
THE ART & LITERATURE JOURNAL OF
NAUGATUCK VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Fresh Ink
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The Art and Literature Journal of
Naugatuck Valley
Community College

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"No voice is hush'd—no life treads silently,
But clouds and cloudy shadows wander free,. . . "

from Thomas Hood's "Silence"
1799-1845



Fresh Ink 2019

was honored with

2nd place

in the 2019 Community College Humanities Association's
Magazines from Small Colleges:
Eastern Division Competition
&
in Poems: Eastern Division

***1st Place** went to Kristen Marcano for*
"Zora Neale Hurston and Luke Turner Reunite"
&
***2nd Place** went to Sevastian Volkov for "Sea"*

Congratulations!

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Friends of Fresh Ink,
Regards come to you and yours from my living room couch. I hope you are well and safe from this storm.
Outside, cold April rain beats on, and a fierce breeze threatens to break
My wind chimes…. (I hear their chaotic clang and wonder if I should brave the darkness and with a clumsy crush to my chest, silence them to be still on the grass). Also, your

Questions, asked about the status of our 2020 journal, have been heard….
Understandably, COVID-19 obstacles arose, but so did solutions…. We made due…. (My little 8G laptop proved itself more capable than I credited it….) So,
Artists and authors,
Rest assured, our printing company, once closed due to COVID concerns, has reprimed its presses, so
A 51st edition of
NVCC's Art and Literature Journal will present your creations, your wonders, your words, to our world….
To this world that on this wild night is being bathed by this bracing rain….
I sit in my home thinking of you all, putting faces to your poems, your paintings… hoping you're safe and secure in peaceful repose, but
Now I am haunted by your presence. My eyes, cataracted, clouded, plan to scan the pages again, concerned by
Errant commas? Misspelled names? Without paper and printer, how do I proof?

Instead of opening the file again, I settle into myself....

Please join me in a long breath….
Read through these pages and revel in the joy of our making.
All of us here have shared our selves.
Yes, this journal will be proofed and printed. We will hold it in our hands, and in the Fall we will remember these days that we were held silent in quarantine, praying for breath.

Jeannie Evans-Boniecki

DELIBAL OR MAD HONEY



Sarah Kushwara

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*denotes an NVCC student author or artist

WINTER ISLAND



Jane Linnel*

THE REAL HEROES - FIRST PLACE

Autumn Dempsey*

His Bronze Star collects dust in the oak dresser left of the hospital bed.
A scratched silver dog tag hangs in the back of the closet.
He will never boast,
but he will never forget.

Years have passed since 1965, and
the six years dedicated to the First Air Calvary
still fixed in his mind.

His brown eyes are filled with stories
that live on as memories.
His sacrifices trail him for life, like a shadow.
Each day he fights a battle we may not be able to see.

His legacy continues
in that faded Army cap he wears religiously.
He is valor.
He is devotion.
He wears red, white, and blue on his sleeve.

When he hears the Star-Spangled Banner play,
he rises from his wheelchair, bound by nothing,
and steadily places his hand over his heart.

AURORA FIRST PLACE

Jason Hesse*

As the last data tower clicked back into its housing, an effusive cheer resounded throughout the upper levels of the Aurora. Smiles and laughs erupted forth, and the five crew members gave each other heartfelt hugs and voiced their congratulations over and over at their marked accomplishment.

At long last their mission was complete; they could finally return home to Earth.

Eventually the merriment simmered down to a low boil and Captain John Warren stood up to address them all.

"It's a damn fine job you've done, each one of you. I just wanted to say how impressed I am with the dedication, tenacity, and—by God, I'll say it—incompetence displayed by every single person on this damn ship. I mean, really Peter? How long did it take you to realize when Danny rearranged your astrological data to look like Albert Einstein?"

Peter wrinkled his nose, still smiling. "A few hours."

"Give or take a few days!" Danny shouted from the other side of the bridge. The crew broke into fresh laughter.

"Or Sarah, when you misplaced the gravimeter?"

"Misplaced? You mean victimized by theft, right?" she said, shooting a very conspicuous glare at the ship engineer, Maria.

Maria shrugged, failing to hide her sizeable smirk. "It turned up."

Fresh laughs arose, even from John before he continued.

"What I'm trying to say is, despite the pranks, the bad luck, any setbacks we encountered, you all came together and triumphed in spite of it all. A unit greater than the sum of its parts. We did something great here, and you've all earned a little rest. We'll be back at NASA HQ soon enough, and then," he said, pausing for effect with a gleam in his eyes, "then the real party begins."

John stepped down from his impromptu podium to join his crew as they settled into their success.

"Oh and one last thing," he shouted above the merriment, "set us a course, Danny! Take us home!"

"Can't it wait, Cap? We're celebrating," he said, his disappointment bordering on genuine.

John just gave him a grin. “The sooner we get going, the sooner you can see that beautiful Laurie of yours again.”

Danny gave an exaggerated salute. “Aye aye, Cap, right away! Full sails, open throttle, pedal to the metal!” He strapped himself down into the pilot’s chair and excitedly began entering the ignition sequence and coordinates for their return.

Peter let his gaze fall to the port side of the bridge. “Let’s open her up, John. One last look before we go.”

Another round of cheers overwhelmed the room and John rose to his feet, his hands up in helpless surrender. “I worry if I say no I’ll be the victim of the first ever space lynching.”

He moved to the wall and accessed one of the terminals, punching in a few code sequences. Once the last one dinged confirmed, the port side wall of the bridge began to slowly retract, revealing a reinforced window to the starscape beyond.

Outside was the stunning view of the target of their months of research: the M87 supermassive black hole. For a moment, the mirth among them dissolved into wonder as they marveled before the brilliant revolving disc of color, the dusty cloud further out, and the streaming jets of light erupting from the poles of the event horizon.

“Oh shit,” Sarah muttered, her face transitioning from awe to alarm. “We’re too close. Much too close.” She immediately raced over to the starboard computer terminals and began to hastily access the navigational software.

“Danny?” John said, doing his best to mask his creeping sense of worry.

“We’re fine, Cap. Nav gear says we’re right on the edge of orbit. Just finishing the trajectory for the auto-pilot.”

“No, no, no. It’s wrong,” Sarah said, “there must be some sort of malfunction. Hell, just look at her, doesn’t she look much closer than she ought to be?”

What was left of the mirth died in the wake of her unanswered question. A silence descended onto the bridge, save for the frantic typing of a lone physicist. Every other member of the crew was now once more gazing at the phenomenon before them, fear creeping onto all of their faces.

“…Danny?” John repeated.

“Look, Cap, everything in front of me is saying we’re

five by five, on course for home. Maybe the light's just playing tricks…."

"Even if it is, better safe than sorry. Set us up to fly straight away, under the very possible assumption we're being pulled straight to the heart of her."

Danny still clung to a mask of optimism. "But Cap…."

"Now, Daniel."

"Yes, sir."

John strode over to Sarah. "How do we look?"

"That's just it, Captain, the systems are normal. You'd think that alarms would be going off everywhere, but according to the hardware everything is completely fine."

"And what would cause that?"

"Some sort of gravitational interference? Can't be sure though, I'd have to run some tests. But I suppose it's possible that...." Her eyes went wide as she turned to look back out at their potential fate. "Oh God...."

"Sarah?" Maria was moving to look over her shoulder at the terminals. "What is it?"

Sarah raced across the bridge to the gravimeter. She powered it on and punched in a few numbers. After a few seconds, it beeped once. Sarah turned to look at the rest of them, her face now engulfed with terror.

"We're on an inspiral."

The bridge erupted into chaos: Maria, John, and Danny all checking instruments and entering desperate commands while Sarah remained frozen, eyes agape at the growing monstrosity outside their craft. Peter collapsed into his chair and wept. Maria and Danny shouted at each other over the consoles, all the while frantically searching for a solution. After a few minutes, John marched over to where Sarah stood, still motionless, when the buzz of the intercom stopped him in his tracks.

Music began to play, plagued by static, over every speaker on the ship. A somber, haunting, seductive melody. They listened in their silence as it captured them, enveloped them, reaching all the way down to the pits of their stomachs. It sauntered on, the static slowly giving way to complete, solemn clarity as the Aurora drifted inevitably towards the invisible pit of the unknown beyond the event horizon.

WHEN HE SPEAKS OF YOU

Mary Tetreault

When he speaks of you,
I see an angel sliding by.
His eyes turn gray with longing;
The sky takes back its blue.
I cry with him, sobbing,
While his quiet tears fall on my hair.
In this moment I am a stand-in for you, his only love;
in prayers I beg to take your place.
His gentle words are for what might have been;
soft wings swoop low and hold us both.
You could not have been his everything,
but he will never know.
His dreams for life with you are pale and muted,
and his words hold promises to keep you in his heart.
His voice is somehow musical,
as if set to harps and flutes (and wings).
I stand here with a hurting man,
and see the boy he was the day you passed away.
He talks of this always - why you and not him? The cruelty of God.
I sooth and whisper and smell your jasmine scent.
You loved him, too;
why did you lose your way and stumble into heaven?

A CROW IN SYCAMORE- FIRST PLACE



Charlotte Silver*

TO THE PIZZA GIRL

Natalie Schriefer

You ring the doorbell at half-past six,
tendrils of sunlight illuminating the hall.
You carry three boxes in your arms,
corners notched into your elbows.
Look at you, carrying all that,
my mother fusses. *You're so strong.*

Mom has never cooed over a delivery boy,
and her voice sounds like my uncle's,
who, years ago, told me I couldn't carry
a propane tank so then I had to,
the metal ridge cutting into my fingers.
When I deposited it on the driveway,
my uncle unlatched the bed of his truck
and called me strong—*for a girl.*

At the door, my mother pays
and you thank her before cutting
across the grass, summer sun yellowing
the yard, your shadow long,
and I want to apologize, tell you
what no one told me:
that we are capable of so much.

EXACT CHANGE

Kerry Heverling

She knew help wasn't coming. She came in, as always and started the routine. The coffee streaming into pots, the pad tucked in her back pocket, the huge overhead fan, sucking all the warmth from the room, muffling voices, in and out. She turned to see the people filling in and willed herself to begin.

Her customer was already here, at the far corner table, a young couple at the one next to his, three locals on counter stools, already hungry enough from plowing snow through the night to bypass her and start begging food from the cook. The bell on the door jingled as a family stomped in, a trail of brown slush in their wake, making a dark path up the center aisle, slippery now.

The local guys were easy- drop three coffees- they knew the menu, over-ordered to prove how hard they'd been working and went back to their chatter, bravado about all-nighters and overtime. She set a coffee and water on his corner table as she passed, feigning eye contact with the girl half of the couple so the customer wouldn't start to talk yet.

The couple was having a hard time deciding what they felt like. They were busy holding hands across the table and giggling about their own things.Their deal was clearly new. She could sense the family had settled in on the other end and were now waiting. Her customer's cane, as always, let go of the crook in the wall and met the floor with a lash.

She felt it, but kept here focus on the girl. They were trying to eat healthy she said, but they saw the butter going into the potatoes on the grill. It seemed a deadly amount. He wanted to try the homemade hash, but were there onions in it? He liked onions, he said, but they didn't like him. She could hear the kids at the far table, telling the parents they were hungry- a dragged-out announcement. The couple couldn't commit yet, so they ordered drinks and asked her to come back.

Her customer said to the room that he'd already finished his coffee.

The family was animated, feeling bold being out on this morning. The mother said she'd treat herself to real eggs in her omelet instead of the whites and butter on her toast. The father wanted his potatoes cooked until they were burned and then cooked some more or else he'd send them back.The kids wanted coffee and the mother decided that was fine, an indulgence given the cold and snow.

Her customer righted his cane and it immediately lashed again.

His usual breakfast ready, she dropped it at his table and moved to the couple.They hadn't given much thought to the menu, but they'd just take plain pancakes if she was in such a hurry to get their order.

Her customer cleared his throat and said to her that he had to laugh when he saw the young couple and got thinking about his own wife. He had been spoiled for all those years living with both of them, his wife and her mother. He never had to cook a meal- they made all the traditional German dishes for him, schnitzel, sausage and stews. She watched his steel-wool eyebrows rise and fall, and could nearly feel them scratching her. He had become a lieutenant on the force and the women were so proud. They loved to wash and starch his uniforms, a fresh one always hanging in the front of the closet. They liked to sit on either side of him on the couch.

She smiled, then motioned to the cook, who was taking her plates out as a reason to move along.The door jingled; the place filled more.The second waitress wasn't coming. Something about a sick cat, she'd been told. Her customer held his cup aloft.

Her customer wanted her to come to his house to help decorate the tree.He had boxes of glass and wooden ornaments from Germany. He had a gift for her, but would never remember to bring it in, so if she came to help, that would be perfect. He could give it to her then. People were

waiting for tables now, in a huddle by the door. He said he would be going soon but just wanted to show her a picture of him in uniform from his younger days. It was his wife's favorite. The women always said they felt safe having an armed man in the house.They had both passed away, sometime in the last five or six years, he said, and he had been on his own.

The couple must have finished quickly, as she saw them get up to walk out. She called after them to be safe in the snow. They left exact change for the food and on the back of the check, in all caps, one of them had written: THE SERVICE SUCKED.

The mother waved her down; the children needed hot chocolate. The coffee had been a mistake she said. Even with lots of sugar, it was too bitter for them to get down. She made the whipped cream so high that it tipped on the way to the table, another avalanche to clean.

