, if you know someone doing drugs, you need to speak up. I was afraid of what my brother would think of me then, but now I wish I wasn't so that I could be standing with him now, having him tell you about how he changed his life because someone cared enough to speak up for him. My plea is to you: do not be afraid to speak up and go against a friend, a brother or sister, or even a parent if it means having the chance to save their life. I want your story to tell how you saved a loved one or how they saved you, not about losing a loved one.

Concrete

By *Justine Kay*

Although concrete seems more

“appropriate,”

I’d rather speak of carpet.

Types: Loop Carpet and Saxony Plush

(not to mention Textured Plush and Frieze)

What about Cut-Loop Pile and the all-too-forgotten

Tip-Sheared?

How can I tell you about what I lost (innocence maybe?)

when my parents ripped out the esteemed carpet of comfort—
replaced by cold slabs of Cocobolo planks to walk me to my death.

Living in Silence

By *Karla Lara*

Stella walked into her kitchen to grab a bowl of cereal, very aware that she no longer felt her back aching this particular morning. Finally, a good morning, she thought silently to herself. She wasn't hungry, but eating, like most things she did in the morning, had become routine. Every morning it was the same things: get up, go downstairs for breakfast, brush teeth and hair, change, and then out the door to another dreadful day of high school.

She walked the five blocks to Dalton High School, where in the morning she would see her one friend Annie. Annie, however, wasn't there today. She sighed; a day without Annie was always a lonely one. Nobody else ever bothered to talk to her. She very well might have been invisible. She walked wordlessly to class where, again, she would endure another tortured hour of Geometry.

Stella wasn't pretty, not by a long shot, but she wasn't ugly. She had a pale complexion with freckles scattered along her nose and cheeks; curly, dark brown hair; and gray, almost black eyes. But people were mean, and in high school, looks were the only thing that mattered. When people weren't ignoring her, she was the constant punch-line for ugly girls everywhere. A certain person always came to mind when she thought of her life at Dalton, and that was Raymond.

Raymond was one of the many reasons she truly hated Dalton High. He took any opportunity presented to make Stella miserable, anything from knocking over her things to making fun of her black sweater; he was there for it all. Stella took her seat next to him in Geometry, but there was something wrong in the atmosphere of the classroom today. There hung a cloud of sorrow and despair in the room, which was ordinarily filled with laughter and Raymond's jokes. Raymond didn't even look in her direction to tell her to go cry home to her mother. Stella welcomed the silence like it was the best gift she had ever received.

As the day continued, Stella noticed it wasn't just the one classroom that was filled with dread. The entire school seemed to have lost its cheerful demeanor, and as she passed by her peers, she noticed that their heads hung low. She wondered what had made the school so dreary, but her curiosity didn't bother her enough to ask anyone.

"I heard that she died in the accident off the freeway," Stella heard a girl with thick, wired braces say.

"I heard she committed suicide . . ." said a boy wearing a gray-colored V-neck.

Someone had died? She hadn't heard anything in the news this morning. Stella decided she would ask her mother in the afternoon. The bell finally rang and she was off. Finally three o'clock and she was able to get out of the place she dreaded most. She would call Annie when she got home and make herself a sandwich.

Her walk home was Stella's favorite part of the day. It was the only time she truly had to enjoy her life. She loved the soft caress of the sun on her back, the perfectly arranged patterns on her neighbor's walls, and the fact that when she walked, she could live within her own enclosed little worlds, forgetting the mean words. But most of all she loved Mrs. Daffany's award-winning roses. She would stare endlessly at Mrs. Daffany's red roses while she greeted her with a warm smile, as she stroked her Chihuahua's ears. She smiled at the thought. She loved the simplicity of Mrs. Daffany's acceptance. She wondered why all people weren't like Mrs. Daffany. She walked up to her porch, but her big rocking chair was empty today. She waited to see if she could hear Truffle's faint bark somewhere in the big white house, but she never did. She walked up to the door and knocked, but she never got an answer.

How odd, she thought. Mrs. Daffany was always home. She wasn't the type of lady to go out shopping for clothes or even food. She forced Mr. Daffany to do all of that for her so that she could tend to her flowers and Truffle. Stella walked away with a sigh in her chest. This had been a bizarre day.

When she finally got home, she dumped her bag on the couch, went straight to the fridge, and grabbed a water bottle. She was thirsty from her walk. She walked up the stairs to her room and picked up the phone to dial Annie. It rang once, twice, a third time until it finally went to voicemail. She heard the automatic response. Annie never changed anything. She called her mother, but her call, too, went to voicemail. Just her luck.

With nothing else to do, Stella walked around her house aimlessly until she found the newspaper and opened it up to the local section to see who it was that had died. She skimmed over words until she found what she looking for.

. . . late Thursday night, Margret and Stella Baker were hit in an intersection on their way out of town. Witnesses say it was a hit and run. Stella died on impact, while Margret is in intensive care. Her condition will be announced soon. Stella will be greatly missed.

Stella stared at the words before her lifeless form, too, disappeared. Dead was the girl everyone ignored.

Waiting for Jilly

By *Cindy Cadman*

I arrived at the sterile two-story cement building in stunned disbelief. The words on the side of the building read “UCI Adolescent Psychiatric Unit.” I was shaking uncontrollably and felt sick to my stomach. My kid was in that building.

The night before I had been woken up by a knock on my bedroom door and a faint voice saying, “Mom, I’ve thrown up.” I gave no response as I had grown weary of these attention-seeking ploys. Besides, I was tired from my three jobs. Hours before, my daughter Jilly and I had one of the worst fights in our history. In anger, she had thrown something at my face, resulting in a scratch and a small bruise. Another knock proceeded. It was the sound of her voice this time that caused me to jump out of bed and answer my locked door. She didn’t look right. Her skin looked pale and sweat was evident all over her body. Wide-eyed, she led me to the bathroom. The yellow bowl we use for popcorn was now full of vomit. Looking back, I find it interesting that I was bothered by the fact that she chose that bowl. Instinctively I knew she did not have a sudden bout of the flu. With much cajoling, she finally showed me one of the capsules she had taken. It was turquoise in color with the word “Xanax” printed on the side. The other nondescript pill was Oxycontin. Both pills are controlled substances producing different effects on the body. Both pills need a doctor’s prescription to acquire; she did not have a prescription for either.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, however you choose to look at it, I had prepared for this scenario. I called the number of the medical center that I had programmed into my phone and informed them I would be bringing in my twelve-and-a-half-year-old daughter who had just attempted suicide. It was surreal even forming those words that I spoke into my phone.