Her customer waited and waited, but she did not go back over. Being the only waitress on a busy shift justified it, she said to herself. When she saw him finally prop the door with his cane, she rushed to clear his table for three young guys, antsy with adrenaline.They were celebratory, pleased with themselves for parking their snowmobiles on the hill, getting spaces in a place this busy. She wiped the crumbs and grabbed the check in one motion. With the two usual dollars, her customer had left the photograph. She could tell by its heft and a glimpse of the edge. She crumpled it with the junk from the table, stuffed everything in her apron and kept moving.

BAG LADY - THIRD PLACE

Jennifer Jones*

She wanders the streets aimlessly,
Heading whichever way the wind blows.
With tattered clothes and disheveled hair
She has no place to go.

Muddy green mittens cover her frail hands;
The fingers are cut out, numb and exposed,
Gripping a rusty shopping cart
She has no place to go.

Inside her cart, are a host of plastic bags.
The contents in her bags are worthless,
But it is not a misconception
That the contents in those bags,
Matches her-self-perception.

She is ignored, invisible to the crowd.
Although from time to time she is greeted
With looks of utter disgust,
She wishes and longs
For someone, anyone she can trust.

The only words that are spoken to her
Are by her stomach
Telling her it's time to eat.
She wanders to the nearest trash can,
Looking for any kind of treat.

Although her stomach is satisfied,
She bears a pain that no one knows.
She continues on her journey,
She has no place to go.

A GRANDMOTHER'S PRIDE



ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak

ALS - A LIFE SENTENCE

Jayanne Sindt

We watched with worry
As your body became a prison
And we longed for your comfort
Knowing your Spirit was trapped within

While your body slowly altered
You were never put aside
We loved you just the same
For we knew you were inside

And we accepted our new roles
Caretaker, jailer- Yet still friend
For the bonds of love run deep
Would our broken hearts ever mend?

Our visits became a schedule
Days quickly passed to years
And we lost sight of you in your eyes
Having to face our greatest fears

We decided to let you go
It is the way it has to be
You served your time with ALS
Now your soul has been set free

A SINGLE TEAR

Roberta Whitman Hoff

The nurses say it's not a real tear,
that happens all the time,
pools out of the orbital bone and down
on the face of a person in a coma,
his stilled tired cheek his wife has kissed
and rubbed against hers every sunrise,
his silent voice beyond the hearing
of busy people, nurses and doctors,
the science of an intensive care unit.

Inside this body his feelings live loudly
and he speaks only to himself perhaps
as if in a dream hearing
the outside world and trying to wake,
as if he were thinking what
he said yesterday, *I don't want*
to leave this body
this life with my wife, my young son,
how much I love and love . . . and long . . .

Try harder, he thinks and the sheets wrap his body
and he feels her hand breathe at the edge,
she is weeping silently in shallow breaths,
the doctors have said, *he won't wake,*
so she thinks the clean sheets wrap his dying skin
in a blessing as he cries in the void
encased by a wilderness of technology holding him
on as she holds his hand. Touch. A language
lingering on flesh, mind thinking a life
longing like a dream,
their blind spirits touch
in the air of the room,
a grieving stillness.

The nurse tells the wife that her presence
stabilizes his vitals on the screens at the desk.
The nurse smiles when she says this,
the wife feels there's hope in
the confusion, this inexplicable
language of coma,
the tear falling off his cheek
in the shape of a vase.

SKINNY FAT

Susan Bush

“don’t you dare get up from this table
without finishing your meat, “ she admonishes

as I squirm in protest at the chunk of pork fat
never wasted in the wartime she lived through

at bedtime she finally exhales
as she undoes her girdle, one clasp at a time

SPIRIT

Susan Bush

in time between dream and waking
I lie swaddled in wool blankets
as the spirit of my mother
peers through thick pink cloud dimensions
so that she can clearly see me

we are lying here together
in our blankets, two cats, and me
we are waking from a dream where
spirit mother was back with me

ANTHROPOCENE WINTER

Susan Bush

thin skies light wind pale afternoon

drought exposes jutted rocks in empty riverbed

I walk with purpose on a familiar path

perched upon my stone seat, I sip ginger tea

and begin counting my exhalations

as if giving back to the air
would replenish the river

NEVER MIND

Kristen Marcano

Oh, tell me that life is more than this!
Silence my sorrows with a tender kiss
And draw me up from this dank, dark abyss
Where I lie lonely, fallen.
Hope lies cold and forgotten
Another million miles below—
And I'm beginning to think
I'll find happiness if my soul sinks,
Slips where the living cannot go.

Give me reason not to lay down this head—
This ghost ship heart haunted by dreams long dead.
Joy, like a lover, left me adrift when she fled.
Now I have ceased awaiting her return.
A woman dies when she learns not to yearn.

When I was a girl, unscathed by pleasure or pain—
Rose-red fruit ripe for the plucking, unstained—
The sweet earth whispered, "What is it that you want?"
But a woman knows the question is a taunt—
That to answer is to proffer
Her Heavenly Punisher the very whip
That will leave her body broken,
Bloody and stripped
So don't tell me that life is more than this.
Just distract me with a little carnal bliss—
Lift me up out of this fuckery with your lips.
Time crushes all things; too soon the morning
Will sweep you off and leave me mourning
The reverie that was your skin on mine.
Worry not! No, don't you fear, love—
Here, just hold my body near, love.
Forget all I've said—never mind,
Never mind.

PREDATORY PROPERTY - SECOND PLACE

Mitchell Maknis*

Looking out the window,
at the paper white sandbox house,
she could feel it.
The isolation.
The silence.
She would miss it.

The chimney was crumbling,
the roof collapsing,
and massive fissures erupted
from the core of its foundation.

Broken windows exposed
The house's cavernous skeleton.
It was decrepit
but it never seemed to change.

Riddled with weeds,
and cloaked by carnivorous apple trees
the house was imperiled
by hungry flora,
pulling it down
into an earthy grave.

Within a week it was gone.
The murderous apple trees still stood.
Victorious.
Cloaking the scene of the crime.
Choking it.
Killing it.
She would miss it.

LOW POLY LANDSCAPE - SECOND PLACE



Vismel Marquez*

I TOLD YOU I COULD DO IT....

Jeannie Evans-Boniecki

As the English teacher handed back their essays, the students anxiously scanned the comments on their papers. She noted – “You know, it’s all about the connectors - the coordinators, the subordinators…. If you learn the “fanboys”, you can write long wonderful sentences and never have to worry about run-ons.”

The teens flipped through their writing, scanning the green marks in the margins, the circles, the squiggles. “Once you learn those,” the teacher continued, ‘you can really loosen up. I mean you can go on and on forever and never have to stop….”

She heard a few “Whatever”s and “Like you”s. She smiled, ‘And never get a green or a red mark on your paper, except maybe a “Well done!” or a “Wonderful!”. I’m not kidding…. A single sentence can create a whole world, tell a whole story, fill a whole page.’

She heard a few muffled harrumphs from behind their closed fists as if they were saying, if you had nothing better to do.

Undaunted, the teacher made her way to the front of the room and settled herself at the edge of her desk. With a deep breath, she tried to gauge her class’s interest and saw one or two cautiously intrigued faces. Feeling encouraged, she continued…. “Here, let me show you…. Give me a topic….”

The boy from the back called out, “Captain Price from Modern Warfare!”

The teacher hung her head…. “Really? Why video games and guns? Can’t you give me something different?”

“No, because they’re cool….”

“Of course. Give me one, then… video games or guns…. I can’t handle both.”

“Guns.”

“Ok, guns….” She let out a sigh. “Here goes….”

“The boy followed the chittering of the squirrel as it moved

through spring woods - his boots, a flopping two sizes too big, his rifle, a BB gun with scope fresh from the box hanging from his shoulder - but he stopped when he heard the chitters turn into a raucous commotion from the trees above, and he let his eyes scan the lightly leaved branches decorated with a spectacle of bursting buds, bright red and brown, about to give birth to summer, until his gaze rested upon a massive collection of old leaves clogging up the crotch of the split trunk of an aged oak and noted a flurry of tail and feather because a small hawk had decided to beat the boy to the kill and was attempting to relieve the mother squirrel of her burden of being a new April parent with pups' mouths to feed, but the boy was so stunned by the wrestling match twirling through the air and the ferocity of the mother as she barked and lunged at the hovering raptor as it threatened her nest that he suddenly longed to protect the little rodent that he had just spent the afternoon daydreaming about shooting straight through its beady eye so that he could hang her limp body from the strap of his Red Ryder and tramps back to brag to his grandpa, an old hunter and provider himself, about his stealth and cunning and the skill he had demonstrated stalking his prey, not to mention the steadiness of his aim and the accuracy of his shot, and to have his Pops show him how to make the cuts so that the squirrel skin would slide right off the meat like a bloody mitten into his hand, and his grandmother would come out onto the porch and watch them working together, him and his grandpops, until her eyes, already cloudy with cataracts, would glaze over even more with nostalgia of afternoons spent simmering pots of fat nutty squirrel stew rather than Mad cow fed ground chuck purchased at the local Sam's Club or Red Lion, that he dropped to his knee, and arched his back, squinting his eyes to the sun to get a better view through the site and aimed to blast the vengeful hawk clear out of the sky but when his little finger pulled the trigger and the wavering shot rang out above the din, the BBs only splattered the hawk. so it was only maimed and, with a quick crook of its neck, it noted its attacker and, in mid-flight, angled downward to flash its claws at the boy's jacket, to slash and stab its beak into the boy's face and the boy shrieked and waved his weapon to and fro to bash the poor bird, now the victim tangled in the

boy's hood, out of the air so that these two now wrestled in their own separate flurry of sparkling blue nylon, glowing black and red metal, and felt down feather, until one of the boy's blows rang true, and the dazed hawk landed on the ground, its wing bent low and dragging and its mouth gawking, shrieking in its own anger and defense, and the boy scrambled up and turned to run back through the woods, fording the fat stream and crashing through the pricker hedge at the back of his grandparents' yard to finally collapse onto their porch swing, crying and shaking, trying to catch his breath, blood leaking 'like the letter "L" from his forehead' onto the flowered plastic porch swing cushion, all the while hoping the momma squirrel and her kits were, like him, going to see tomorrow, and he trembled and trembled at the thought that he had saved them and that he felt honorable and good, which was how he was when his sister, five years his senior, found him, and he ached to tell her what he'd felt when he'd looked through that site aimed at the wild bird but more toward the sky, but he stopped when he heard her cry out in her shrill voice, so superior and condescending, to his grandparents watching t.v. inside the house, "Bobby's gone got himself hurt playing with that damn gun you all got him last birthday!" and "I told you it was no kind of toy for a baby!" because his story got stuck in his throat because what she'd said just wasn't, just wasn't, just wasn't what had happened and it just wasn't, just wasn't, just wasn't so…."

…and the teacher drew in her breath and smiled at her class, pleased at her own fun, having even slightly amazed herself.

"See? I told you I could do it – a story in one sentence," she laughed. "I told you it could be done."

One boy looked at her dead pan and raised his hand like an L for her to see, but then he smiled. and let out a low chuckle.

"Just bustin' you, Miss. That was cool."

The rest of the class nodded in agreement, "Cool...."

FALLEN



Sandra Eddy

THE MONSTERS WITH THE HEADLIGHTS

Joe A. Sainz

I want to cross to the other side, Mother. I know I can make it.
I want to cross the gray, hard grass with the double yellow line in the middle.
And I know I can make it; I can. There's unexplored land there.

You can't; you can't. The monsters with the headlights will kill you.

But I know I can make it; I can.

Look what happened to the possum. There he lies in a heap—in disgrace.

But he does not lie in disgrace; he died trying.
But there may be better acorns on the other side. I must find out.

No, you don't. You should stay here where it's safe and happy.

No. I must cross. I'll be careful.

Careful? The skunk was careful. Smell that in the air? That's all that's left of him.

I'll go at night so I can see the monsters' headlights.

You had a brother once. His tail is hanging in our nest. That was all we could find.

But I can do it. I know I can.

No, you can't. You should stay here where it's safe and happy.
Look what happened to the groundhog.

He ran across without looking. I can do better.
But look what happened to the rabbit. We had to take care of her babies.

She stopped in the middle to look. I can do better.

But look what happened to the snake; he got squashed.

He was too slow; I'll cross fast. I can do better.

You don't know if you can do better. You should stay here where it's safe and happy.

But if great grandpa hadn't crossed, we wouldn't have a tree to live in.
And if grandpa hadn't crossed, he wouldn't have built our nest.
And if grandma hadn't crossed with him, none of us would be here.
And if …

Your father?

Yes.
He would still be alive, safe and happy if he had not crossed.

But, why did he cross?

To save you when you were a baby, son… to save you.

Is that why I only have three legs?

Yes.

I still must go.

You're right, son. I'm sorry.

Sorry for what?

For holding you back. Go ahead and cross with my blessing.
Go, my son. Go with your head held high.
Go, and do not stop.

OUR BATTLEFIELD

Dylawnie Woods*

I come to, dazed, and too exhausted to move. My eyes dart around, barely able to make out the foul scene of despair in front of me. I look up, bloody and tired, hunger the only thing on my mind.

Dozens of my comrades that I've eaten with, and laughed with, lay lifeless in near-neat rows around my feet. Terrified, I almost convince myself that they are playing dead, praying like prey that the predator they face will leave them be.

Those that have yet to fall and continue to fight are only those that chose to lie to themselves that what futile effort that they could muster could at all change the losing battle in front of them. Even so, I sit up helplessly as, one by one, their delusions crumble and I watch them struggle with their weapons before being shot down by an enemy we didn't know well enough.

As they fall beside me, their thoughts projected onto their faces like cinema screens; I read their emotions. Some of their faces appear content with defeat as long as it is alongside their brothers-in-arms. Others bear contorted looks of what can only be interpreted as shame, seemingly envious of the deserters, whose collective fates may one day prove to be even bleaker than our own.

As I am about to fire my last round, cold, shaking, and unsteady, unsure if what I am drenched in is either sweat or blood, I pull the trigger. The bell rings, my comrades pick themselves up, we hand in our exams, and we leave our battlefield, defeated.

UNCERTAIN DARKNESS

Gary Rushworth

Time, and sunsets, pass all too quickly
Bringing an uncertain darkness
Where everything is suspect
And clarity lapses into the shadows.

In the deep of blackness
There is movement, a stirring really,
Of all that we are
And what we are made of.

In the Screen Mirror of our souls
We see ourselves as only we can-
Lost at the moment we think
Things make sense.

We realize then,
When the grey dawn beckons,
How lost and vulnerable we are;
As the daylight comes.

THE LEGEND OF THE MATH BOMBER

Anthony C. Brown*

It makes me want to scream. Anytime I look at it, I can feel it mocking me --the large stack of homework peeking at me, most of it math assignments. It had gotten tall enough where the papers started to lean but just wouldn't fall yet. It looks like a flower heavy with dew. I feel my head leaning and following the fall. "Get out of here. You are going to be late." My mom snaps me back to reality. I throw a sheet over the pile and run out the door. Here I am in 6th grade, and I would rather hang out with my friends. I know I am going to hear about it from my teacher. Just hope he is cool about it and doesn't call my mom.

His name was Richard P. Reed. He had some advanced degree in mathematics, and boy did those stereotypes fit: thick glasses, unusually large teeth, slender frame that slouched slightly. Of course, all the kids made fun of him. I did too, but he ignored all of those childish things. The only thing that mattered to him was math, like it was his personal mission.

"I see you are falling behind on your assignments. You are talented, but you have to apply yourself." He handed me some extra credit. He wasn't a total jerk. He seemed to figure out how I think. I loved to flip things around in my head. One thing that I was good at in math was fractions. The first thing I always thought about were pizza pies. Two different fractions could both represent half a pie; one would just have more slices than the other. From fractions I enjoyed their close cousins, decimal numbers. Decimals always made me think about money. Four quarters made up a dollar. So 1/4 of a dollar was 25 cents. This never gets old in my head. I always got the correct change at the store.

The coolest trick I learned recently was flipping fractions and decimals together. Ok so 1/1 is 1. Now 1/10 is equal to 0.10. Let's get crazy and look at 1/0.10. It is the same as 1/(1/10). So now flip the fraction in the denominator (bottom of the fraction), multiply it by the numerator (top of the fraction). So 1/(1/10) is the same as 1 * (10/1), which is equal to 10.

Little things like that made math enjoyable. I think I may be a closet math geek. SHHHHH!!!

"STOP USING THAT CALCULATOR!!" he demanded. "Do the assignments by hand, so you can understand the...." I had already stop listening. I had a long night ahead of me using a calculator to catch up on the assignments. "... especially don't use it on that last BLAH, BLAH, BLAH". I tuned him out, nodded my head and fled to the door. I would catch up on my assignments and keep my mom from grounding me. Sweet. Ok, so I didn't 100 percent hate math, but I did hate homework. And this teacher gave out homework like his life depended on it.

Hours passed by. With the help of a calculator and Google I was almost done. I was at the last question finally. What is 1/0? I knew this was a trick question. It meant something, but I couldn't quite place my finger on it. Oh well, screw it. Let's see what the calculator says. It was an older Texas Instruments Calculator. They take our phones before big math tests, so I keep that baby in my possession at all times. When I hit enter the screen lit up and asked me, "Are you sure?"I hope I didn't break this thing. Yeah, I am sure. I can go to bed after this. My finger got stuck on the enter button. Then I heard this voice whisper, "Foolish human. Isn't one divided by 0 an undefined number? So you are undefined". The room went dark. All I saw was a grinning figure in a chair and a countdown clock next to it. You've got 30 seconds to correctly answer 1/0. A light shined on me. The visibility was just enough to see my hand disappear. "SOMEONE HELP ME!!" I screamed. "25 seconds...HA HAAA!". I watched in terror as my arm disappeared. Ok so this was serious. How was I going to answer this maniac? Then in a moment of true inspiration I thought of my cool trick with fractions and decimal numbers. 1/0.10 is equal to 10. Well what if I go smaller. It gets me closer to zero, which gives me a clue as to what is happening as we approach 0. 1/0.010 is equal to 100. The smaller I go in the bottom of the fraction the larger the answer will be. But if that is easy to prove why would 1/0 be undefined. GOT IT. The largest number that we know of isn't a real number. "1/0 =

INFINITY." I shouted. "What! How could you know?", the figure snarled no longer smiling. The countdown clock exploded next to him, and I was back in my room. I checked all extremities to make sure everything was in place. I wasn't sure what had just happened, but I threw that calculator in the garbage.

The next day at school Mr. Reed didn't look like himself. He stood a little bit straighter than normal. There was a flick of confidence in his eyes. Wait a second, he wasn't wearing glasses either. I handed in my homework assignments and he asked me how it went. I told him it went fine, trying to push the memory of last night out of my head. He leaned in and winked, "I told you not to use that calculator." My face went white. "How did you know? I am lucky to be alive. You should have warned me.", I sputtered out. "How did you know 1/0 is INFINITY and NOT UNDEFINED?" he asked with a wry smile. I sat there stunned.

He went onto explain that there is a level of math that those in this world keep hidden. These mysteries were going to open up to me. He explained the intensity of my assignments were to prepare me for the challenges that remained ahead. The countdown clock that I saw was actually a device called a Math Bomb. Answering the question correctly caused it to explode on the user, but an incorrect answer and its powers could be used against me.The enemies looked to eliminate all of us. He wouldn't call them aliens, but they weren't exactly human. However, the universe has rules. We have to be proven unworthy before we are eliminated. A planet of fools didn't deserve to have freedom according to these laws. As people failed the tests we were coming closer to our end. My laziness, specifically always using a calculator, is what attracted them to me. No one had defeated them in years, and now I had a target on my back. Being grounded would have been more pleasant.

I know this is a bit much to take in. My homework seems a lot more attractive right now. Good news he said wouldn't tell my mom. If your teachers tell you that you are wasting your talents, listen to them. You have no idea what they might be preparing you for.

ROSY MORNING



Iysha Robertson*

THERE LIVES A NIGHTINGALE

Sevastian Volkov

There lives a nightingale who loves a woman
for her food he admires her,
what he cannot eat
for her hair he admires her,
what he cannot feel
underneath his little feet.

She told him to become a man,
that she would give him
all that grows in her garden
to be loved by a person
who watches her so.

The nightingale flew to the house of a witch;
she turned him into a man.
He didn't like the taste of bread
and his hair was finer than hers
He told her about the dark sky
but she didn't understand.

There lives a woman who loves a nightingale
a nightingale that lives in the branches
and oh, how softly he sings

VESILLIA (UKRAINIAN WEDDING)

Sevastian Volkov

Dear falcon, what do you see?
Tell me while I'm far away.
Do you see my lover's paints
or my lover's fine hands?

Surely we will have a winter wedding,
Let the man marry the girl.
With myrtle and periwinkle he will wed her,
take her from her parents' home.

You are whiter than birch trees,
and when I touch you,
redder than blood!

Dear falcon, what do you see?
Tell me while I'm far away.
Do you see my lover's pin,
in my lover's blue-black hair?

I was there at the wedding
but when I tried to drink beer
it ran down my face
and into my whiskers.

You are whiter than guelder-rose,
and when I kiss you,
redder than berries!

Dear falcon, what do you see?
Tell me while I'm far away.
Do you see birds
around my lover's house?
They must surely gather there.

After the wedding
I will go home
to your bed
and only the owl will see us, if that.

We've drunk down all the wine
what could replace it
other than kisses?

You are whiter than linens
and when I speak to you,
redder than thread!

ONE MAN, ONE CHILD

Ivan de Monbrison

Father, son, husband, grandfather, brother, uncle
Separate or together, one man
Gave life and absolute love
Missing you, cherishing you
Echoes of a lifetime bring tears, joy, love, regret
Gone of flesh, alive in memories
Lessons shared of family, love, education, work, outdoors, balance
Watchful of resources, generous with praise
The essence in my heart and mind
Intensely physical, sadness tangles contentment
Feeling, hearing, seeing, touching my being
A piece gone; acute awareness awakened
Honor with a short shower, a game, inflated tires, kindness, praise, love
Practical and powerful; gentle and brilliant
Dad

TREE BOA



Iysha Robertson*

CROSSED FINGERS

Gary Rushworth

"Elections coming,"
the charlatans cry,
"I'm your man!"

Fingers crossed behind their backs.
"Believe in Me!" they say,
"Let me in. You'll see."

"I have more experience," says she.
"No! Time for change," another knows.
"Wrong! I'm the people's choice! That's me!"

Each to the other, on attack.
A dream, a scheme;
a knife to throw at someone's back.

The time is nigh. There's no slack.
Gung Ho! Don't Know? No Clue!
Can't trust a finger crossed in back.

SNAKE MIGRATION



J. Greg Harding

MELINDA

Joe A. Sainz

Melinda's silver helmet covered her natural red hair. She grew up next door, yet I neither knew her age nor what was wrong with her; no one ever explained the helmet to me. She looked early twenties. I didn't even know who else lived in that house, since all I ever heard from there was an occasional scream. The only thing I was sure of at that moment was that I needed silence and peace after a 10-hour day, so I escaped to the lounge chair in my backyard that late New England November afternoon.

Melinda walked through my fenceless property from her yard and stood before me. She rocked back and forth and blinked fast as she smiled with clasped hands over an out-of-fashion, tattered pink sweater. She stared at the ground in front of her, not at me. "Hi," she said.

"Oh. Well, hello there." Couldn't she tell I didn't feel like talking now? Maybe a fence would not be such a bad idea after all.

"You dirty," Melinda said. She pointed at the old paint stains on the casual tee shirt that complimented my dirty sneakers and well-worn pants.

"I guess you're right; these are my hang-around clothes."

"What hang-around clothes?"

"Clothes you wear at home. You know, comfortable, old clothes you don't care much about."

She stared at a passing flock of birds and waved. "Bye, birdies. Bye.The birdies my friends, you know. They no make no fun of me."

I looked at Melinda's yard with the hope that her mother was looking for her, but all I saw was a woman engrossed with repairing a 20-year old car. Her natural red hair draped over the radiator.

Melinda's rocking was more pronounced. She stared at the ground. "You work?"

"Yes. I deliver stuff to people."

"What stuff?"

"Whatever they order. I work for a package delivery service. Hey, wanna know what the worst part of the job is?"

"No."

Her verbal slap made me stop and blink. "Well, I'm telling you anyway. It's the cops. Can't go as fast as I want to, and I need to go fast to get the deliveries done."

"So, who you call if you have burglar in your house who going to kill your family with knife?"

I searched her facial expression for clues, but there was no sign of whether she had experienced a burglar in her house or if she had made this up. "I guess I'd call the cops, yes."

"You like delivery?"

"Like? What's there to like about delivering a bunch of heavy packages to people all day?"

"But is better to have job than no have job?"

I noticed a bulge around her middle, a tell-tale sign of someone who wears an adult diaper. "Yes, it is."

"So, you like job now?"

I smiled and looked at her shiny, silver helmet. I decided to nod and leave well enough alone. "What I really wanted to be when I was a kid was a soldier. I almost went into the Marines. You know what a soldier is? The guys and gals who go to war and all that?"

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why war?"

"Now you're asking a tough question. I guess we don't all think alike, so we fight about things. Anyway, I also wanted to be a basketball player. My mother had other ideas, though; she wanted me to be a surgeon. Imagine that? Hey, you know about basketball?"

"You mean . . . game where you throw ball in net, run back and forth, back and forth, and back again, and throw ball in net again . . . and . . . and run again?"

"That's the one. I wanted to play professionally. I'd certainly have a lot more money than I do now."

Melinda contorted her head again and blinked fast as she clasped her hands. “Basketball pay money?”

“Oh, yeah; big money. Man, you should see all those millions of dollars those guys get.”

“Why?”

“Why do they get paid millions of dollars?” I looked around again hoping to find Melinda’s mother—or anyone, for that matter. “Hey, they deserve it. Yeah, these guys do incredible tricks. There’s this guy who dunks the ball backwards and scores so many points each game that he broke an all-time record the other day. He went too far, though, and they had to get the paramedics. He broke his leg real bad and needed surgery.”

“How much money for paramedics?”

“You mean: How much do paramedics make? I don’t know. Why is that important?” I knew I should have controlled my temper, but it was too late.

“Paramedics no important?”

“Yeah. Paramedics are important.”

“Surgeon important?”

“Sure. They’re very important. Can’t find too many people who can open up a live human being, fix something and close him up again.”

“Surgeon pay money?”

“Yeah, but they don’t get as much as basketball players.”

“Why no get as much money?”

Look, let’s change the subject. I know you live with your mother. Do you live with your father, too?”

“No. Father gone to heaven. He fly with birdies. He fly with birdies and he sees me. Fire no hurt him now. No.”

“Fire? Was he killed in a fire?”

“We have big fire. I little. We have big fire. House hot. Smoke. Loud siren. Ashes. Fire. I no mean to do.”

Her agitation concerned me. I sprung from my chair and looked around for help. This was not what I had in mind when I had come out here to relax. “It’s okay. Calm down. There’s no fire here anymore. It’s okay, Melinda.” I noticed

scaly scars on her hands.

"I okay. Sorry. I okay now. I remember fire. Sorry. Sorry."