ER doctors, nurses, a psychiatric crisis team, and a police officer were present to receive us. She was questioned and evaluated for hours. She admitted she had no intention of ending her life; it was our fight that had upset her. After six hours the vomiting stopped and she was stabilized. We were escorted across the parking lot to the psych unit. I held it together—barely. No mother should have to walk her child into a unit with double-locked doors that only open with permission. Professionals and patients surrounded the unit. I could feel them trying to figure out why we were here and what kind of horrible parent I was (or so it felt that way). Her first stay at the unit was for eleven days. Six months later a second stay involved nine days. She would cry like a wounded animal locked up in a cage after each visit. I still have difficulty expressing the deep sadness that permeated my entire being, taking me over and not letting go. As her mother, it held me captive for years.

She is my “caboose,” born nine years after my first daughter and six years after my second. She was wanted and intentional, knowing full well how sick I would be. My pregnancies all involved months of extreme nausea. Needless to say, I hated pregnancy! This did not deter me, however, because I loved motherhood. I found purpose in raising my three girls. Nothing has given me more fulfillment than being a mom.

She was a beautiful baby: easygoing, funny and sweet. As her mom, I treasured every moment. Her sisters had brought me such joy; there was no reason to think anything would be different this time around.

It was the end of July 2002, and our family was packing for our annual week at the beach. The kids were made aware that their father would not be joining us for this trip. Days before, I had become aware of my husband’s infidelities. Everything that he had been doing the last several years became painfully known. My older girls pressed their dad for answers and he blurted out all the

ugliness and lies that he had perpetrated upon the family. It was as if you could feel our home, our family, come crashing down, shattering in millions of irreparable pieces, never able to be whole again. We were all truly broken.

In the ensuing divorce, our beloved home had to be sold. Things that at one time offered stability and comfort were no longer available. Our lives became a series of unknowns. Their father continued to spiral downward and he became another burden they had to bear. As much as we all tried to shield Jilly, she was only too aware of the traumatic events surrounding our lives. Each family member was trying to work through his or her own issues, let alone each other's. We did the best we could under such loss. We wondered if things would ever get better.

One of the first changes in Jilly's behavior was presented to me by her fourth grade teacher. Her grades had started to slip and she had become sullen. At home she was noticeably more clingy and needy. I understood why and it tore me up inside. She deserved a home with an intact family. I could not give that to her and this realization was pivotal in her downward spiral of hurt and anger. In the meantime, her older sister left for college and her middle sister decided to move in full-time with her father. I had to work more hours to make ends meet as a single mom.

Jilly decided to change schools entering her fifth grade year. She no longer wanted to attend the private school she had been at for the last five years. She was enrolled in our local elementary school and did okay. I volunteered as the P.E. instructor so I could see her and meet her new friends. She started sixth grade at our local junior high school and within six months I was receiving calls from teachers regarding her truancies, non-compliance, and poor grades. We started meeting with school counselors, teachers, and administrators. We knew each other on a first-name basis. This pattern would continue until she left high school, during her sophomore year. Notice upon notice arrived in the mailbox, year after year, warning me of what I already knew: Jilly was in trouble.

When Jilly was in seventh grade, I received a call informing me that she was being expelled

from school due to excessive unexcused absences. She would purposely take her time getting ready in the morning, knowing I had to be at work. I would not excuse this tardiness or her absences. Sometimes, I would call the campus police officer and he would come to our home and force Jilly to school. She would just end up leaving. I had to come and pick her up immediately. She was crying hysterically, cussing, and blaming everyone but herself. I drove her immediately over to the second junior high in town where she was to be enrolled. She didn't know anybody, so she made friends with the only group who would accept her. These "friends" introduced her to drugs and alcohol. Within months she was suspended and then expelled from school. In between all of this were multiple counseling appointments with clinical psychologists, stays at outpatient facilities, and temporary live-in shelters for at-risk youths. I had to tell our story over and over again. It felt as if nothing was working or getting through to my daughter.

I called the police when she ran away or when she vandalized our home. She would use permanent marker and write horrible messages on her bedroom walls. Her journals were filled with cryptic messages, aiming the brunt of her anger and hatred at me. Every inch of her room was littered with clothes and trash. Countless times I uncovered empty pill or alcohol bottles. Calls started coming from police officers. Yet again my daughter was being detained while attempting to steal a bottle of alcohol from a local store. Or she was rushed via ambulance when she had fallen and hit her head while intoxicated. When I arrived at the emergency room, I was informed her blood alcohol level was three times the legal limit.

The time had come. She would have to be sent away for her own safety and my sanity. Our last resort had now become our only option. The family was in full agreement. The plans had been set in motion long before she completely spiraled out of control. Jilly would be attending a highly recommended outdoor wilderness survival program in Gooding, Idaho, called the School of Urban and Wilderness Survival (SUWS). With our counselor present, Jilly was informed of her impending departure. Needless to say, she was terrified and hysterically crying. She promised to do

better. I was completely unmoved by this display. I felt nothing. She threatened to run away, as was expected. I had set up a stand-by transfer team to accompany her to Idaho. However, her older sister volunteered to take her. While she was away I felt free: free from despair, worry, sadness, and fear.

Jilly returned home prematurely from SUWS in May of 2007, due to her father's serious cancer diagnosis. She expressed gratitude for what the program did for her the seven weeks she attended. Her substance abuse did not return to the degree it once was. We enrolled her in a program called Opportunities for Learning on the advice of her school counselors. Here, she could finish out her eighth grade year in an alternative setting. She stopped participating during summer. In the fall of 2008 she was allowed to enroll in our local high school in spite of her school record. I tried to hope that maybe this time would be different. But it never took long to expose the same pattern. It had been three and a half years of the same unending cycles.

In January of 2009 I kicked my fifteen-year-old daughter out of my home. Things were said that should never be said between a mother and child. I no longer had anything to offer her. I was emotionally, physically, financially, and mentally drained. For three and a half years I had tried everything. My life stopped to try to help my daughter. I had communicated to my family that Jilly and I were at the end of our rope. I feared I was close to a nervous breakdown. I had invested over \$30,000 to cover what insurance did not. I do not state this amount as if it puts a price tag on my daughter's care. Had I not had that money to help her, I do not know what state she would be in today.

I have not seen nor heard from my daughter for three years. As a mom, you never envision your life disconnected from one of your children. This disconnect has never stopped me from loving her or longing for her. Sometimes love involves difficult, heart-wrenching decisions you are forced to make. I would not and could not change the decision to kick my daughter out of my home, even knowing what I know today. I may not be able to make up those lost years; however, I can look

forward to a future spent with her. I did the best I could under the circumstances. I believe Jilly did, too. Neither of us are the same people we were back then. Hopefully, forgiveness will trump stubbornness. Nothing will ever change the fact that I am her mother and she is the daughter of my heart.

I will wait for you, Jilly, no matter how long it takes.

Grey Days

By Kelsey Smith

I never tell people why I don't like the cold. I'll gripe and moan and groan and shiver, claiming the superiority of blue skies and sun, but when a frostphile challenges my claim, I won't give reasons. Most people wouldn't understand if I said "it's an association thing." And if they did, they'd probably want an anecdotal explanation to back up such an obtuse statement.