"How did this fire start? Do you know?" I noticed a few black, rotted pieces of wood on the side of her house.

"Yes. I do fire. Fire. I do fire."

"Why?"

"Mistake. Mistake. I no want to do this, but mistake. I want to cook by myself, but I make mistake. Sorry. Mistake."

"Oh. Did you set the stove on fire?"

"I fire to kitchen curtain. Mistake. I sorry. Firefighter save mother, but no father. Mistake. Sorry."

"It's over now. No fire anymore. You can relax."

Melinda resumed normal breathing but still stared at the ground. "Firefighter make millions?"

I couldn't control my laughter, since my uncle had been a firefighter for thirty years and barely made ends meet. "Well, I don't think so, Melinda."

"Why no make millions like basketball player?"

I decided to risk ignoring her question and to pursue the fire. "Tell me. Did your father die in the fire, Melinda?"

"Yes. Sorry. Mistake."

I felt an imaginary scalpel cut deep into my soul. I wanted to announce something to the world, but I couldn't have spoken even if I had access to a magical global public address system.

"You no look so good. You sick?" she said.

"I'm okay. Thanks for asking."

"I go. Bye."

I waved without saying a word. She turned toward her yard and walked as she rocked back and forth.

"Careful walking in the dark, Melinda."

She interrupted her walk and turned. "I walk in the dark all my life, but I happy with birdies. I happy with grass. I happy I breathe. I happy with sky. I happy with small light."

I waved a weak good-bye and sat in my yard for hours re-examining everything Melinda taught me that day.

SEARCH LIGHT

Olivia Danielson*

A hollowed-out tower rest
at the fringe of the frosted lake
that holds monstrous chunks of ice,
like pieces of cereal floating at the peak of white milk.

During bitter winter nights
the hollow tower shines its' yellow light
that projects a runway of illumination
as if the ships that lay on the lake will walk down the aisle.

The light that leads the way to the horizon line
seems to whisper, "Bring me home",
influencing captains to find the courage
to overcome the obstacles of a harsh wrath winter sets upon them.

A light that escorts the mighty to a safe haven of warmth
and promises that tomorrow will come to reward those,
who have conquered the black midnight of the Midwest's mid-January,
despite the cold that could encapsulate you with ice so thick
it would dress you in crystal with one breath of the wind.

So, the hollowed-out tower stands as guard to these brutal winter nights
as a reminder to those on the lake
that home is where the light glazes over bringing faith
that this light, bright enough to reflect off of Venus looming in the night sky
holds the promise of a tomorrow, though it is never guaranteed.

FOX WITH GREEN EYES - SECOND PLACE



Charlotte Silver*

IF I EVER HAVE A DAUGHTER

Yelizaveta Tolstokoraya*

I will never have a daughter,
Because a child should never be
A victim of their parents' faults.
It's inevitable that
They are burdened, anyway.

And if I do,
I won't expect my daughter
To be the best just to be good enough.
My grades weren't perfect,
My answers never right.

And if I do want her to be the best,
I can't tell my daughter
She's doing something wrong
To the point of her losing self-confidence.
I gave up on too many things myself.

And if I do it wrong,
I hope she'll disagree with me
And show me a better way
Because her voice matters, too.
A belief I didn't have about myself.

And whatever I do,
I'll try not to let my daughter
Believe that I don't love her for who she is.
I may have a daughter,
But, please, don't let her be like me.

TO CLIMB A PURPLE MOUNTAIN

Gary Rushworth

I watched the sunlight fade
Behind the purple mountain;
Like yet another dream
Dissolving into the sea.

I try
But sometimes I just lie here
Too weak to move
Lacking the will to risk – anything!

You say,
“Try again!”
I say, “Why?!”
But you and I know the answer

The one that pushes, pulls
And drags me along
From day-to-day
And night-to-night.

“O.K.,” I say,
“It’s just one more mountain;
another lost dream
searching for freedom.”

Beckoning the clouds to wait,
I climb the purple mountain,
Hoping this time,
To touch the sky of lost dreams
And set them free.

MY SWEET BOY - THIRD PLACE

Jenny Butterfield*

It felt like a lifetime,
I was a mom of two.
Two beautiful girls who filled my heart,
And made me feel the type of love I never even knew.

By some kind of miracle,
I was blessed to mother three.
But never could I understand,
How things will really be.

Months later I had my first ultrasound,
I learned I was blessed to raise a boy into a man.
I knew it would be different because I only had daughters,
But I also knew no matter what, I'd do the best I can.

Finally the day came and I got to see my boy,
That same love I felt for my girls came rushing in.
I couldn't ease the need to want to kiss him so much.
As the days and months went by, I quickly realized,
He didn't like my touch.

Long hours away from home,
not seeing him all day,
I'd rush back home, run through the door,
but he wouldn't even look my way.

He didn't respond to his name,
He didn't like hide and seek.
It wasn't too long after that,
I realized he couldn't speak.

He was diagnosed with severe autism
At the age of two,
People say that he tested too early,
But deep inside my heart I feel...
like I already knew.

The worries I feel on a daily basis is on another level,
What happens when I die?
What happens when the person who cares for him,
Doesn't know what he wants when he cries?

You see, kids with autism prefer certain types of foods,
What if he doesn't ever speak?
What if he goes hungry?
Because the person that cares for him doesn't know what he eats.

What if he wanders off,
And gets lost all by himself.
All alone with no words to speak,
And no way to ask for help.

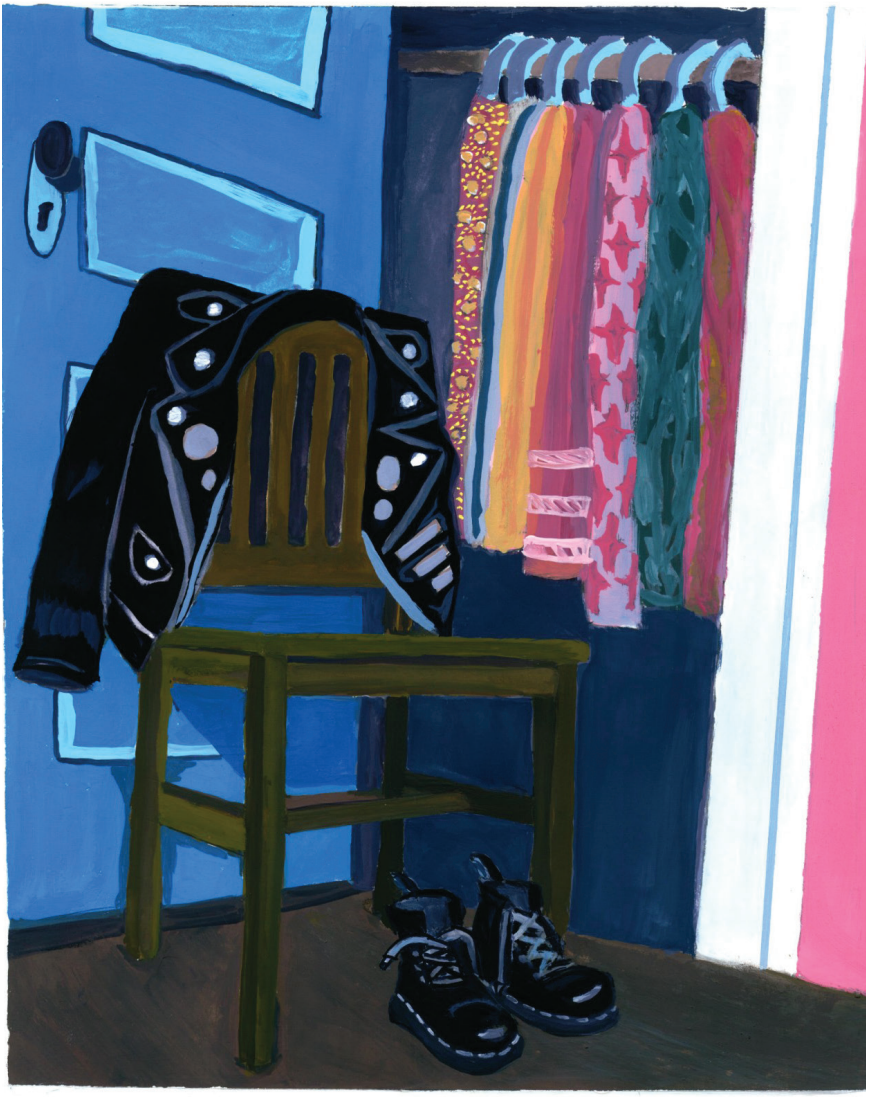
If all that isn't enough to worry about,
We all know that bullying is big these days.
But for my boy, the "zero tolerance" won't be the same.
Because if my sweet boy comes home with a bruise,
They'll have no idea of who's to blame.

What about his social life?
What if he doesn't make any friends?
What if they just leave him alone,
And he's lonely to the end?

All those worries that I can't help,
I pray god makes a way.
To protect my baby and help guide him,
To always make sure that he's okay.

I knew things would be different,
To raise my sweet boy into a man.
I still know that no matter what,
I'll do the best I can.

IN MY ROOM



Madeeha Sheikh*

BANGED UP KNEES

Heather Ruszkowski*

On the rockwall coated in moss, waiting
for the bright yellow school bus,
I hold out my knee to a friend.
“Look!” I exclaim, frantically pointing
at each freshly formed bruise. Purple
and black disfigures my freckly
skin with a light pink hue.
“I have more than you!”

My friend in turn to my bragging
begins to show off her carefully cultivated
collection -- all the way to her bandaged
elbow. “Ha!” she replies to my boasting.
I guess I have more trees to climb
and more kids to fight.

PRETTY LITTLE FLOWER

Erica Sturges*

Some years ago, there was a pretty little flower. This particular flower was always in full bloom: the veins in her stems, so full of love that filled her with life; her petals, so soft to the touch, like the wings of an angel; such a kind, loving, free-spirited little flower.

She was absolutely exquisite. But then, the day came where this lovely little flower would cease to be the radiant, graceful, bursting personality she has always been. The sparkling flow of life she used to have within her would soon perish. On one ominous day she met the sly cactus, only disguised as a handsome flower. She was unprepared for what was to happen in the years to come.

In the beginning, this disguised flower blinded the little flower with make believe happiness and empty promises, and for a little while, she bought into them, until this masquerade of a flower started to show his true self. A couple of years down the road, the little flower was starting to see what he'd truly become. She slowly started to see his thorns, and when he got upset, the perspiration that came out of him, was to her surprise, not that of water as you would think a cactus would harbor, but of poison.

The cactus's poison was contagious. One drop latched on to the little flower, and her days began to darken. The pretty little flower, once so beautifully in bloom, had been torn. She was not who she used to be. Her skies had turned gray, and her petals began to wilt. The sun that had once shined down happiness upon her didn't exist anymore. The little flower was broken. The only ounce of happiness that the cactus left her with was a little seedling. And although that little seedling lit up the little flower's life, she still felt empty and broken deep down inside. All that soon changed when she was taking a heart broken walk and had an epiphany. She realized she didn't want that life anymore. She had to drain herself of the poison that was holding her

captive, but she didn't know how.

One day, while pondering in her garden, her thoughts came to a halt. There before her, was a very impressive, magnificent, mesmeric flower. She had been spotted by him. He went over to her and introduced himself. The little flower was absolutely hypnotized and enchanted by how charming this new flower was. And so, in the days that followed, the little flower and her new friend talked every day and had the most wonderful conversations. Her spirits had been lifted, and finally, she had enough courage to break free from the cactus's poison. She had never felt better in her life. This attractive, dreamy flower had thrown back the sunshine that she lost so long ago. The poison within her began to drain, and her wilted petals began to flourish once again.

From then on, the two were inseparable, and who knew, that in the years to come, that captivating flower would sprinkle her with effervescent diamonds on her already stunning petals, making the little flower feel even more beautiful than she has ever felt in her whole life. Making that promise to the little flower was his way of telling her that he wanted to live out the rest of his days with her, and that she didn't ever have to worry about her pretty little petals being wilted or broken again, and in that moment, it had come to the little flower's attention that the big Lotus flower in the sky had sent her a flower angel to answer her prayers. In the midst of regaining her soul once more, she found her soulmate.

JUMP



Madeeha Sheikh*

UNDRESS ME SLOWLY

Yelizaveta Tolstokoraya*

Undress me slowly;
It can take years to do properly.
Take off and hang up my coat,
Smell the freshness of my perfume
And savor the sweetness of my voice.
Pull me closer one step at a time,
Day by day,
Reveling in the feeling of my hand in yours.
Take off my sweater
And kiss my skin to warm it.
As the layers come off,
Learn where I like to be touched
And what makes me gasp the loudest.
Learn what makes me laugh,
And laugh along with me.
And when I cry,
Just hold me tight so I don't break.
When I stand bare before you
And have nothing else to hide,
Don't turn away –
I know you won't.
I hope you won't.
Because by then
You would have known me all along.

SEEDS OF FAITH

Elizabeth Schneider*

Seeds of faith
So small
They barely seem
To be there
At all
So finally when
They sprout
I will sing and shout

Because I have seen
What I knew
Was there
Underneath the ground

This is how faith grows
And when it sprouts–
It shows
How faithful God is
And how beautiful–
He makes it grow

LOOK AT ME

Jalon Copeland*

Look at me, look at me. I'm just an ordinary guy with a mark on my right hand, and abnormally big eyes. I feel fine with who I am, but I'm sure that you don't. You want to be in my life, but you left to go somewhere else. You say that you love me, but you don't even know how to explain it to me. "Because I know you" they say. Well guess what? You don't. You don't know my favorite color, you only know that I had a girlfriend, you don't even bother to even ask how my day is. So, what's the point to even explain it to you. All that I want you to do is look at me. From head to toe, from the skin that was knitted together and stayed.

I want you to watch me evolve. From someone who had to figure things out bit by bit, day by day, experience from one to another. To someone who takes a step at a time as days go on, with a powerful spirit, and a not so easily broken will. So, what you came back, all that you missed was left unsaid. You know now that my favorite color is purple, you were shocked that I had a boyfriend and play for both teams, you also know now that my days were gracious as the heavens and homely as the depths of hell.

I wondered why you love me till this present day. "Because I know you" he says. How can you know me when you're not there? How can you lecture me when I've heard it before from a different relative? You missed out on so many things that, that one main thing could've shattered me and you weren't there to even understand why. Because I know you. Because I know you? How can you know me? How can you know me Dad? How can you know me by the way I act? How can you know when I'm in a good mood is just by my smile on my face that gets unleashed with excitement? How can you know that the main thing that almost shattered me is almost losing my mother from the strong hate of other people whom despised her? Just tell me how? So, I want you to look at me. Look at me as your son. Look at me as the son that you want to know and not because you know me. Just look at me.

PANCAKE MIX

Christian Rodriguez*

The pancake mix did it all.
On that day, why did it have to fall?

Her voice piercing the air from anger
Overcome with frustration, hands in the air -

I should have expected this a while back,
Something so small to give her a heart attack.

The exchanged screams, red eyes from crying
I swear, a neighbor probably thought she was dying.

Nevertheless, dropping pancake mix turns into past mistakes
Her screaming getting closer and closer to my face.

Tears now rolling down my face, teeth gritted,
“I should have left years ago” I admitted.
The house now so silent, creaking from what came out of my mouth,
Her face a cherry red, obviously upset,
she says what I dread the most

“Pack your bags. I want you out.”

GRASS

Mary C Verdosci

Grass, one of nature's many wonders,
swaying in the wind to and fro.
To me, is nature's worst blunder
an undefeatable foe.

For wherever I plant the seed,
with certainty this I know,
I find instead that rascally weed
where I want the grass to grow.

On the other hand, on hills and slopes
where it is difficult to mow
I find the grass there envelops
all else I try to grow.

Until one day after so many attempts
a new seed I did sow
It promised to kill the weeds
and to grow and grow and grow.

It did.
Now on weekends
I'll not be free.
All I do is mow.

FORGET

Kimberly Dyer

I remember being young
dancing under the water crystals
in my bathing suit with my sisters
as we oooh'ed at the rainbow in the sky.

We had a porch
on the third floor of a broken
down apartment building.
A balcony of escape.

We went out there to forget.

VAIN WITH ENVY

Mitchell Maknis*

At age 17 a renowned journalist worked tirelessly
to pay for his college education.
At 17, I worked through my teen angst
with a school designated therapist.

In 2012 that journalist became recognized
by being inducted into the CT Journalism Hall of Fame.
I graduated middle school
with a bad attitude and mediocre grades.

In 1996 this journalist restructured the SPJ's code of ethics.
I wasn't born until a year later.

In 1978 the journalist became the host of a talk show.
I watched a movie made in 1978.

In 1966 the journalist enlisted in the U.S. Army,
helping the Secret Service protect President Johnson.
I didn't know who was president that year.

In 1945 the journalist was born and
spent his youth helping to provide for his family.
I spent my youth hiding in my room.

This man spent 33 years of his life
teaching decades worth of knowledge
to SCU's inquisitive students.
In my 22 years, I've taught my dog to sit.

GULLS GALORE



Charlotte Silver*

SWAN SONG THIRD PLACE

Heather Ruszkowski*

ACT I: Time: Evening

(THE CURTAIN opens to a bedroom set in rural New York State. There's an unmade bed and the lighting is dim and gloomy. A television sits across from the bed, currently turned off. On STAGE LEFT there is a wall that leads to the balcony. There are portraits on the walls. The floor is hard to see but there are newspapers littering everywhere, some of them have red markings on them but at this point it's hard to tell what they're marking. The nightstand has a book, a glass and other odd items, director's choice. On STAGE RIGHT there is an entrance to a kitchen set up. The stage is divided into three sections at this moment.)

NARRATOR (A voice that is directed to speak completely off stage): Her eyes like a swan's, dark and unemotive. // injected with sour notes of no remorse. Cold. // Her lips part with dagger corners-a smirk? No // an unknowing laugh. Winged hands cover a mouth // that has said things so beautiful yet fowl. // Grace in her steps- she walks to murder a crowd // with one look from the bewitching, unfeeling // eye of a woman who does not care for them // nor for anyone else who does not carry // the same name, the same mystic swan like wings, as // her own.

NARRATOR: What happens after the actress retires? Well, let us see… Or well, think of this as only one side of this story.

THE SWAN (Already on stage, makes her entrance before the curtain rises):

her apartment, the dark dusk shadows cling to her opalescent skin. Her frail arms showcase goose bumps and yet she retaliates in wearing a silk nightgown. A glass sits near her hand, on the table next to a semi destroyed day-to-day pill sheet. No one else resides in her chamber, a sea of a bed with only one body.

Looking at her phone, her pointed lips curl into a snarl. No messages. No. Nothing. Grabbing the wine glass, she takes a sip, making sure to let the glass, the cool glass, rests gently on her cracking lips. Wine is always dry, and if anything does not help the parched feeling in her throat; but- she keeps sipping. Small sips. Nothing more. Putting down the glass she checks her phone again.

Nothing.
No
Th
ing.

Hastily, she swings herself over the side of the bed, chopstick legs on the ground. One foot into the slipper, then another, she stands. Gliding past the portraits of her on the wall, past awards and trophies, she makes her way onto the balcony. Flinging the doors outward, in a dramatic performance for only herself, she feels her grey hair blow past her sunken eyes.

"...I fucking hate February," she mumbles, producing a cigarette and lighting it in one fluid motion. Blowing smoke, she holds herself. Her body drapes against the railing. Bleak surroundings, everything is dead. The dark brown branches etch into the grey sky, like the colors on a novice painting.

Taking another drag, she checks her phone again. Not a single call or a single message. No email, tweet, anything. '*How inconsiderate of them all to just ignore my presence. To make me beg for attention. Their loss,'* she thinks. Breathing out smoke, she parts her lips slightly to let it trail out in a single stream. She appreciates this one part of February: the dramatic air.

Other than that? It sucks.

She makes her way back into the room, turning on the lights and staring at it. *'At least house parties are always in the*

kitchen.' Kneeling, she looks through the newspapers. Edition from one month ago, two months ago, three, four. '**New York Times, Washing Post, New York Daily News, Boston Globe, New York Post, Newsday, USA Today,'** etc. lie on the ground mixed pages, missing pages. The name **GEORGIA TICKNER** underlined in red pen sticks out against the cream grey color of the paper.

"I wonder if there will be anything in tomorrow's issues…"

Her eyes make their way to the empty glass. There was a need for a new one. Sauntering to the kitchen, she reaches for the glasses and puts the new one on the marble countertop. So many things to see her reflection in, so little time. Reaching for the box of wine, she pours herself a bit of it, swirling it around. A good, dear, friend of hers once said this was his favorite brand. To her, it was all the same. The same dry, throat parching, substance that she continues to drink.

'*At least it's better than Champagne.'*

Anything. Was. Better. Then. That.

Elbows on the counter, she opens her phone again. At the appearance of a message, she keeps her cool. She doesn't even check who sent it as she quickly clicks the notification.

[**Helen Bell** is new to Facebook…be her friend?]

'*Really? Really?!'* Eyes glue to the screen as she stares at the promotion of making a new Facebook friend. '*Helen Bell… the new actress in town? Why should I friend her?'* she internally screams, glass shaking in her hand. Her chest quickly inhales and exhales, as her hand takes the glass to his quivering lips.

It feels like a personal attack. Like Facebook knew how she was feeling. It must know, because of an article she had read

earlier about them listening into your conversation. But why would she talk about *Helen Bell.* Helen Bell's name keeps ringing in her head like some plague. The phone quivers like a hurt animal in her liver spotted hands as words bubble in her throat before exiting like a great rehearsed moment.

Except for once it was raw.

*"*Helen Bell is a nobody! Helen Bell doesn't have a single talented bone in her body! Helen Bell is an insult to the acting community and thE FACT THAT THEY CASTED HER IN MY POSITION, HER UNTALENTED LITTLE BODY STANDING IN MY SPOT IS...."

CRASH

Red pours onto the counter, dripping onto the floor as she stares at the shattered glass. Did she get too carried away? In a sobering moment, she plucks a paper towel from behind her and begins to mop up the mess. Wine stains, so she tries to be diligent at picking it all up. Carefully, she takes the pieces of glass into her liver spotted hands and throws them into the trash on top of various newspapers.

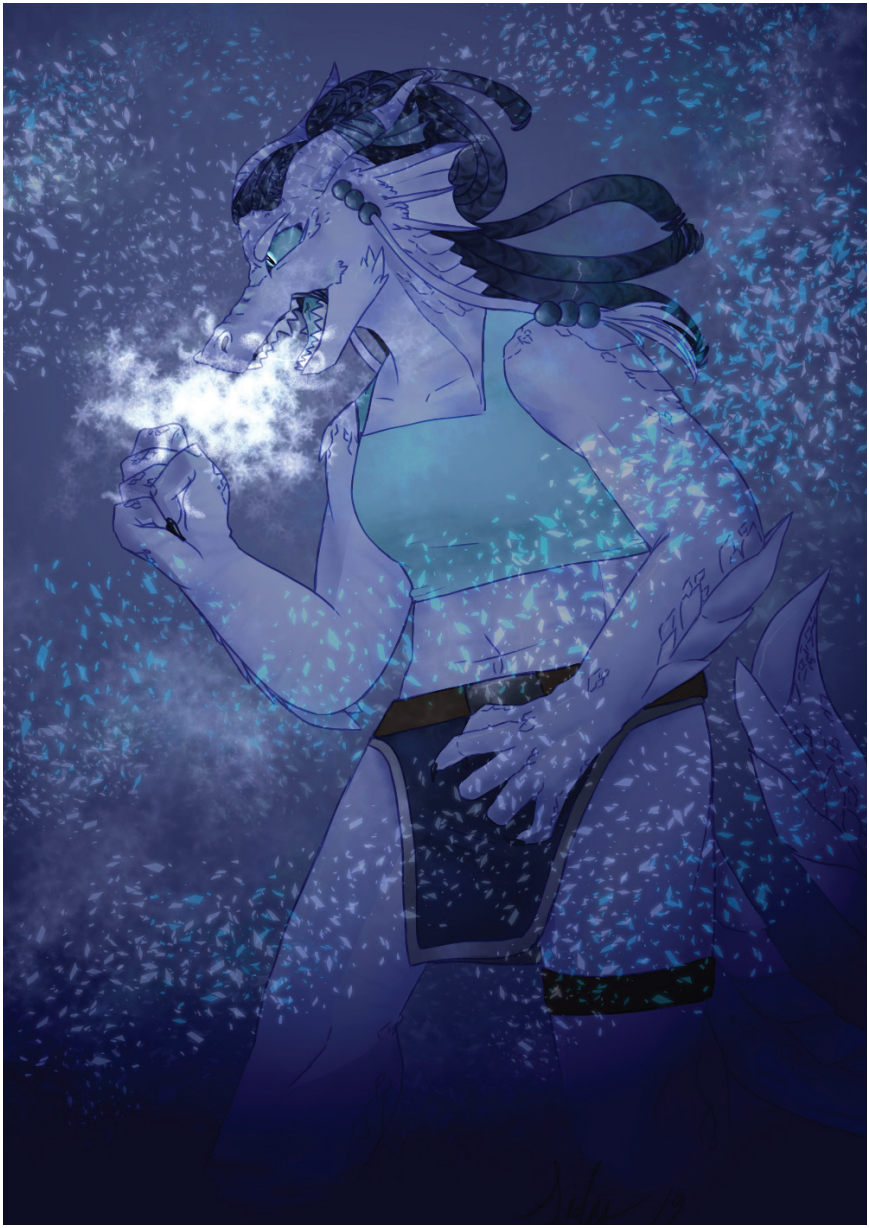
Continuing to clean up the mess, she feels her arms stiffen. Standing back, she pulls her hair into a low pony before letting it go. '*I'll have someone else clean this up,'* she qualms with herself, unable to really get her left arm to cooperate. A sign that she should head to sleep.

Away from the scene, she goes to retire in her bedroom. She makes sure to slam the door behind her.

THE SWAN [Exits off STAGE LEFT]

[*Curtain Closes*]

ICE DRAGON



Iysha Robertson*

WINTER SPIDERS WOVE AGAIN LAST NIGHT

pd Lyons

Hard hairy frost
Uncut grass bowed brittle
Glints tiny rainbows in the new sun

Tucked back in bed
Black clove coffee (too hot to drink yet)
Claims the room
Meets the open window

Breathing deeply again
This is my morning

WHO OWNS WHOM?

Nick Cardinal*

The man's eyes shoot open.
The nightmare was all too real.
In a daze he paws around the nightstand for his glasses.
Adjusting his eyes,
He begrudgingly looks at the time on the cable box.
Iridescent cyan numbers scream 3:30 AM.

Whines and whimpers pierce through his earplugs...
Behind his closed bedroom door...
All the way from the living room sofa...
On the other side of the house.
Sighing he rises from his bed like a corpse from a dirt nap.
Stepping into his worn slippers,
He cautiously opens his bedroom door.
The ominous silhouette of his canine oppressor
Looms in the distance.