I spent the most impressionable years of my childhood in Columbus, Ohio. Most Californians would find a city dreary and mundane as Columbus to be unworthy of mention in a personal history, but that's only because most natives of SoCal are unable to fathom how radical the difference between the two places really are. Californians take the sun for granted. We gripe and complain when Riverside's sidewalks absorb enough sunshine to bring an egg to over-easy. Ohioans would be Aztecs if not for their Aryan coloring and rampant obesity. They *worship* the sun.

But that's because Ohioans never see the sun. Their skies are never blue, only grey or that washed-out sort of winter-white. Natives of Ohio have names for the different kinds of cloud cover that Californians would have never thought of. No SoCal native I know cares about the difference between Partly Cloudy and Mostly Cloudy. Every Ohioan cares because the difference runs between 20 and 40 degrees.

The muted Ohio sky is the reason why from a very young age, I developed a clear opinion about blue skies or cloudy, about warm air or cold. As an elementary school imp, I came to worship that precious sunny time of year, when the wet spring teetered on the cusp of a warming summer. The teachers would start to let us outside for recess in the afternoons, no longer afraid that sub-zero temperatures would claim our ears and fingers. For thirty minutes out of each day, we were free. Thirty minutes can encompass a whole world in the mind of an eight-year-old.

The best sunny days were the grass-hut days. All of us imps waited for the day when the new spring growth in the tiny field tucked in the back of our playground grew too high to manage. The grown-ups passed a death sentence upon the waist-high grass and weeds, ordering that they be mowed. We could always count on the lazy mower to leave the piles of shorn greenery to be picked up at a later date.

Now any kid who's rolled down a hill knows that grass itches like crazy, so no matter how huge we could pile that grass, it never took on the function of an autumn leaf pile. No, we were never that wanton. The grass was thatch and thatch only. Twigs and sticks always lay in abundance on our playground; we had Royal Manor Elementary's ancient deciduous trees to thank for that. Rocks dug holes in the freshly-shorn earth for the foundation, fallen branchlings became the timbers, and that grass became a ceiling for a house big enough to fit three fifth-graders inside. We itched, we teared, we sneezed, but the houses did not fall.

On grass-hut days, we learned something more valuable than what the grown-ups taught us in the classroom. We learned how good it feels when something you make with your own hands works as it should. And we needed sunny skies to feel that way.

So when the summer waxed and waned (complete with stifling humidity), when the autumn winds began to blow chills down our sweaters, we knew our freedom, and our blue skies, had been taken away for another season. The other kids looked at winter with a sort of resigned indifference: it was coming whether you wanted it or not, so you might as well pray for snow so that at least *some* fun could be had.

I never shared that sentiment. Winter cold meant there'd be those days when the wind chill dropped below minus 20 degrees, those days when no hats or mittens meant no more ears and no more fingers. Frostbite took only seconds to run its course in conditions like those.

Frostbite days were *always* grey. No chance of that washed-out white, of that brightness the winter sky tried to muster like a smile through gritted teeth. Just the grey: a heavy, solid cover that

muffled the world, that whispered of snow but lied.

The longer the cold lasted, the longer the family remained inside the house. The longer we were stuck inside, the louder my parents would yell.

To me, grey days were yelling days.

My hatred of the cold isn't rooted in a simple thing; it doesn't have one of those ten-words-or-less explanations. My bias and I will stand our ground and insist that warmth and sunlight are superior in every way, but I don't give my reasons. No one wants to listen to a lengthy anecdote anyway.

The Last Flight of the Scarlet Tanager

By Bryce Sherman

Sitting on a hollow hill
The sun begins to set, I rise.
I'm too tired to fall asleep.

The Scarlet Tanager sings
A melody without a harmony,
Solo until the coming spring.

The way the barley swayed as she approached,
The girl with the lights behind her eyes.
My world shifts with each swing of her hips.

She was only a heart's-length away
Her lips parted and I tasted her breath,
And the Scarlet Tanager hit the window.

Copulation led to revelation.
The scent of sex hanging in the air
We all fall short of glory, but perhaps this is our miracle.

"You don't deceive me, my dear Romeo," she cried.
"But I can still be persuaded."
And I whispered to the cold sheets beside me, "Please let it be me."

I'm too tired to fall asleep
But I love the smell of Brown Eyes,
We were born for each other.

We may not be able to see
Horizontally
But we must find a way to open our eyes.

For there are forgotten hearts all over this place, dead.
They are the children from our youth,
Those who lost in love.

I'm too tired to fall asleep.
So stay a heart's-length away.
Maybe it's safer there. Safe.

Or maybe that's the answer,
Getting lost in the fuck.
Legs tangled, submerged in those cold sheets and you.

Given the choice of being lost between heaven and hell
Or being lost between your legs . . .
Fuck the distance that keeps us "safe."



Illustration by Nadine Heard

The Woman in the Watch

By *Julie Monroe*

Willy's face skidded to a halt in the dirt and Lou's hob-nailed boot whacked his elbow as he slammed down beside him. Propping himself onto the elbow that didn't hurt like hell, Willy spat grit and blood onto the ground. His head felt like someone had filled it with lead and packed extra in his face. The sharp clang of steel on steel from the trundling freight train three yards away didn't help his head feel any better either.

A pair of scuffed brown boots stepped in under his nose. He dragged his eyes up and saw Lou staring down at him with his hand outstretched. Willy took the hand and Lou hauled him to his feet.

"What was with those guys in that boxcar? They didn't have to be so rough with us," Willy griped as Lou handed him his bundle.

"You're lucky I'm not rough with you right now," Lou said as he dusted dirt off the ragged once-white shirt underneath his wool coat. "If it weren't for your habit of betting on anything that moved, we'd still be riding our way to Buffalo."

Willy muttered an incoherent protest and brushed the dust from the front of his thick cotton coat. When his fingers ran flat over his breast pocket, his heart dropped into his gut.

"My watch!" He spun around, frantically searching the ground for any glimmer of gold in the fading sunlight.

"I thought that thing was busted." Lou dismissed the trouble.

"Yeah, but I'm gonna fix it," Willy insisted. From the edge of the grass, a spot of yellow metal winked at him. Willy rushed over and scooped up the beat-up old pocket watch, cradling it like a delicate flower.

He gathered up the short chain in his palm and opened the lid with a dull click. Behind

the cracked crystal, the hands were frozen in a moment from the past. The photograph of a young woman gazed out from where she was pasted tight to the lid. Willy caressed her face with his thumb before snapping it shut. He wound it three times and held it up to his ear. Nothing. It was as broken as ever. He slid the watch into his inside breast pocket and gave it two reassuring pats.

Willy snatched his frayed fedora from a clump of weeds where it landed and plopped it right behind his receding hairline. When he looked up, Lou was already hiking up a narrow cow path alongside the tracks, following the descending clouds of soot from the engine's smoke stack.

"I still say that fella cheated." Willy trotted to catch up.

"You still say, you still say," Lou jabbed. "Why don't you just shut up?"

Willy laughed. "You sound like my wife."

Lou glanced at him over his shoulder. "Sounds like a doll."

"You have no right to talk about my wife like that," Willy warned.

"I thought you left her," Lou said.

"If I weren't such a rat, I'd still be with her now," Willy muttered. "But that doesn't make her any less of a saint."

After what felt like hours, Willy figured the tracks were dead for the night. The only train he'd seen riding them was the one he and Lou were shoved off of. Even if there was a train, it would probably be a cannonball and impossible to jump in the dark without getting ground into hamburger under its wheels. It seemed Lou figured the same when they hit a fork in the trail. He led Willy along the path away from the tracks and into a thick hardwood forest.

Tree boughs blotted out the sky overhead, full with once-broad leaves, now shriveling in the shorter days. Only small patches of the dusty blue and orange sky peeked through the branches like windows to the fast-falling night.

Cold stung Willy's nose with each breath, but his fingers were filled with blood, hot from the walk. The constant rustle of leaves in the light breeze or a distant rushing stream—he couldn't tell

which—was amplified through the crisp, thin air. His hopes for an Indian summer dropping with every leaf that fell, Willy couldn't imagine an end to the winter ahead.

Lou stopped in a small clearing where a ragged hole in the canopy cut straight through to the sky. "Let's make camp here," he declared.

Willy dumped his bindle next to Lou's and helped gather up sticks and twigs. They kicked away a small area of leaves down to the dirt where they built a fire. For supper, Willy shared a can of Lou's sardines and five of his crackers. The sardines weren't half bad once fried up in their tin.

When night fell, it fell hard. All Willy could see by the light of the dim little fire was Lou slouching across from him, sipping gritty coffee from a tin cup. The forest at Lou's back was as black as tar.

Willy jabbed at the embers with a crooked stick. His eyes flicked from the fire to Lou and back again like a nervous squirrel. The itch was back in a bad way and it demanded to be scratched. Willy was never one not to scratch. He tossed the stick into the fire and eyed Lou as a lopsided smirk climbed over Willy's thin face. "Hey, Lou."

Lou took another sip without looking up from the hypnotic movement of the flames.

"What is it, Willy?"

"You wanna play?" Willy asked, slick as grease. He dug in his coat pocket and pulled out a loose deck of cards, dog-eared and crusted with grime.

Lou's eyes rose, reflecting the dancing flames. "Just the two of us?" He thumbed absentmindedly at a scrape on his coarse, round face.

"That's all you need, isn't it?" Willy said, shuffling the cards from hand to hand.

Lou set down his cup. "Alright." He got up, spread out his handkerchief between them and sat across from Willy. "I'm gonna fix your gambling problem."

The game started out in Willy's favor but turned south seven hands in. The pile of coins stacked in front of Lou looked like a mountain compared to Willy's few cents.

When the ante alone for the next hand took away a quarter of Willy's money, his heart sank like a stone. After a rough shuffle, Willy dealt five cards each and set down the rest of the deck. Nervous fingers picked up his hand and fanned them out. Four jacks winked up at him next to a two who couldn't care less. He hoped to devil that his poker face hadn't cracked.

Lou pitched in two pennies and Willy raised him another. Anything bigger at the start would be a dead giveaway. Willy traded out his two for a seven to keep up appearances. When Lou asked for two cards, Willy knew Lou was bluffing for sure.

Willy roughly shoved all of his coins into the pot. "All in."

Lou eyed Willy's measly three pennies. "You might as well put that in my pocket."

"That ain't all," Willy said and reached inside his jacket. He pulled out his hand and his gold watch spun at the end of its short chain, reflecting orange light from the fire with each turn.

Lou's bushy eyebrows rose. "You don't want to do that, Willy."

"You don't know what I want," Willy spat. "I'm gonna win it back after you show your cards anyway. You'll see." He placed the watch in the pot without looking so it wouldn't know his betrayal. The memory of its warm shape echoed in his palm, pleading. He shook it off.

With a sigh, Lou gave in. "Call." He pushed everything in, almost doubling the size of the pile.

Ha!" Willy blurted and slapped down his row of four jacks.

Lou placed down his cards.

Four queens laughed in Willy's face.

"Looks like the ladies win," Lou said and raked in the pot.

Willy felt the color drain out of his face, "Hold up!" He heard the panic in his own voice, but couldn't stop it. "You can't just leave me with nothin'."

"You knew the stakes." Lou shoved the coins into his coat pocket, saving the watch for last.

Willy's voice went quiet, "At least give me back the watch. It's busted and ain't worth

nothing.”

“You know what your problem is, Willy? You don’t know how to let go.”

Willy hunched over with his arms crossed and stared daggers at Lou. “Drop dead.”

The fire burned down to a heap of hot orange embers and cast a devilish light on Lou’s sleeping face. Willy lay on the other side with sleep the furthest thing from his mind. His eyes were glued to Lou’s coat pocket that bulged with the watch.

With his mind set, Willy got up. He snuck his way around the fire, careful not to step on anything that would crunch. Willy crouched next to Lou and reached his sticky fingers into Lou’s coat pocket. Moving aside a couple coins, he closed his fingers around the watch.

Lou’s hand clamped onto Willy’s wrist like an iron vise. He yanked out Willy’s hand, the short chain dangling from his clenched fist.

Willy felt Lou’s eyes bore into him like a wolf sizing up its prey. He didn’t dare stare back. Ready to get a fist in the face, Willy was shocked when Lou released his grip. He scrambled backward just in case Lou changed his mind. He chanced a glance at Lou and saw the man looking back with pity in his eyes.

With a soft click, Willy opened the watch and gazed at his wife’s pretty face smiling up at him. He spoke in a hushed voice, “I gambled away everything I ever had, but she’s the only thing I wish I could win back.”

The Bad Side

By Andrea Estay

Falling in love could be great. It could be an adventure full of exciting new experiences that bring a feeling of heart-pounding adrenaline from just being able to give yourself wholeheartedly to someone. To be in love could be beautiful, but there is a bad side that could be just as powerful, if not more, than the good. I would never know how she got to this point. To the point where a man could control her state of mind and happiness. My sister, Michelle, had just turned twenty when she met Ben. He was welcomed by our family even more so than other men brought home before him. He had a job and a car, and seemed to be on the right track. Ben would shower Michelle with flowers, gifts, and exciting dates on Friday nights. With every day that passed, I could see her slowly getting more and more attached. Michelle acted like a young girl falling in love for the first time. And she was; Michelle had started a relationship with her first love.