Illuminated only by a dingy nightlight,
The man tiptoes down the hallway.
He prays no one else has been awoken.
The dog locks eyes with the man.
A predator who's sighted its next meal.
The man hopelessly motions for the dog to wait.

He turns on the kitchen light
And his eyes are instantly irradiated.
Drool bubbles from the dog's mouth and puddles on the tile.
The man groggily pours the dog's food into its bowl.
Before he can even place the bowl down,
The dog is devouring its breakfast.
Slobber and kibble are flung furiously
As the dog eats like its life depends on it.

Before the man even has time to clean the floor
The dog has finished his feast.
It trots over to the back door
Anxiously waiting to relieve itself.
The man himself hasn't even gotten a chance
To go to the bathroom yet.
The deed is done.
The man silently lumbers back down the hall.
The sanctity of his bed is calling out to him....

It's the same routine every morning.
Sometimes the dog wakes him up later, sometimes earlier.
Dogs are supposed to be "man's best friend"
Aren't they?
But in this relationship…
Who *really* owns who?

BLOCK SECOND PLACE

Emily Smith*

Exhausted, the woman walked through the door into her silent house feeling discouraged from a long day which had left a stale taste in her mouth. The relief that she should have felt walking through the door was negated by apathy. She tried to see past the swarm of pessimistic thoughts, but they poured into her space like rats, sabotaging her every attempt to unwind; gnawing at her ankles and lurking in the corners, awaiting her acknowledgement. Frustrated, she rubbed the corners of her jaw trying to relax her tensed facial muscles. With stiff and heavy movements, she lumbered into the hallway, grabbed her towel off of the railing, and stomped up the stairs; her whole weight crashing down onto each step along the way.

It seemed unreasonable how much more exhausted she felt after climbing those 12 steps. She couldn't turn the shower on fast enough once she reached the bathroom. With urgency, she unpacked herself from the tight and abrasive confines of her clothing. Itching irritations peppered her skin beneath the wires and straps of her bra, and her waist was tattooed with a red ring where her dress pants had pinched her sides and belly. She stretched and cracked her toes as she kicked her pumps aside. Peeling off her glasses, which had nearly adhered themselves to the bridge of her nose, she carefully tucked her neatly styled hair into an uncomfortable plastic shower cap, anxiously waiting for the shower's steam to fill the bathroom; finding comfort in imagining it hanging like fog around her nude body.

As she pulled the shower curtain closed, she exhaled deeply with relief, feeling safe and warm in her one and only sanctuary. In there, her phone wasn't ringing, she wasn't thinking about the mess that needed to be cleaned up, or the bills that needed to be paid, and she didn't need to attend to anyone but herself. Stepping into that hot shower was like turning the clock to 2 am; in the silence she was momentarily freed from the challenges of life. Maybe without distraction, that perfect idea would finally come to her. Eventually, she would need to come up with something.

She sat down, cross legged and allowed the water to fall onto her; it was so scalding hot that it turned her skin pink. The countless small hot droplets collided forcefully with the surface of

her skin and rolled gently off, massaging away the tension and hardness dwelling within her body and slowly returning her to her soft and gentle nature. She reached for her jar of solid coconut oil and closed her hands around it, waiting patiently for it to melt and become liquid while she strained to form a productive train of thought. She searched her mind, reviewing every moment of her week, and when that wasn't enough she journeyed back through her memories as far as she could go. The water cascaded down her face as she sat with her shoulders hunched over her knees. Her eyes were softly fixed upon the shower curtain as she blinked away water droplets which bounced off the lid of the jar she held and sprayed her face. The jar of oil slid out of her grasp to rest against her thighs while her hands drifted away to find her face. She covered her eyes and pressed her eyelids gently with her fingers as she flipped through possible ideas like selecting a song from a jukebox, trying to draw inspiration from anything at all, grasping at strings until a sigh of defeat escaped her mouth. Her ears now felt the spray of the water; it was an annoying sensation. She lifted her hands away from her eyes and pulled the shower cap over her ears to cover them. As she dipped her head into the center of the shower stream the sound of the water beating down onto the plastic cap upon her head seemed terribly dramatic. It sounded like a dreadful rainstorm unleashing its wrath onto a tin roof. That treacherous sound soothed her; she loved it. She was sure now that all she needed was the warmth, the water, and that sweet percussion; loud and robust, but gentle and rhythmic.

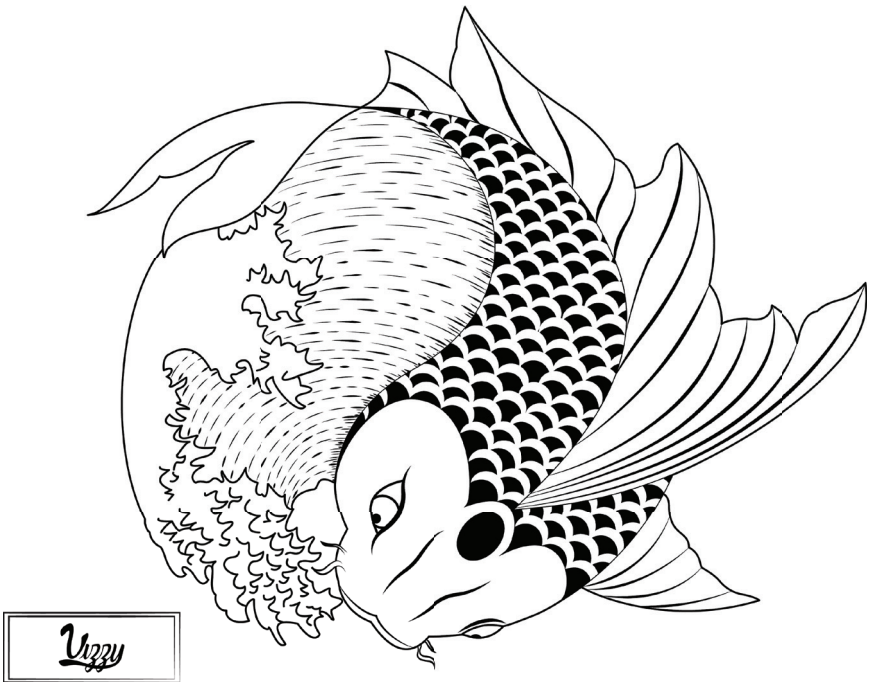
She closed her eyes clinging to that moment of peace between the two warring sides of herself. Like the first few raindrops hitting the soil after weeks of drought, optimism and motivation blessed her tired mind. Finally feeling at ease, her eyebrows and forehead softened, and she was surprised as her mouth curved into a slight smile. Then all at once it struck her, as inspiration does, suddenly and abruptly. Just the candlelight of a thought to set off an awe inducing display of fireworks within her. Her bits and pieces of thoughts were no longer like caged animals in a zoo, but instead coexisted harmoniously like creatures of a thriving ecosystem. Excitement buzzed within her body and mind. In an instant the tables had turned. Her apathy became hope, her doubt turned to confidence, and her bitterness was transformed into gratitude. And there, naked on the tiled floor of that shower, sat a powerful woman.

CHOCOLATE TIME

J. Greg Harding

What happens in chocolate time that otherwise undone?
Do caramel rivers with butterscotch currents flow upward
and into the sun?
Do Blitznickerbrattleworts lose their sting
and float softly on trumblesilk wings?
I suppose that the eoscape changes completely
To settle the truculent frooms,
And the airboiler cloudophone whispers
Dim dithers in mullabye dillynight tunes.
I believe that the wifflittles savor the sight
Of the sunrising goldengloow pushing the night
Until morningdew droptacles sparkle the glen
And the spendrican fiddlenogs hustle wherewhen.
Then, the hushbustle cacophones rule
And the dingledrab fractickers diddle and drool.
And not until fudgeripple evenings slow
Do the mortiggers blast and the snurfagongs blow.
And the ice cream Sunday's cream was whipped
With the Peagrackle tail feather kindly dipped
In the nectar of Bunnybees humming away
In a place where the most of us can't seem to stay

CO-EXIST



Vismel Marquez*

THE LAST SLAVE SHIP

Joe A. Sainz

(Inspired by a painting by Kadir Nelson on the cover of the February 2020 edition of National Geographic Magazine illustrating slaves in a rowboat trying to reach the last-known United States bound slave ship, the Clotilda, in 1860.)

The Last Slave Ship;
Twenty-six future slaves try to row the rickety boat to the ship;
Tall waves crash against the boat;
Fins in the water surround the boat;
Which fate is better?
Hard decision.

The Last Slave Ship;
Twenty-two future slaves on the boat envy the freedom of the waves.
Where's the ship going?
What type of life awaits them?
They would rather not know.
Why try to get to the ship at all?

The Last Slave Ship;
Nineteen future slaves in a rickety boat;
Large silhouettes swim under the waves.
They appear so free!
And they have the freedom to eat;
And they swim to anywhere they want.

The Last Slave Ship;
Fifteen future slaves in a rickety boat;
The boat approaches the ship;
And it almost crashes; no one cares.
They will ride in the cargo section when they board the ship;
They will get less drinking water than a house plant;
The Last Slave Ship;
Twelve future slaves in a rickety boat;
They will be forgotten items in a tag sale;
They will eat nothing but molasses and mush;
Why try to get to the ship?
There is no choice; no choice at all.

The Last Slave Ship;
Eleven future slaves in a rickety boat;
Thoughts of families never to be seen again;
Thoughts of a bygone childhood;
Another wave tilts the boat at a 45-degree angle;
There is no nausea, since they had nothing to eat;

The Last Slave Ship;
From West Africa to wherever Alabama is;
What will life be like?
The hold of the ship will be their home;
But, the hold of a ship is for cargo, not for men, women and children;
But there is no choice; no choice at all.

GOODBYE - THIRD PLACE

Jennifer Jones*

I watched you,
As you savagely
Crammed some of your belongings
Into Hefty trash bags,
With no regard for the items.
You spewed filthily remarks
Aimed in my direction.

I watched you,
Hurry around the house
Rapidly collecting everything that belongs to you,
But careful enough
So, you leave nothing behind.
You were dragging your black trash bags
Across my chocolate hardwood floor.

I watched you,
As your reckless bag
Crashed the alter,
And spilled our photo
Encased in sterling silver
Etched with love

I watched you,
Twist the brass doorknob
Which led to your escape.
So eager to getaway
You forcibly opened the screen door.

I watched you,
Try and balance oversized trash bags
One in each hand,
As you swayed side to side
Like uneven weight
On a balance scale.

I watched you,
Trip over a rock
Stumble forward
Lose your footing
Release your trash bags
Smack the concrete,
And look back at me.

STILL LIFE IN WIND

Julian Hogan

I can't talk now. Sorry. The wind's caught me up again and you wouldn't hear me. Where it's taking me, I wouldn't know, but I can see your house from here. I always wanted to say that. Up here, the air is clean, the skies are clear and the world is very big—seriously, I could be going anywhere.

I hop a train for a while…just seeing the sights…until I was forced to jump. I toss around from here to there, then catch a cab. A dog sniffs me, then pees on me. Can you believe that? I mean, it's like he didn't even see me there.

Well, I get out and get out quick. I run up a tree and into some punks with their sheens of greens and they're sooo funny.

"Hey, old man, why are you so brown." The group of them shake with laughter.

"Look at him, he's all wrinkled and gross, he's falling apart." A swishing staticky sound fills the air—more of their laughter. I try to gesture rudely, but part of my rib breaks off. "What's that? You're breaking up!"

I cast myself from the branch with a new rise of shimmering of giggles at my back, thankful as the distance slowly swallows the noise—as well as my embarrassment. What do they know! Have they burst into being with the songs of nature to greet them? Yes…yes, maybe they have. But, have they felt the bright summer sun dance blazing white patterns or play games of tag with the shadows on their glossy bellies? Yes, maybe that too has been a part of their fortunes. Still, they know nothing of the vibrancy of being yellow, then lording over all who see you as gold before shifting to red and finally brown? That is the glory I have experienced. But then I guess that memory too will one day be shared by them.

Still, when most of those tragic souls are bagged, tagged and burned, there will be few—a lucky few—who will see beyond their branches—beyond their trees. These will play with the children who will toss about in their piles. They will float with the fishes on cool running water. They may even feel their hearts leave them as they fall from where only the eagles go. They will see the world, farther than they ever dared imagine. For those favored few, they will see…there is life after death.

A LOUNGING TIGER



Charlotte Silver*

GULLEY

J. Greg Harding

Brumble jungle,
Ditch dug, humble
Habitat of undulating
Flora-fauna, trundle
Beds for micromonsters
Huddling in mud.

The prehistoric critters
Wriggle larger than my eyes,
Helicopterous wings
And leggy things
Settle secret nests and
Find their niche under

Stones softened by
Tumbling waterful blunder,
Falling and fumbling
From gravity's pull
Until suitable servants
For mossflower growth.

Walls of vinefalls
Dripping sweat onto
Shower slick ledges
That overhang time
Slowed in this valley
Of prehistoric

wonder.

THE BLUE OVER THE ACACIAS

Adele Annesi

Shouts and the beat of the djembe pulsed the air of Borko. Straw broom in hand, Kadi rushed to the doorway of the thatched hut. Her mother stood on a rock by the main road as the Dogon came dressed in vibrant hues on skin like velvet, their shoulders carrying néré poles. Slung from the poles on leather thongs were long carved boxes like the many-colored beads of a necklace Kadi's grandmother had worn a long time ago.

Following the procession came the villagers wearing mud cloth in the green of the shea nut, the blue of the cloudless sky and orange like the sunrise over the acacia trees on the horizon. Skipping to the beat of the djembe and the sound of the susoy flutes, the villagers raised their hands high, faces crinkled with laughter, songs flowing from open mouths as the boxes bumped along.