After a short six months, they decided to move in together. My parents were very hesitant about the idea because not only was she young; she had not known this man for very long. Michelle had responsibilities such as finishing school at Saddleback, working, and taking care of her new German Shepherd puppy. However, my permissive parents could never put up a fight for long; Michelle was the kind of person who was able to convince them of anything. During their seventh month together as a couple, they got an apartment only fifteen minutes away from home and only five minutes away from Saddleback. Personally, I could not have been more excited since I thought I'd be invited over all the time. However, I would soon discover that I was not welcome.

At the start of their relationship, Michelle would come home with Ben every Sunday for a family lunch, a tradition in our family since we were born. But, as the months dragged on, my family and I saw less and less of my sister. Even the amount we talked had gone down to maybe once every two weeks and had finally stopped completely by their one-year anniversary.

My mom would ask if I had talked to Michelle and if I knew what she had been up to. My replying almost every time with an angry “No, I haven’t” made a concerned look grow on her face. At the time, I could have cared less. The fact that Michelle had this new man in her life had me feeling deserted and frustrated. Michelle would always have an excuse for why she could not visit or talk for long. Her reasons did not any make sense, and I was fed up with her avoiding my family and me.

One day, I finally got to meet with her after telling her I was going to take her shopping. Upon arriving at her apartment, I saw a few things that drew me to a concerned state of mind. First, I saw a dirty kitchen full of unwashed dishes and pots with old food still in them, along with a collection of empty beer cans and bottles of alcohol. The next thing that caught my attention was a huge flat-screen television with Ben’s video game controller connected and a collection of violent video games that made me think of him as a child. The final thing that made my heart drop was Michelle’s German Shepherd puppy, Riley. The dog was still in a cage that she had far outgrown. I immediately opened the cage to see Riley struggling to get out and stand. I asked how long she had been in there and Michelle replied with a nonchalant tone, “Almost always because Ben doesn’t like the dog.”

I exploded at Michelle, yelling about how inhumane it was to keep a dog in those conditions and that I would be taking Riley home. This caused Michelle to lash back at me, demanding that I leave. It was not until I started packing up Riley’s food that I noticed Michelle had started to cry.

The crying had turned into a panic attack. After twenty minutes of breathing exercises, she finally calmed down to a normal breathing pattern. Michelle would go on to reveal all the secrets that she had been hiding from my family and me: how much she hated living in such a place and how the work that she put into fixing their apartment was messed up when Ben had his friends over, which was almost every night. Michelle also confessed that she had dropped out of Saddleback during her second semester because Ben needed more of her attention. Michelle had not told anyone yet and

I knew that it would not go over well with my family. She also confided to me that she spent a lot of her savings so that Ben could buy a car while she still paid her share of the rent. Another truth came out when she told me the real reason for not coming home: Ben hated my family and didn't want anything to do with us. With all this sinking in, I tried to hold back my urge to scream at her for being so stupid and leaving our family for someone who could not have been more of a setback in her life. It wasn't until she turned to the side to grab more tissues that I noticed how thin she had gotten. I stepped back and took a good look at her. Michelle had lost most of her weight, her hair was thin and falling out, and she had a bruise on her right arm. We both went quiet when she saw me examining her body; she knew I had noticed. Knowing she no longer had anything else to hide, she confessed that Ben had thrown her against the wall multiple times and forced sex on her. This made me extremely sick and furious. I began to tremble, thinking that not only was this man tearing Michelle away from my family; he also had been physically and emotionally abusing her throughout their time together. I will never know why I did not tell someone right away. When I went home, I told my mom about how much fun Michelle and I had and that she was doing well. In reality, she had fallen into a deep depression and was living with an abuser.

Over the past few weeks, I visited Michelle frequently while Ben was away and continued to tell her to leave him. She would tell me how much she hated him and wanted to leave but still stayed. Her reasons for not leaving him included the fact that he owed her money and they had signed a six-month lease; whatever the excuse, it was never the right time. When she finally did come over, my parents could see something was wrong. They pounded her with questions, but nothing got her to tell the truth. Michelle had gotten noticeably worse; her long brown hair was shorter than her shoulders and had lost its color and volume, and her body had gotten significantly smaller. The whole time I thought I was being a good sister in keeping this between us, but I was wrong. If there was ever a time to tell my parents, it was now while she was still in the room. I took advantage of this opportunity. I took a deep breath in and exhaled the news out. It was not long until

it turned into a night of constant tears, yelling, and disappointment. I was shocked to hear Michelle defending Ben throughout the conversation and telling my parents how horrible they were to her. Ben had wanted to rip Michelle away from her family and friends, and he succeeded. The emotional abuse had brainwashed her into thinking everyone who cared for her were the ones against her. However, by the end of the discussion, my parents had gotten ready to move her stuff out that very night. They jumped in the car and set out for her apartment. Meanwhile, my sister was screaming and running down my street after them.

After a horrible few days, Michelle moved back into our house. We later discovered that her dog, Riley, had to be taken to the vet because she was lacking proper nutrition, was now too skinny, and would forever have health problems, such as not being able to have puppies of her own. Michelle was put on antidepressants and anxiety medication by a doctor. During this time, she continued talking to Ben and he continued to bash my family. The physical abuse may have stopped, but the emotional abuse continued a couple of months after. Michelle continued to sneak away to see Ben from time to time until she found out he had been cheating on her periodically throughout their two-year relationship. The news crushed her and caused her to sink deeper into sickness. For a long time after their split, Michelle found her outlet through alcohol, a technique she learned specifically from Ben. However, now she is learning to control those urges.

Michelle would have stayed with Ben forever and we would never know how far the abuse could have gone. Her idea of love was the kind that made her lose her friends, family, and future goals in life. This forever changed my sister and it has changed me as well.

This experience has taught me a serious lesson on how important it is to speak up and help someone who may not ask for it. Had I told someone sooner, maybe Michelle would not have had such trouble moving on and getting back to her healthy self. This has also taught me and my sister

that the correct form of love isn't the kind that takes us away from family, causes pain, or prevents us from succeeding in different aspects of life; it is the kind that encourages growth and positive energy, as well as accepts the person for who they are and all their hopes, dreams, and people in their lives. Day by day, I believe that Michelle will be able to return to school, regroup her old friends, return to her healthy self, and meet someone who will show her the true meaning of being in love.

Think Sleep

By *Madeline Mendiola*

I sat in the bush for eight hours. This was the happiest place on earth. The sun peeked through the leaves and warmed my face. She would come back for me. I knew she would. I needed her.

I sat and watched families rush back and forth, hoping to experience every ride before the park closed. Through the leaves I could see a big princess castle and the tippy tops of the roller coasters. It was a colorful place. I saw children giggling and playing with each other. It made me wonder why I never had friends.

The sun disappeared, and I got cold and tired in the dark. I tucked my arms into my t-shirt, but I couldn't fall asleep. What if she came back for me but couldn't find me because I fell asleep in this bush? No, I couldn't fall asleep. I started counting how many times a family would pass me by on the crosswalk. I began to recognize every face. There was a blonde lady with a bright orange fanny pack and almost ten kids following her. There was an Asian family who I couldn't understand, but when they spoke they sounded anxious, like they were in a hurry. Every time I saw a brunette woman walk by, I remembered and my heart would begin beating as if it would tear out of my chest in pure hope that it was her. But it never was.

A little girl sat in front of the ice cream stand just a couple yards away from me. She was wearing a light pink, flowing princess dress that would glitter when the light rays from the street lamps brushed across it. She begged her father for ice cream and she sat and she cried and she cried until her face was bright red and her cry was just a whisper. Her father kept repeating, "No, sweetheart. We don't have enough money."

Why is money so important? It's just paper. I could tear it in half. I could smash it with my hand. I could stomp it on the ground until it was just dirt. I'm dirt.

"I can't afford you anymore."

That was the last thing she said to me before she left. But I don't understand. Why do you have to afford me to stay with me? I told her I would clean my room and I wouldn't cry anymore. I promised I would walk to school every day so she would never have to drive me and I would even plant my own vegetables in the backyard so she didn't have to feed me anymore. I would do anything to just be with her. I needed her.

But I was alone. I sat and turned my mind off. I called it think sleep because sometimes it was better not to think anything. I would think sleep when men would come over. I would think sleep when I could hear their voices and groans from my mother's bedroom. My face was emotionless and my eyes were empty. I believe these were the moments I looked most like my mom. I started to think sleep and minutes turned into hours. The breeze swept across my face and I stared at the leaves and the veins in the leaves and the ant on a leaf. The first thought I had after that was that everything seemed too quiet, especially for Disneyland.

I peeked above the bush to see the people, but there was only one now. It was the man standing behind the ice cream counter. He picked up a broom and started sweeping the trash down behind the stand and walked over to the trash can. He removed the lid and tied the bag shut. I was jealous of him for a moment. I watched as his muscles flexed as he lifted the bag out of the trash can. He looked strong. He looked nothing like me.

Still cold and hidden in my bush, I looked at my small, skinny fingers and my scarred, pale arms and I got angry. I was furious. They were useless. They couldn't help make money so I wouldn't have to hear her moaning cries every night from inside of my room. They couldn't help protect her when big dirty men went into her room and left money on the counter before they walked out the door. They couldn't grab onto her shirt and force her to stay with me. They couldn't reach her face to wipe the tears away from her empty brown eyes. They couldn't make her happy.

All of a sudden I felt small. Smaller than I ever had before. I felt consumed and overpowered by the bush that surrounded me. The leaves poked my face and my arms and my ears, and I felt sick.

My stomach started flipping and clenching, and I felt all of my insides rise. It burned in my throat and I puked putrid chunks all over the leaves.

I walked out of the bush with tears streaming down my face and blurring my vision. I cried for the first time in my life. I screamed “Give me your hands!” and I fell to my knees and smacked both of my fists with my small insignificant amount of strength into the empty pavement of the crosswalk. The man, startled, ran over to me. I couldn’t understand him. There was ringing in my ears and my sobs heaved out of my chest. Snot dripped down my upper lip.

He knelt before me and in a horrified tone asked me things like “Where are your parents?” and “Son, are you okay?” But I wasn’t okay. Not now. I knew she wasn’t coming back and now I have seen the darkness in the happiest place on earth. There was no going back.

Broken Arrow

By Christy Nelson

it is morbid

i know

but for thirty-two days

we gathered around the blood stained cement

of the driveway down broken arrow

it took twelve of us to encompass it

that is how much blood there was

we lit candles and held hands

we held each other and cried

we grieved in that driveway

because he had the presence of mind

to shoot himself outside

one day we found the evidence torn up

they laid new cement

that had already dried

but if it had been wet

we would have scratched this sentiment:

“Mike’s blood was here”
and next to it
we would have written the day and the year

that would have been cruel
i know

but he made a choice
only halfway through seventh grade
and the gravity of his choice

to end his life before it starts

was grounded and carved
into our soft, wet hearts

Tuesday

By James McDonnell

Tuesday's Child is Full of Grace . . .

No, I do not regret my life and I am at peace as it ends. Some say it is a pity I will die and I am only fourteen, but I have outlived my batch by many years. I am a lucky girl.

Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday were awfully deformed and ended before they reached two years old. Saturday and Monday lived until they were five and six, and then they were ended. I do not know why. They looked okay to me. Friday and I went on for five more years, but then she got sick and died in her sleep, so Doctor Betty did not have to end her.

I am Tuesday, last of the seven *Wunderkinder* as Doctor Betty called us. She said I am a success in having lasted this long. Jerome says my life is a gift from God.

Jerome is the man who brings me my food and medication in the evenings, after Doctor Betty and all the others who wear the white coats leave the Medical Center to go home. I asked Jerome what home is and he says, "It's a place those folk go to eat, shower an' if time allows, visit with their families." I like Jerome. His skin is dark and wrinkled, his hair is white, and he smiles a lot. When he comes at night, after Doctor Betty goes to her home, I read to him from my diary, we talk, and I call him Brother Jerome. He is my family.

He brings me things to read. Doctor Betty also lets me read. I am very intelligent. But the things Jerome brings me to read, Doctor Betty does not like. Once she found me reading a news magazine that Jerome brought me and took it away. She was very mad at Jerome. Now we have a special place where we hide the magazines and books he brings me.

In the magazines, I sometimes read stories about the *Wunderkinder*. The reporters seem to

know a lot about my batch mates and me. When I was younger, I remembered the bright lights and the flashes from the reporters' cameras and how Friday and I were the center of attention. It was scary but fun. When a reporter asked us what it felt like to be clones, Doctor Betty got angry and we could not see the reporters anymore. I asked Doctor Betty what a clone was, but she did not tell me.

I had a nice room where I could look out the window and see trees going up the hill behind the Medical Center. A reporter took a picture of me from the hill last year and Doctor Betty moved me to another room inside. My room has no windows and I do not like the white light.

In one magazine I read late at night, it said that there was a court battle going on to determine who owned me. The Matilda Hart Foundation said that the medical research center where I live and Doctor Betty had violated the terms of the research grant regarding the last surviving clone (they mean me) and they wanted to take possession of their property. They put a picture of Matilda Hart in the magazine. She was an old lady. She looks very nice. The story said she was rich and gave all her money to the Medical Center if they could produce a viable clone of her. The Foundation said Doctor Betty failed because all the others died of abnormalities, and I was sick and dying too. The magazine had two pictures of girls at the bottom of the article. A picture of a pretty girl about my age was in black and white; under it were the words, "Matilda Hart, age 14." Next to it was the picture the reporter on the hill took of me. It said, "Tuesday, the clone of Matilda Hart." I looked at the two pictures and then over at the mirror. I wear thick glasses, my face is much thinner, and my hair is flat and patchy from the treatments. We do not look much alike.

I cannot ask Doctor Betty about Matilda Hart or about cloning because she will know that I have been reading magazines again and she will take them away. She is not a mean person, but I asked her once if she had any children. She seemed sad and said no, she and her husband could not have children. I told her I could be her daughter and she smiled at me for the first time. On Mother's Day, I made her a card that showed her, me, and her husband holding hands and it said "Happy Mother's Day." She never talked to me about it again.

Anyway, I know what a clone is because I read about it in the magazines. It means I was born with no mother or father. I am only a copy of Matilda Hart. She must have been worthwhile making copies of, but I think I am a disappointment to Doctor Betty because I am not like Matilda Hart.

It confuses me that I am someone else and not me.

I have a Bible that Jerome brought to me, and it has pretty, gold-lined pages and a red leather cover. When it is late and I cannot sleep, he reads me stories from it. He tells me about Jesus and his mother Mary and his father God. Doctor Betty says there is no God, but Jerome says there is.

I like Mary best because she is a good mother who took care of the baby Jesus. I was sad for Jesus when he died, but he would rise again, so I was not as sad for him as I was for Mary. It must be hard for a mother to see her child die. She must have been very sad and cried. Doctor Betty does not cry. No one here cried when Friday died, except me.

Mary went to Heaven to be with her child, Jesus. I asked Jerome if a clone could go to Heaven. He says I will go there if I believe. I want to believe because I want to go to Heaven. I guess Doctor Betty will not go to Heaven because she does not believe in it. Maybe if she did, she would.

I am not human. I was not born. Doctor Betty made me in a lab. I am a product of a manufacturing process. Did she remember to put a soul into me? Jerome says to me, "Princess, it don't matter which oven you come from; you are a child of God. He'll find anyone and give 'em a soul." I like when Jerome calls me Princess.

When I was twelve, I was still able to walk. That was before my bones started to get worse; now I have to be pushed around in a wheelchair. I used to sneak out at night, go with Jerome to the roof of the Medical Center, and look out over the city. I liked the swings that they have on the roof for the kids in the pediatric wards. I never saw any kids playing, but I learned how to use the swings, thanks to Jerome. He pushed me a little, but when he did I felt free. I did something other kids do and that made me happy, like I was almost normal. When the sky got lighter, we had to go back to the room because he said if we got caught, "Doctor Betty'll have your head!" I don't know what that

means, but it did not sound good. He promised that one day he would let me see the sunrise over the East Bay hills. Jerome says it is the most beautiful sight in the world.

Today I was not feeling well, and all the doctors and technicians gathered around me. They whispered and looked at me like they did when I fell and broke my hip. I think I should be worried, but I am not. They put me on a monitor and gave me some shots.

When Jerome came in, I told him that I was feeling funny all day. We talked and I reminded him that he promised to show me the sunrise. We talked all night and when it was late, he put me into the wheelchair and took me to the roof. He put me into the swing because he knew I liked it. I cannot sit up straight, so he held me up. The sky became lighter and then I saw the golden sun rising over the hills. It was very beautiful and it made me very happy.

I asked him if when I got to Heaven, would I meet other kids there? Would I be like them? He said that I would see my sisters there and all the kids would want to play with me. I could run around the clouds, play hide-and-seek for eternity if I wanted to. He said that in Heaven I would be a real princess. He hugged me from behind and kissed my head. I put my hand up on his face and felt his tears.

I am back in my room now and it is hard for me to think. I am tired. I will finish this tomorrow.

A Broken Past

By Korinne Kornmann

When Ava heard the news, she did not know how to feel. The truth was she stopped feeling anything for him a long time ago. The last time they spoke was enough to deal with for a lifetime. *But now this? I would have to be downright robotic to not feel anything about this . . . right?*

She just kept going back to those old memories—the time in her life when everything was so carefree, when she saw him as the fun parent, not the destructive one.

It was just an ordinary day in the first grade. Ava sat quietly at her desk, working on her grammar worksheet. Her strawberry blonde hair was up in pigtail braids and her baby pink flower print dress matched perfectly with her new pink and white Converse tennis shoes. She heard her teacher call her name and saw her dad standing in the classroom doorway.

“We’re going to Disneyland,” her father said.

“Dad, I have school today,” Ava said with concern.

“You don’t anymore,” he replied.

He grabbed her hand and started to sprint to the car.

They spent the whole day at Disneyland. It was one of the best times Ava ever had. Which is why she did not understand why her mother was so visibly upset when they walked into the front door of their house that night.

The third grade science fair was the next day and Ava had spent all week preparing her project on the solar system. Each planet was represented by a colored Styrofoam ball that hung in orbit around a metal wire stand. She was so proud of it that she left it on display in the kitchen

for both her parents to see. Her dad walked in, stopped, and stared at the project with a stunned expression. “Ava this can’t be your final project! No way, it needs color—yes more color.”

Ava was confused but saw how excited he got at the thought of adding color, so she decided to just go along with him.

Her dad placed the project in the garage and began to splatter paint all over it, almost giving it a tie-dye effect. Ava soon joined in and couldn’t believe her eyes when she saw her new final project. It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. She loved how her dad always knew how to make things fun. Suddenly, her mom came into the garage in a tempestuous rage.

The fifth grade father-daughter weekend was all Ava could think about. She had never been camping before so getting the chance to do it with all her friends and their dads was so exciting. She waited for her dad to return from the market and then they would go. When he came back, Ava couldn’t believe her eyes—more candy and junk food than she had ever seen in her life. She knew her mom would freak out if she knew. *Good thing Mom is at work.* They hit the road and met up with all the other dads and daughters at the campsite.

When it was time to make dinner, Ava’s dad did not help. Instead he pulled Ava aside and told her to pretend she was an adventurer exploring the forest. They ran around looking at trees, nature, and all of the animals. Ava had a blast, and her dad seemed to be enjoying it even more than she was.

When they got back, the other dads seemed to roll their eyes and speak in annoyed muttered tones. Ava never understood the way people acted around her dad. *He is the best daddy in the world. No one is as fun as my daddy.*

No one is as fun? Try no one is as selfish as my . . . She couldn’t even say the word in thought. As she paced back and forth under the shade of the tree next to the church, she watched

more and more people make their way into the church for the service. It was so easy for them to go into that door because none of them knew him like she used to know him. He did not build any relationship with them only to break it down. She did not have a dad, or at least she had not had one in a long time.

Now at age 24, most things in Ava's life were drastically different. She was an account associate at Goldman PR, a firm in New York, and lived in a respectable neighborhood in SoHo. She was now a brunette but still had her pin-straight hair. She had defiantly transformed into a New York girl—far from the troubled home life she escaped back in Texas. The only good thing to come out of her realizing the reality of her dad's condition was that she was able to patch up the rocky relationship she had built with her mom. In fact, she was closer than ever with her mom after many heart-to-hearts and excessive apologies on her part. Her mom understood how hard it all must have been to understand as a little girl.