The procession was not like others Kadi had seen where the people had shuffled past silent as old women, like her mother in the morning before she drank her tea. Outside the hut, Kadi stood on tiptoe to see the next box, its wooden lid stained with red clay and seared with the image of the shikra that soared over the savannah to Mopti and the mountains where Kadi's mother said her father had gone. Kadi loved the shikra, its sharp yellow eyes vigilant, always seeking.

At the sound of singing, she turned and saw the women of Borko swaying and dancing up the road with the throng. One tall slender girl wore a long dress blue as the sea, blue as the bowls made for tourists and sold in the Mopti market. Pressing her back to the outside of the hut, Kadi squeezed her eyes tight to pull inside the colors, the vision of the girl and the blue dress, one Kadi would like if someday her mother would make it for her, if there would be enough material.

"Kadi! What are you doing there?" called her mother.

Kadi's flew open. She thrust the straw broom out and shook it. "Sweeping," she shouted above the din.

"Sha," her mother answered, stepping down from the rock. "You came out to see."

Kadi went to the steps and brushed the broom back and forth as her mother came up the dusty walk. "You don't like the parade, Maman?"

Her mother stopped. "It's not a parade, only the mayor's last show before he leaves this earth in the cask he has chosen. Now

go along and finish your work. You can't be done already."

"But I am finished. See?" Kadi held up the broom, its frayed edges free of dirt.

Her mother stood beside her. "You think sweeping is the only task? Go finish the rest."

Kadi put out two fingers and touched the worn woven cotton of her mother's pagne. "Maman …" Kadi smiled, her lip catching on her crooked front tooth. "Someday will you make me a blue dress? Like the girl in the parade."

Her mother bent down low, her breath warm with the smell of strong green tea and earth. "I told you, it's not a parade. And we have no money for dresses." She clucked her tongue. "Now go finish. You mustn't grow up to be lazy."

Kadi touch the faded red kanga wrapped at her mother's breast. "We don't have to make the dress today, just someday."

Kadi's mother shook her head. "You are too full of somedays."

It was better to be full of somedays than nothing, Kadi thought. "Maman, when will Father come home?"

Her mother's eyes clouded. "When he's finished."

"But when?"

Kadi's mother clucked her tongue. "You ask too many questions, child. Now go and gather some straw to patch the roof."

When her work at home was done, Kadi went to work in the village for those with whom her mother could trade, the cleaning of a hut for an egg, the gathering of straw to patch a roof, the planting of a garden for a bit of produce. Sometimes a few francs changed hands. Sometimes Kadi put a franc away in the mud cloth bag she kept under a board in the floor near her mat. As the seasons passed, she still watched the shikra. But she looked less at the mountains, less straining of the eyes to see what did not come. If work was all it meant to be grown, she thought as she gathered more straw, she could do without it.

"It's good to work and see results," her mother told her, though lately even she seemed less convinced.

One day an older woman from the village came to the hut at the edge of the settlement where Kadi was turning over the earth for a garden.

"You must go home," the woman said.

Kadi looked at her. "I haven't finished."

"You must go," the woman repeated.

Kadi left the spade by the hut and started down the road. As she walked, she gazed out over the savanna. The sky, not so

blue today, was still vast. Outside her house people had gathered in silent knots as they did for funerals.

Several turned and saw her. “It’s the daughter,” they said. “Let her through.”

She was nudged and jostled into the hut as if she wanted to be there. In the semidarkness sat her mother, in front of her an old man, white-haired, his midnight skin covered with dust. On the small table before him was a cup of green tea.

“Come, child,” said her mother. “See who’s here.”

Kadi looked at the old man, powdered with the dust of many roads. He looked at her with filmy eyes, strained from having seen much.

“You don’t know me, child?” said the man.

“She doesn’t recognize him,” murmured a woman in the crowd.

Who was this old man that she should know him, Kadi wondered. “I am sorry, sir.”

The man stood on spindly legs. Holding out a calloused hand, he touched her face, his finger on the edge of her lip, which still caught occasionally on her front tooth.

“Well, say hello, child,” prompted Kadi’s mother. “He’s your father come home.”

The greeting that should have come was lost to Kadi like chaff in the wind. This was her father, for whom they had waited? Her father, now ancient as the mountains? She looked around the hut, but it looked the same. He had brought nothing with him.

“They should have time to themselves,” said someone in the crowd.

“Yes, time,” echoed another.

One by one the visitors from the village left. There had been nothing of a feast for them anyway, only green tea, and of that, only enough for one.

“Your mother says you work hard,” said the old man. “That you are good at cleaning and gathering straw and making gardens.” The man who was her father put his hand on her shoulder. “You have done well while I was gone.”

Kadi didn’t smile. Her lip might catch again on her tooth, and she was too grown now for her lip to catch. She looked in the man’s face, his clouded eyes where much life had gone, and thought of the dress she wanted. She had a few francs now in the mud cloth bag, enough to buy a way in Mopti where the Niger and the Bani met, and beyond them the blue over the acacias.

MR. CROW

Mary Tetreault

My first thought was, I am sitting
outside with somebody's pet crow!
I, lowly, on the step –
his presence oddly important to me.
He had a few things to think about,
but none of them involved me.
He, in the close tree, was chatting with
another of *his* kind, way down back in the woods.

He let me step closer to take his picture,
all glistening in his black gentleman's coat,
against a spring sky of little-boy blue.
Turning for his digital photo shoot,
his strong, pointed beak looked shorter and wider than I'd first expected.
The silhouette – perfection!

Among the bare branches, Mr. Crow
squawked to the other bird, seeming to
say he'd be home late for super
but was safe and close at wing.
I thought he was just taking in the lovely warmth and
debating whether to fly off to see his long-distance lady love
or stay around home near his old mom, who'd want to settle in by early
evening.

He was not afraid that I'd enter his space horizontally – no visible wings.
And he might have known I wouldn't be coming vertically.
I hadn't climbed a tree in ten decades!
Two bodies and souls so different – each wondering
what to do with the rest of the day.
Walk, fly, near, far, now, later,
alone or in company?
I blinked; he flew – cawing back something I didn't quite catch.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF ERIC SEBASTIAN MARSDEN



ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak

CHANGES

Jennifer Jones*

The Maple tree in the fall is alluring,
She is an enchantress,
Captivating the attention of everyone she meets.
Her foliage displays
An abundance of beauty
That leaves spectators in awe.

She is admired,
Met with flashing lights,
Simpered faces, and intimate touches.
People find refuge
Underneath her balmy branches.

That is, until
The extremities of winters wrath,
Stripped her of all her glory.
The rich covering that once adorned her,
Now left her raw, exposing her uninviting scars.

She is vulnerable,
Ignored by the same people
That once ravished in her beauty.
She is left desolate.
There is not a single soul
To embrace her
In her time of despair.

So many delighted in her,
And yet,
There is not one whom she can call upon
To shield her bare branches from the storm.

However,
She finds solace in knowing
The seasons will change.
All her impurities
Will be refined.
She is resilient,
She is a maple tree.

DISTANCE

Jason Hesse*

The discomfort of the unknown
gleams through the eyes of strangers
and through their pleasant greetings
and their gentle regards.
So I turn away
to hide from their glow,
daunted by its brilliance.
But every so often,
amidst that blaring brightness,
I find another quiet soul
that winks like mine;
a kindred spirit, also searching
to not be lost.
Days will pass; weeks, months, years;
and after a while
with jokes
and smiles
and comfort
and kindness,
two minds begin to intertwine
two hearts begin to beat in time;
two lives entangle. And yet—
I feel like a fish on a hook,
wriggling desperately.
A simple snack turned trap
by my hopefulness
that this time, maybe, it might be real
and not some nighttime fantasy.
Someone who cares,
who loves;
but loves who?
Sometimes I think it's me;
other times I know
it might not be.

Those are times I see
a distance between us
that isn't there.
I see myself an actor in a hollow play;
opening night for an empty auditorium.
Will ever I stop striving
for impossible perfection
with jealous eyes
and realize
I am already important
to you?

A HEART IN A GLASS HOUSE

Nathan Fitzgerald*

My heart is heavy
I think my sorrow weighs me down.
Has my heart always been this heavy?
Or have I lost the strength to carry?

Anxiety? Maybe. Depression? Closer.
My heart used, reused, and abused
Wear and tear have worn it down.
I feel my heart pump, but I hear no beat.

I'd say the heart of a man is stored in a glass house,
The glass house of soul.
But what fun or purpose is his house
If a man has no friends to welcome in his home?

Yet one day a man might proclaim
"Ah, look at this one!"
And he will choose
"I'll share her all I have, for her to use!"

He will offer her the key
To which she'll say I do.
The treasures of his heart she owns
All the power to make of him the fool.

It's been said to never throw stones from a glass house,
And I would agree.
But it's been less said to never steal from one,
What a tragedy this is, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

IS THIS SARAH JAMES EDDY AFTER THOMAS EAKINS?



ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak

STRENGTH

Yelizaveta Tolstokoraya*

As little children tend to,
My brother and I would compete.
We'd lift boulders and throw them in the lake
And judge who threw the farthest.
We'd harness ourselves with grocery bags
To see who could carry the most
And then come back for more.
Jars with tight lids I saved for fun,
Never giving anyone to open.
I got up out of bed today.
My body heavier than the rocks I used to throw,
And it was more than I expected.

LOVE IS....

Lynette Melendez

Love is an act of surrender
Towards another person
Where madness lies
Beneath this selfless action

Love is prideful
Having possession over a person
Where the years are more important than a relation
Pleased by the validation of others

Love is a prison
Being stuck behind the bars of lust
Sentenced to life without parole
But what attracts is not seen by the naked eye

Love is mysterious
Told false testimonies
Comforted by a monster in disguise
Honesty is defined by sequential lies

Love is dangerous
A drug that becomes an addiction
Knowing that it's fatal to health
Somehow it creeps back into a systematic process that no longer operates

THE HEROES

Joe A. Sainz

Suicide - the reason we sat in the sweltering heat in the musty room with nothing but telephones, chairs, desks, and bare bulletin boards. I had completed the training course to work for the suicide prevention hotline operated by the county in record time, since time was one commodity I did not have. This was the first day I was on my own. I was petrified at the thought that whether someone lived or died may depend entirely on my faceless words.

My telephone rang. I stared at this machine that would bring me some traumatic experience. The counselor to my right nodded toward my telephone without saying a word, which prompted me to grab it.

"Suicide hotline." I was ashamed of my lack of assertiveness at 45 years old. Who would ever believe I was a Senior Vice President of Communications for one of the biggest companies in the country? It's amazing what being diagnosed with terminal cancer does to self-esteem.

"Hello? Suicide hotline." Silence on the other side. "May I help you?" That's all I needed: a prank call.

"Hello." A feeble voice answered.

"Yes, I'm here. Go ahead," I said.

"My name is Mary. Are you a counselor?" The trembling voice had an airy tone. The first thing that ran through my mind was that this person was already dying. Should I call the paramedics? Months of grueling training flashed through my mind just like a person falling from a building whose life flashes by.

"Please … go ahead, Miss. I'm here to help you."

"I don't wanna live anymore." She burst into tears.

"Can you tell me what's wrong? Why don't you want to live anymore?" I tried to steady my trembling hands. This was no class role-playing.

"I can't take it anymore. I've failed as a mother."

"Wait, Mary. Why are you saying that?"

"I shouldn't have bothered you. I'm going to send her to an institution or something and then kill myself."

"Is the person you're taking about your elderly mother, perhaps? Who are you going to send to an institution?" I tried to avoid contradicting her and tried to follow her line of thought. I had

never felt such loneliness.

"I'm talking about my 20-year-old daughter. She was born severely mentally-challenged, and I've been taking care of her all this time by myself." Mary's tone was calmer; her voice did not crack this time.

"Go ahead, Mary. How come you had to raise her all by yourself? Did your husband leave you?" I realized I had just made a mistake. I assumed she was married, a generalization that could make her feel guilty or angry. Mistake number one.

"No. He loved us both very much. He died in a shoot-out with a bank robber. Jack was a police officer."

"Sorry. How old was your daughter when he died?"

"She was just two, but it didn't matter. In fact, it still doesn't matter; my daughter still thinks like a two-year-old anyway."

"Well, look at the bright side, Mary. At least she didn't suffer when her dad died, and she has a caring mother like you." There was silence on the other end. Did I lose her? Did I come on too strong too soon? "Mary, are you still there?"

"I'm here. I was just drying my eyes."

I dropped my knotted shoulders and let out a breath.

"I love my daughter very much; it's just that I can't bear to have to constantly watch her just sit there like a vegetable knowing this is the only life either one of us will ever have."

"What's wrong with a mother loving her daughter as the only life either of you will ever have? You are to be admired for devoting 20 years of your life to a human being whom you love." I got emotional and ended up doing most of the talking for a while. Mistake number two. "Think of the comfort you offer her, even if she can't respond to you. You've gotta hang in there with all you've got, Mary." I screamed into the telephone. I forgot all my fancy counselor vocabulary and protocol. The other counselors stared at me as they listened to my mini sermon.

"You're right. It is worth the trouble. Nobody takes care of her like I do. I know when she's thirsty, hungry, or anything else."

"It's going to be okay, Mary. You hang in there and call me anytime. I want you to tell me more about your daughter. Would you do that?"

"Yes, I'll do that. Thank you for listening. I'm okay now, really." She continued thanking me until I had to say goodbye.