But understanding came from the bad memories that filled Ava's mind and infected it like a virus seeking to break her down.

“Dad, what are you doing? We could have just been killed! You can't make turns like that.”

“Don't worry about it, Ava. We're fine—fine and hungry! Let's get ice cream.”

“Dad, take me home now, you are acting crazy,” screamed Ava.

“Okay, no ice cream. Laser tag! You love laser tag. Let's go!”

“Dad, it is eleven at night and I have my first varsity tennis match tomorrow.”

“Fine, but we will have to race!”

“Dad, stop! You are scaring me!”

“Steve, I will not let you put Ava in danger anymore. Take your medication or leave. Do not take it for a week and stop. Do not lie and say you are out and going to get more. You have one

choice. Take them every day or leave.”

“Wow, aren’t you on your high horse today. Me and Ava both think you are the crazy one.”

“Steve, get out! Leave and don’t come back until you can be a benefit to her life, not a curse.”

There were plenty of other memories or conversations she could choose to remember. The time he thought it would be okay to barge up on stage at her high school graduation and make inappropriate jokes; the time he showed up at her college dorm room thinking it was a good idea to play a joke on her roommate and pretend to be robbing their dorm—that was a particularly bitter memory, as it was never the same with her roommate after that. Of all these memories she could think of, all the bad and even the good, there was one missing. If she had that one memory, she would already be in the church waiting to pay respect to the man who once was her father. But sadly, she could not make her legs move from under the tree’s shade for she could never remember a time that her dad put her above his disorder.

He was selfish enough to ruin their relationship. If he cared more about her, maybe he would have taken his medication. *If I was his little girl and he loved me, why was that not enough motivation? Why did his mind always win over his feelings for me?* With those questions still burning deep inside and forgiveness nowhere in sight, Ava walked away from the church, away from all the people inside, and for the last time, away from all the memories that brought her there that day.

To Carry on the Family Name

By *Ambrose Cappuccio*

You should've hid yourself better
Than the bathroom. It's so expected.
Like forgetting your coat. The noose in
The closet, piercing the boy behind a buck,
Perfect's secret, real love that just disappears,
The one time "drive safe" slipped your mind.

You could've tried backwards jumper cables
In your son's Spitfire, off the beautiful Anacapri
While grandma was dreamt away to paradise,
Or a Limoncello/Drano shot at least.

Here.
A toast to your heritage, to legacy,
To blood.

We would've never known its purpose
Was to fuse the fungi out of your sad, sorry age
Into ours.

Personally,
I can only sneak sips
Of what that new nectar was to you—
Of what my mad dad was to you;
The second name that you puked
Out as the poison played its part.
After yours, of course.
You're the first of us, mopped up
So far.

But you checked out boring,
Relieving yourself silly on our brand
New Terra-Cotta bathroom floor.
The same place your son fucked his succubus
While you brooded a fissure in the mouth
Or through the temple.

You mustn't have slept that night just before
His laugh was hard to listen to, I'm sure.
Your son smiled all wide, all night,
As you awaited paparazzi at your
Barrel Behind the Porcelain Bowl.
Where flip-side your flimsy feet, bent under
The marble sink like a pitted puppet,
You wore your mind like a pillow;
The impossible to tolerate pool of blood
That drowns the cracked tile to make
A leafless tree,
Meager'd,
Before maroon sky,
Starless,
Blossomless,
The rest of us.

The rest of our family
You pulled out from under dirt;
All the roots to black ash,
To grey soot,
And washed us a weak pied beast.

With a grandfather's pride,
Would you apologize if my father
Just desired to grovel
Into his own line of fire?
He's lost your touch—
He's losing his touch now
My touch.

I only hope, when I do lose mine
I go like Pollock did—
Question'd down past his dust.



Illustration by Candice Lowney

Box of Memories

By Kyle Sanacore

Of all my worldly possessions, the most important holds no monetary value. My old Marine Corps uniforms are neatly folded in a box and are always treated delicately. Some are caked with dust and dirt of countries with names I cannot pronounce anymore. All have been washed several times, but remain as stiff as cardboard from the sweat they have absorbed. They symbolize all the work, hard times, friendships, and sacrifices I have made over the past five years. Memories come rushing back to me as I open a storage box.

Although they do not carry the stories, my dress uniforms display all of my accomplishments. The most important of them is my Humanitarian Assistance Medal. We provided shelter and delivered tons of food to millions of Pakistanis affected by massive flooding. Next is a medal many Marines look down upon, but I do exactly the opposite. The National Defense Service Medal is given to those who volunteer to serve during a time of war. Less than 1% of our nation has served our country, and even less have the distinction of serving during wartime. The last medal that stands out is our Meritorious Unit Commendation. Our unit was chosen to be a part of the president's echelon of security while he was visiting India.

Unlocking the boxes of my camouflage uniforms reminds me of how close all Marines get when put in horrible situations. One of my fondest memories is when our platoon was kicked out of our barracks. Through absolute misery, our platoon was brought closer together. It was the middle of winter and a couple of Marines were caught with trash in their room. Our whole platoon was hustled out of the barracks with all of our gear and marched into the dark. We had no lights and no idea what our destination was. Three miles later, we arrived on a field covered with about six inches

of snow. We were told that we did not deserve rooms and would spend the night in the field. Though cold, tired, and hungry, we decided to make the most of the situation. We organized a snowball fight and built a giant Nazi snowman to represent our fascist leadership. The chain of command was less than impressed with our antics, but it brought all of us together and gave us the feeling of being untouchable.

As I run my hands down into the box of uniforms, my hand catches on a frayed piece of fabric of what used to be the right knee of the camouflage fatigue. As a Marine, you take a knee whenever you can. It's relaxed enough to relieve some stress on your muscles, but gives you a low silhouette and a stable platform to shoot from. One green pair of my fatigues that are ripped to shreds reminds me of my closest experience with an explosive. As our squad was making our way down an embankment, I suddenly felt a lift off the ground with a deafening sound and a flash so bright, it temporarily blinded me. I was brought back to reality with the sound of gunfire and two Air Force soldiers kneeling beside me. I wondered, "Am I alive? Do I have all my teeth?" After moving all my extremities, I was back in the fight: kneeling, shooting, and directing my men to effectively engage the enemy.

Life is not about the material things that you gather. It is the symbolism they possess, what the memories inside them mean. Most people see a box of old raggedy, smelly uniforms. To me, there is nothing that I will ever own that will mean more to me than my Marine Corps utilities. They carry stories that will stay with me forever. They remind me of times when I was miserable, thought I could not go any further, and how my friends came together to support each other. I hope the memories do not fade, and every time I open the box, it will always take me back to that place with my brothers-in-arms.

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