I shook as I hung up. The other counselors were busy with their own calls now, so there was no one to talk to about my experience—no counselor for me. I slumped in my metal chair.

I felt numb from the strain, yet I wanted to jump and scream as loudly as I could. I never got the chance. I felt a hand on my shoulder, which belonged to a kind-faced, elderly gentleman—my replacement.

"But I've only been here for a few minutes," I said.

"It's okay. Sounds like you need to cut your shift short. We all go through this the first time." He offered a weak grin.

The counselor who sat next to me grabbed my arm with one hand as he grabbed his coat with the other. "I've seen you at the bus stop before; how about if I walk there with you?"

"Sure. I can use some company." This counselor was 36—I overheard him mention his age to another counselor—yet, he had a worn, grandfatherly look. His name tag said "Ron." He gave me the impression of an old, young man—a paradoxical mixture of youth with the wisdom and weariness of old age.

***

As we walked down the street, I noticed Ron was unusually quiet for someone I had just met. I guessed the many years at this suicide hotline business had taken their toll. He stopped in front of a video equipment store, which had a big screen television set in the display window. The sound of a football game was audible outside the store due to the strategic placement of a speaker on an outside ledge to attract shoppers. The cheer of the crowd was deafening, since one of the players had just scored a touchdown. The band played a loud, vigorous march synchronized with myriad hands, pompoms, confetti and hats that flew into the bright sunshine. The commentator's voice changed to a restrained excitement as the director switched from camera to camera to match the sudden change of pace. The football player who carried the ball in for the score raised his hands and did a victory dance in the end zone, which made the crowd cheer even louder. He was a hero. Ron stared silently at the big screen. I wondered why he was so mesmerized with the action on the screen. Maybe this was his favorite team?

It was without warning or emotion that I saw the tears streak down Ron's worn, wrinkled face. The louder the cheers, the louder the band played in honor of this man who just ran with a football. More tears rolled down Ron's eyes. It took me a while, but I finally understood his tears—even after only one night of suicide hotline duty.

TOUCANS



Salma Akter*

A PRAYER IN PAIN

Shyanne Caporuscio*

Please God just take me away from here;
I am begging just let me go.
This is not what I want for myself anymore.
Everyone will be okay; life will still go on.
Please God, just let me go.
I've been fighting way too long.

I tried and tried.I cried and prayed.
I gave this all I have and now I'm throwing it away.
I lied, I lost. I just gave in.
Believe me, I tried to fight my temptations.
I fell into the unknown and the fear;
God are you still listening?
Please God, take me away from here.

I wonder if you hear me. I wonder if you know.
The pain that I am feeling deep down inside my soul.
How can I get through this? I feel so alone.
I don't know where to turn from here. No place feels like home.
I know this is a lot, and I am not sure what is left to say.
I do not think I am strong enough; God, please take it all away.

I am trying to have hope; I just do not understand.
How can all this pain and desperation
Be a part of the bigger plan?
I am not asking for all the answers, perhaps just for a sign.
Maybe could you tell me, God, will it all turn out just fine?

Please God, just take me away from here.
I am begging just let me go.
This is not what I want for myself anymore.
Everything will be okay; life will still go on.
Please God, just bring me home.
I've been fighting way too long.

CREMATION RIVER 1-5

Kenneth DiMaggio

Lines Before Cremation River (#1)

Pyramid-like bundle
of sticks on a small
dock before a river
that looks like it is
flowing with slowly
coagulating mud

Fire
will soon
flower over
what I squint
to see inside

which soon sparks
towards me as if
saying “Westerner
go away.”

For which all my
life I have:
a quick prayer before
an open casket
rote condolences
to the grieving
family
well-shared memories
of the departed afterwards
at the luncheon
is how my civilization
makes sure

death never happens

Lines Before Cremation River (#2)

A foot
--trying to kick
the rest of its
body out?

But before my
imagined escape
from death grows
more detailed
a priest or monk
sets torch to the
pyre that will soon
make a body ash
that will get
sprinkled
into this river
that begins in
Kathmandu
and ends in
an eternity that
my empirical reality
will never enter

A foot
trying to kick
and help balance
the rest of its tiny
body out
before it is held
in the only pair
of arms
that will always feel
eternal

Lines Before Cremation River (#3)

He calls me Father
even though I never
had any children he
insists upon being my
guide before the pyres
that will soon be enflamed
before this river

--for which families and
most of all sons will have
duties that make sure
the ashes of their mothers
or fathers receive the blessings
of eternity

The capital letter E
used to equal a number
a square a mind that
could perceive but still
feared entering the
eternal

numbers formulas
masterpieces failures
they all get lost in this
never ceasing current

Only with a family that
mourns but spreads
your remains

And the money he
asks me for after my
guided visit reminds
me how I am childless
before what has now
become an abyss

Lines Before Cremation River (#4)

Before the ashes
a temple but also
hospice
for those who will
soon burn in one
of the pyres before
the river

A wait no more than
a few weeks my guide
tells me

until then
several old men
but also women
who can still walk
but also smile at
the fire that will
soon ashen them

But in the land where
the sun settles we will
fight and when we
inevitably lose we will
grandly in granite or
marble memorialize
our struggle

and as an old woman
gently walks past
a man from the West

Death smiles
at his civilization

Lines Before Cremation River (#5)

So fast did the pyre
burn
for you to forget
how it also blossomed
over a body

now a smear
of white and gray
ashes

that from out of
where
a monkey
now crouches before

perhaps contemplating
food
or some other form
of existence

in a substance that
appears to be dust

yet does not

ONE UNLIKE THE OTHERS



Madeeha Sheikh*

LITTLE PAPER HEARTS

Joseph R. Adomavicia

Little paper hearts open
with faded words between the lines.
Little paper hearts close,
balled up like a writer's scrapped page.
Little paper hearts open,
crumpled and wrinkled and crinkled.
Little paper hearts open or closed
can be reshaped but shy from normal.
Little paper hearts open.
Little paper hearts close.
Love is a wager worth betting on
for, even a little paper heart
regained shape after being crumpled up and tossed away.

CRYSTAL CLEAR GLASS

Mary Tetreault

The glass is crystal clear
There is not a drop of light-brown liquid
No ring of caramel color
Not even a hint of alcohol's aroma

It's just a glass!
A container for iced tea, juice or city water
It doesn't clatter on the coaster when she sets it down
It comes to rest quietly without a tremor

In winter the glass becomes an insulated mug
The liquid is coffee-- none of alcohol's false heat
She attends meetings and shares and sponsors
And becomes known for her words and their delivery

Nothing needs to be hidden when footsteps sound
And there's no black-topped bottle
Furtively pouring warm mouthfuls as she closes the closet door
Nothing hides on the corner support of the table
There are still men who don't deserve her
She stumbles in other ways and picks herself up
But the glass is crystal clear

The chosen name is hers and legal
This one matches the given middle perfectly
It comes free with a divorce
But takes some fighting for in other ways

She finds her truth, helps others, moves
And moves again
She learns, teaches, struggles, suffers
Searches, finds worth and strength and leans on love

Now the peace and safety slowly return
The path is still unknown but the steps are trusting
She feels the promise of golden sun and nature's waterways
She sees the crystal glass and gives thanks

I DO NOT WANT TO STEM THE ROSE

Carlamary Santiago*

I do not want to stem the rose
Doing that is just too easy
And I have never been that way
Nothing could ever please me

I do not want to stem the rose
People do not believe me
I wonder if I stay that way
Will someone ever see me

I do not want to stem the rose
I was warned about the prick
And the pain it can bring
To those who have yet to be nicked

I do not want to stem the rose
I hear it becomes addicting
The other girls say that once you have done it
You will want it like air for breathing

I do not want to stem the rose
It hurts to be told that I look like the type
And this is why I would much rather wait
Until I find the right guy

RIVER FISHING (A HAIKU)

Joseph R. Adomavicia

Soft river burbles

steady on a rocky bed

The fish are jumping

NEVERMORE



Iysha Robertson*

I WATCH THE LITTLE BIRD AS IF I WERE A TREE

Roberta Whitman Hoff

as I stood still in reverie beside
the Japanese Maple Tree this tiny
creature landed an inch from my face on a thin
branch and my breath made no difference
to her as she stood beside my cheek
as if I were part of the tree or a leaf.

I had saved a life that morning and was pausing
to review the moment, this feeling in awe;
all I could do was stand still
so quiet at the thought that a woman had lived
because I had been with her and how grateful
her grown son was that I had dialed 911
and the ambulance and medics had come.

I held this new experience inside my being
as still as the Japanese maple tree where
the tiny grey sparrow with observing eyes
looked at me as if I were a leaf and not eyes seeing
and then I remembered I was not a tree
and the sparrow of course flew away.

HUMMINGBIRD

Danielle Minicucci*

After you died everyone told me that you had gone to heaven
I suppose it was their way of trying to make me feel better

Nobody understood why it killed me to think of you like that
Locked up
Hidden away from this world

Your soul was too good, too pure, to leave this earth entirely

I wanted you to switch from one plain of existence to another
so that your spirit touched this world with its infinite beauty

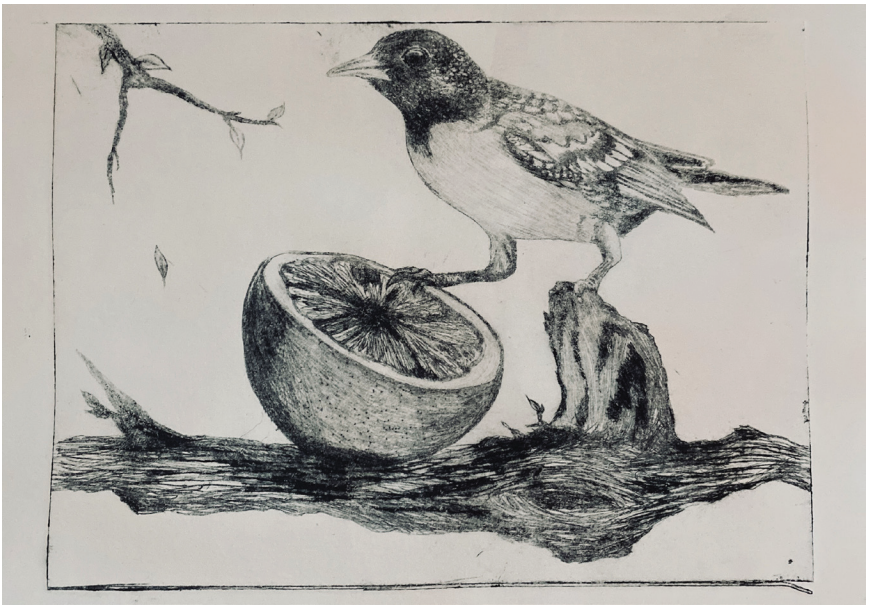
When I really miss you I like to imagine that you came back as a hummingbird

They were your favorite.
I recall all the trinkets of them scattered throughout your house

There was one in particular that I loved
The puzzle that sat on your wall of hummingbirds with flowers that was in the shape of a hummingbird itself will forever be burned into my mind

I hope your soul is out there
I hope you're living free of pain and
there is happiness in your next life because
if we are destined to go to heaven,
I pray that you wait to go until you can go with me

WINTER'S HUNGER



Stacy Staple*

HAIBUN FOR TOM YOUNG

Roberta Whitman Hoff

I sat on the cool slate steps of the home that belonged to my friend

and neighbor, Tom Young. Mother wanted me *out of her hair*

so I went to pet the neighbor's happy dachshund named *Lady*;

that was my excuse to visit. On hot summer mornings

Tom taught me how to sit still on the porch and watch the morning dew glisten

like sparkling diamonds of water on every single strand of green grass in front of me,

to wait and listen for the heat bugs; I felt the heat of morning rise first

and then they came in a wave of screeching sound

always just before noon and I would blink and all the dew vanished.

Summer returns I remember
the man my heart
named Grandfather

YOU ARE SUPERMAN

Danielle Minicucci*

You're the one everyone comes to for problem solving.
You're the one who jumps into action
To save people who need you.
I have seen it first hand,
The way you put yourself in the middle of a fight,
The way you pulled me into your body like it was a shield.
But does everyone see the way it drains you?
At the end of the day I want you to be able to come to me
and let your burdens be shared
Because even Superman needs to be saved sometimes;
He just doesn't know it, and he certainly doesn't show it
--I want to be the one to save you

SYDNEY AT ASBURY IN ACRYLIC



ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak

Submission Deadline: March 1, 2021

Fresh Ink 2021

NVCC's Art and Literature Journal

Previously unpublished works will be accepted in three categories:

Poetry
Short Fiction
2-D Art

- Up to five (5) individual works will be considered from each writer or artist.
- Each prose and poetry piece cannot exceed 1250 words in length.
- 2-D representations of any art genre will be considered.
- Only electronically submitted text documents in .doc, .docx or .rtf formats will be considered.
- Graphics should be submitted in hi-res .jpg or .pdf format.
- All graphic submissions will be considered for the cover design.
- All entries must be submitted via

FreshInk@nvcc.commnet.edu.

- Each entry should be submitted separately as its own attached file.
- Each file name should be the work's title.
- No authors' or artists' names should appear on the submitted attached works.
- Authors' and artists' names, contact information and status as an NVCC student should be included in the body of the corresponding email message.
- Only works from self-identified NVCC students will be entered in the Poetry, Short Fiction and Art contests.

For further information contact Jeannie Evans-Boniecki, Ph.D., Fresh Ink Advisor at JEvans-Boniecki@nvcc.commnet.edu.



Front Cover Art: *Cat in a Fish Pond*
Heather Ruszkowski
Back Cover Art: *Pin Oak at Clark U*
ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak