
THE ART & LITERATURE JOURNAL OF
NAUGATUCK VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Fresh Ink
2022
Connecticut
BUCKLE UP
ISSUE 53

The Art and Literature Journal of
Naugatuck Valley
Community College

Fresh Ink
2022



"the hand" by Anna Kwashnak

ISSUE 53

The 2022 Luke S. Newton Memorial Award

Winners:

Art:

"Window Still-life"
by Meghan Delp*

Short Fiction:

"Chance Encounter"
by Grace Dodge*
&
"Butterfly Kisses"
by Robert Andreotta*

Poetry:

"Visiting My Sister Isolated by COVID"
by Vivian C. Shipley

The Luke S. Newton Memorial Award honors Luke S. Newton, an alumnus of Naugatuck Valley Community College and a lover of great writing.

*

"The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
Smaller and dryer than the will
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still."
"Ash Wednesday" (lns 36-41) by T.S. Eliot

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Front Cover - A collage of “Experimental Flowers” by Veronica Egas, “Cloud Watching” by Meghan Delp & “Buckle Up” & “Nature’s Winter Magic” by Gregory Kashuba
Back Cover - A collage of “Brazilian Jaguar” by Veronica Egas, & “Pigeons” & Window Still Life” by Meghan Delp
Lay-out Assistance - Christopher Boniecki & Vismel Marquez

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April 13, 2022

Dear Friends of Fresh Ink 2022,

In this collection you will find the works of some of NVCC's best student authors and artists as well as representative works from our supportive creative community.

As our publication continues to grow in quality as well as in size, special thanks go out to all who support this evolving project: CEO Dr. Lisa Dresdner, Academic Dean Justin Moore, Associate Dean B.L. Baker, Student Activities Director Karen Blake, Administrative Assistant Nancy Powell, interim DAT Coordinator Terrance Griswold and Educational Assistant Vismel Marquez.

Special thanks go out to our evaluation team members who read and scored this year's more than two hundred quality submissions. As many of these team members have been conscientiously participating for years, I'd like to thank them doubly for their continued support. Greg, Wade, Steve, Sandra, Joe, Joseph, Alyssa, Ember, without you this project would not be possible. Thank you, also, to the honor student, Marisa Panasci, for being so instrumental in evaluating and editing this text. You're brilliant.

Thanks go out to Christopher Boniecki for his invaluable assistance helping with evaluating and laying out the publication all weekend long in the typically lonely DAT lab.

Special special thanks are due to a graduating member of the NVCC student body, Gregory Kashuba, for his dedication to this year's *Fresh Ink* cover design. It has been a pleasure witnessing his creative process as his collages are truly spectacular.

Finally, thank you to you, the contributors to our journal, for entrusting us with your art, your poetry, your prose. Again, it was an honor to serve you in this capacity.

Best Regards,
Jeannie Evans-Boniecki, PhD
Adviser Fresh Ink 2022

Winner of the Luke S. Newton Memorial Award for Art

1st Place - Art

Meghan Delp*
window still-life
gouache and oil pastels on black canvas



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*denotes an NVCC student author or artist

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2nd Place - Art

Veronica Egas*
brazilian jaguar
oil on canvas



Chance Encounter 1st Place - Short Fiction

Grace Dodge*

Winner of the Luke S. Newton Memorial Award for Short Fiction

A vividly lit sign reflected in the windows of a church that shadowed the entirety of the street. Across from the site of worship stood an establishment that encouraged a different kind of devotion. A cigarette sat between Indy's cracked knuckles. When she glanced downwards, all she saw were finger bitten nail beds, and sour smoke drifting up past her hands, and into the sky. Indy flicked ash off the end, watching embers fall into the snow-lined sidewalk. She took one more inhale, savoring the warmth in her lungs, before crushing the stub underneath her sneaker, and throwing it in a nearby trash can, readying herself for reentry into the dive bar that employed her.

Above her, the chapel towered, steeple stretching higher than any of the buildings around it. Indy savored one more brief moment of quiet, all the other windows surrounding her now dark, and shouldered her way through the heavy wooden door. The noise of the bell that hung along the frame echoed throughout the room.

At one a.m., it was practically empty. Only two patrons remained, the piss-yellow of their cheap domestic beers filling their glasses. It was Monday, which meant they were supposed to close twenty minutes ago, but all of her attempts to prompt the men to leave had gone either unnoticed or ignored. The chairs at all of the unoccupied tables were up, most of the earnings from the night counted, and the heat had been turned off, leaving Indy wishing for something else to warm her fingers. She sighed, knocking her fist against scuffed wood, causing one of the two men to look up at her.

One man had a face full of patchy stubble and bags beneath watery, red-rimmed eyes, and had spent the majority of the evening fiddling with a gold band. He looked like an absolute wreck. Another divorcee, if she had to guess, or just another person to get the shit end of the stick. A ragged sweater with threads frayed on the shoulder, hung loose off his thin torso. Being at a bar this late, alone, on a weekday, looking like you haven't slept in a few days, wasn't a great indicator of success, or prosperity, herself included.

Two seats down sat the other one. His head was bowed, a trenchcoat hung

loosely over a finely tailored black suit and an expensive-looking hat rested on his head, covering his eyes from view, but thick salt and pepper locks rested against his shoulder.

“Chop chop, gentlemen. It is past close and I can’t let you stay any longer.” The divorcee took the last sip of his beer, barely looking at how many bills he removed from his wallet before tossing them onto the bar, and placing his glass on top of them, upside down, soaking them in what little beer had remained. Indy resisted the urge to flip him off. The door chimed signaling his departure, and unfortunately, did not hit him on the way out.

The other man stayed sitting, watching the divorcee leave, a silver coin flashing between his fingers as he passed it from one hand to another, maneuvering it with the slightest twists, gaze fixed on the other man’s retreating figure. Indy sighed, sensing a confrontation in her future.

“Come on, man. It’s one in the morning and I’ve got an 8 a.m. class tomorrow. Well... today. I’ve definitely let you stay long enough,” she pleaded, letting her fatigue seep into her tone. “Not to mention, I still have to make food for Seollal tomorrow, along with--.” He stood abruptly, and far quicker than Indy had expected, cutting her tangent off mid-sentence, as his features still eluded her. It looked like he’d barely taken a single sip from his beer, but he tossed a 20 dollar bill, and a handful of loose change down nonetheless, the coin flashing as he tucked it into his breast pocket. She brushed the thought away. Indy wasn’t about to complain or point out the fact that his Bud Light only cost $3.99. She had other things to worry about. A tip was a tip, as far as she was concerned. Hopefully, this was his way of apologizing for keeping her past close.

The man shuffled his way to the front, tread unusually soft against the old wooden floors, and opened the door, letting the cold winter wind blow in. It sent a chill down her spine. Indy looked down at the bill, and at the section of the bar it was set upon. Something about the shellac looked wrong, and she reached her hand out, brushing against the lip of the counter. Three deep gouges were carved raggedly into the wood. She hadn’t seen a knife.

“Hey! Did you do this?”

Indy glanced over her shoulder to glare at the man, only to see bright, yellow eyes. They were fluorescent, even in the dim lighting, reflecting slightly in the

light from neon beer signs that were propped on the wall to his left and stood out aggressively against the darkness of the man's skin.

They stared at each other. Neither moved nor made a sound. When the man opened his jaw, wider than was possible for any human, his face twisted and his full lips pulled taunt as sharp fangs poked through. Bright white. They were long, thin like daggers, and stretched just past his bottom lip before angling back inwards at the tips. He looked intrigued, and all at once, Indy regretted drawing the man's rapt attention. Even the way he stood looked off. His hunched shoulders gave the impression of a leopard waiting to pounce, and his head was slightly cocked to the side, at the slightest angle, while he watched her every move. Her every breath. A predator stalking prey.

Indy froze as he stared at her. Without blinking once, the minutes seemed to stretch into hours, as she stared back, wide-eyed, willing herself to keep her gaze true, knowing that if she failed, it may be the last thing she ever did. Those effulgent eyes seemed to look into her, seeing her heart hammer up against her ribs as pinpricks began, warning her of oncoming tears. The smile faded on the face of the other man, barely visible among the pearly spears that protruded from his mouth.

"Enjoy your evening, Indiana," the man said, somehow perfectly clear between the teeth that obstructed his lips.

Then, he tore his stifling gaze away from hers, politely tipped the brim of his hat farewell, and closed the door without so much as a creak. All Indy could do was stand there, stunned. She'd never told him her name.

Mere seconds passed until she ran from behind the counter and threw open the door, heart throbbing in her chest as she scanned the street frantically, listening to the bell knock loudly against the doorframe. The neon sign illuminated nothing but empty pavement. There was no man. No yellow eyes. No fangs. Just the silhouette of an empty church, the buzzing sign above her, and Indy's frantic breathing.

It wasn't until later, after Indy had convinced herself that it was a side-effect of too many late nights, did she light another cigarette and will herself back inside. With the absence of patrons, the room seemed cavernous. The emptiness clawed for her attention as she ignored her shaking fingers, picking up the change from beside the other glass. Two quarters, a nickel, and a silver coin. *

Gregory Kashuba*
nature's winter magic
digital design (clip studio paint)



Winner of the *Luke S. Newton Memorial Award f*or Poetry

Poems by Vivian C. Shipley

Visiting My Sister Isolated by COVID

Like a burglar casing out a house, I've been peering
through a window for months, but today I can visit
Mary Alice if she's wheeled out to the gazebo.
Her face, a gravestone weathered to a blank stare,
I'm unable to quarantine my heart as her lips sag
when I tell her who I am. Preserved by the salt air,
her skin is smooth like chambered timbers of a hulk
that's been filled then emptied over years by seawater.

Some part of her brain must still hold the will she had
to be beautiful even when a tumor growing there has
been scoured first by radiation, then rounds of chemo.
Unlike a trawler stranded on sandy flats, low tide
does not uncover portholes into her mind. Reminding
her I sucked my thumb, had to wear wide-calf boots
in high school doesn't salvage childhood's souvenirs.
How long will the hull of her body refuse to cave,
melt into Florida's foliage like a downed palm tree?

Unlike my mother, the tumor in my sister's skull
is quiet, subtle. Although I was the one who needed
it, Mary Alice beaded a bracelet for our mother
with silver, blue and gold to pave her path to heaven.
Not once did my mother give her the look she
reserved just for me, sucking air through her teeth,
eyebrows arched toward her scalp like a stretching
cat. She never sniffed my sister's head like a melon
checking hair for smell of cigarettes, Maker's Mark,
pot. When I talked to boys on the phone, I stretched
the spirals of black cord down the basement stairs.
Hearing my whispers, she called me her misfortune,
snatched the receiver so she could slam it down.

My sister would find it strange to learn I have kept
the mask she wore molded to fit over her head and
bolt to a hospital table during radiation. When she
is no longer here, I will be able to stroke her acrylic
cheeks, finger parentheses of the jaw bone. I'm glad
now I resisted the urge to paint it like Spiderman

or Batwoman. There are cut-outs for her mouth
and nose, but none for her eyes, perhaps to prepare
her for what cannot be seen. Unlike Cardea,
Roman goddess of hinges, who had the power
to open what was shut, I cannot lift the malignant
mass from the socket of her brain so words
might leak out, sentences crawl up her throat.
Unable to pour herself into another vessel,
if Mary Alice had something to ask me, some
knowledge to impart, she has lost it now.

Adrift

A night light for my soul, I no longer have the Bible
my mother left open for me on my bedroom table to
protect me like a box of latex gloves, an N95 mask.
Nothing moors me. Even pushing forward, I recede.
Mired in 2021, some mornings, it takes more courage

to get up than I can muster. NYT's Coronavirus death toll
for the U.S. of over 600,000 leads to bathrobe afternoons.
My mother would tell me to call on inner resources.
I do, but they don't answer. Poetry, the raft I climbed
onto to get through another day of isolation doesn't

keep me afloat. Learning in science about hugging
a porcupine from the front and not the back didn't teach me
to embrace myself. Rowing a dinghy did. The boat
was a little tyrant maybe because like a chained dog,
it was so often tied to bigger ships. Poems no longer

come sideways, shy and circumspect to surprise me
like the dinghy. Small, unpredictable, it was unstable
when someone like me, overweight and unsteady,
got in. Knowledge of buoyancy, of physics didn't
help and I learned the hard way to lower myself in,

keeping weight in the middle. Maybe, lessons from
rowing will help me through these endless days of
washing my hands, staying two arm-lengths apart
from others. After all, never standing up, I did
perfect crouching like a child in school shielding

herself from a Bushmaster AR-15. Rough water?
I practiced mindfulness, stayed centered and calm.
I'm too goal oriented, dinghy rowing, unlike using
a bow and arrow to hit a target's center, helped me
accept my outer and inner imbalances. Meditating,

I kept a steady rhythm, didn't get depressed as I
do each night dwelling on bad choices I've made.
I gave myself up to the illogical: to row the dinghy
forward I had to face the stern. Backwards, I
could not see where I was headed and I was able

to point the bow in the right direction by choosing
a landmark—if I forgot, I ended up nowhere near
where I wanted to be—which sometimes opened
up whole new worlds. Rowing in early morning when
water mirrored my face, the past faded away. Like the virus

which has a vaccine but breakthroughs of a new variant, Delta,
I couldn't see what waited for me. With a tree
or rock as guide, it was another chance to go
back to before I began to thumb away hope, be sixteen
again, stand on the roadside, my bared hand stuck out.

Dust

You are dust and to dust you will return.
—Genesis 3:19

My poems pointless as Rembrandt's Self Portrait
hanging in limbo at the Frick with no one
to look at him like Sisyphus I'm tired
of endlessness of Covid-19
Daring to wear mismatched socks playing air guitar
to rival the Rolling Stones doesn't put
a wrinkle in starched hours so I dust
which makes more dust At least
it is productive prompts me to create a list
road dust coal dust stardust space dust
Liveliest of all are dried bugs pet dander
Experts say dust high to low
fan blades light bulb tops Wipe toilet tank lids
Swiffer the baseboard I can combat visible
particles unlike deadly droplets
that might be clinging to groceries
while I worry if I'm walking through air where
pans a jogger has been Neighbors bang pots
to thank essential workers but useless
I draw a heart finger Thank You
on my dresser Rather than dwelling on mortality
I contemplate how many motes of dust it takes
to make a dust bunny Everything
about me is average so
my body sheds its entire skin more than a billion cells
every twenty-eight days At least once a day
Mother said Cleanliness is next to godliness
but grace never arrives alive
in bits of my husk turning in a ray of sunshine

Anne-Charlotte Silver*
sunset at the poconos
digital photography



Ellen Lopiano*

The Feeling

Every day starts new,
And then it rumbles.
Outside, inside.
Like a tornado
No warning, little warning.
Wait do I get a warning?
Can we pause?
I need to breathe, to think.
Paralyzed.
Can you feel that?
The vibrating?
My skin,
If it vibrates anymore it may melt.
Melt right off,
And fall to the floor.
1,2,3,4,5,6
The numbers on repeat in my mind
Fast, faster.
Like the spin cycle in a washing machine.
Make it stop I want off,
Out of this body.
Triggers- what was it this time.
The hollow sound of a motorcycle, the dryer, or the roar of a fire.
Breath... it will pass.
It always does.

Poems by Christopher Boniecki*

My Persephone - 1st Place - Poetry

I live life based on you my Persephone
but when the winter months come it gets hard to breathe
the proof of my devotion
carved into my feet by their revealed veins

Hades has you and therefore me as well
A Horn of Plenty lays barren, an empty shell

Cadavers form from the echoes of your mother's wails
Her laments rampage through my crops
The Poplars no longer sway in gentle breeze
But are undignified as the blizzard wind causes them
to plead and flail

The epic heroes of poem take shelter
instead of creating new sagas of venerable virtue
When Spring lets its time fade
into a beautiful spectrum of crimson oranges
The forests of an untamable flame bid a pliant farewell
I can't take such a distinguished exit

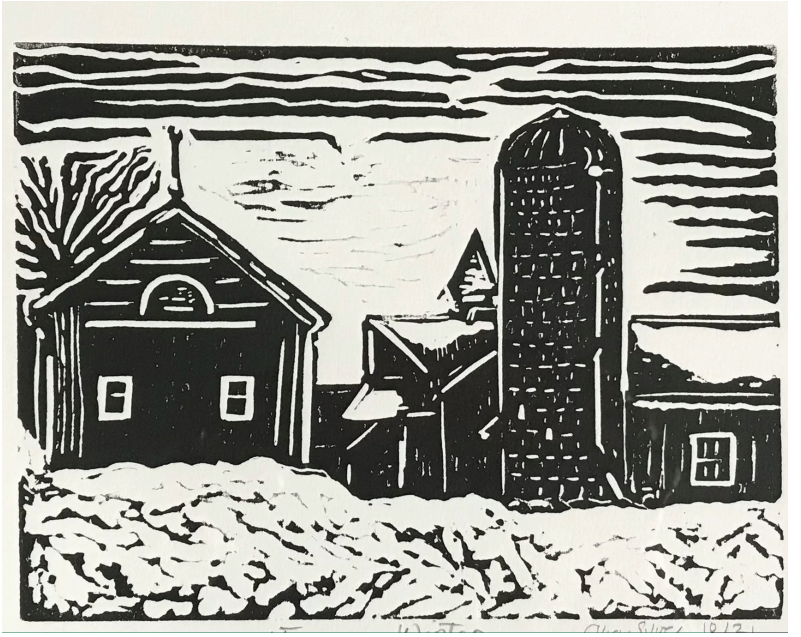
Wave - A tanka

My brain was a wave
My self— caught by undertow
Its skull dragged through sand
Swallowed by infinity
Spat out— ‘nother wanderer

By the Lady in My Dream

Oh, how we used to happen
We moved individually and not in response
Every step our own
We were Bohemian and didn’t like sweets
The puzzle piece that the dog ate
I loved being your little Jiminy Cricket

Anne-Charlotte Silver*
barn in winter
linocut print/ink



Sandra S. Newton

Slant Eye*
An exercise

You say you want to stroke my long black hair
But that only makes me want to move
Farther from you sitting here.

You say you feel nothing but love
For my tawny sun-browned skin
Yet I know in the dawn it will hardly live.

One thread unraveled from this skein
Will show the slanted eyes that close
Because what they saw in scan

Was nothing gained; here we only lose
What once we held, what now is held from us
With sweet seductive lies.

We have slanted eyes
Jap Chink Flip Gook
And all the rest: Look!
The yellow menace
The kung flu
How do we go back where we came from?

**Slant rhyme: near rhyme, usually the same consonants but different vowels.*
Eye rhyme: words that look like they rhyme but don't in sound.
Terza rima: triplets rhyming aba bcb cdc etc. In classical poetry, iambic meter.

Adrift 2nd Place - Short Fiction

Joseph Spezzano*

Alone, weightless and spinning; this was all I could care to feel right now. Most people's reaction to such an ejection would be one of fear, fueled by a primal sense of self-preservation. I, however, felt nothing. "Stabilizers engaged," the familiar, vaguely feminine, robotic voice remarked from the speakers embedded into my ears. Now I felt something –the weak thrusters on my suit slamming me to a complete and utter stop. From here, the blackness of space wasn't as dark as I had originally thought. Past the drifting chips of white paint and tangled mess of what was once the ASP-RL0128 were hundreds –no thousands–of twinkling stars. They were far, not impossibly far; but definitely greater than the distance my outstretched hand could reach. "Suit energy critical: Non-vital functions are now offline. Re-establish a connection with the nearest power tether immediately." The voice spoke once more, and the small, white LED illuminating the inside of my padded helm shut off –as did the four displays just beyond my peripheral vision.

It was rather amazing how much light those flat rectangular displays emitted, but it was even more astonishing how much of the universe they concealed behind their polluting glow. Just as my helm had plunged into darkness, a new light began to shine from the rosy, pink puffs and swirling aqua marine clouds that snaked through and around the drifting celestial bodies. Exo planets, either blue or unremarkable shades of grey, were all tangled in this parcel of stardust. Embedded within the exotic nebula surrounding the star system were glittering flakes of ice, riding along what I could only describe as long white locks of silky hair, which flowed throughout space. As for where they came from, that was far beyond where my eyes could currently see–and so, I craned my neck and looked up. "Warning: Anomaly detected," my suit chirped unnecessarily, and I was now face to face with what I could only describe as her.

Those puffy pink clouds, with their swirling green curls, blotchy blue seas and silver tendrils weren't just a nebula, but a body; a body that belonged to none other than the universe herself who had humbly graced my insignificant, primitive self with her presence. Before me was a face, featureless beyond the two silver eyes looking down on me from above the event horizon they peered out from. Just like that, all three years of not just my own work, but that of all seventy-six crew members aboard the station was discarded –as the gem encrusted planet known as Solitude-22A and the black hole hugging

it were not just ordinary objects challenging our understanding of physics, but rather they were part of an elaborate, celestial necklace hanging over the heart of the very being who created the universal laws which we had no choice but to abide by. I was admittedly blindsided by such a sight, so much so that I ignored the cosmic hands filled with countless, tiny stars cupping beneath my minuscule self. I had only realized I was being raised up towards the heavens once I stood face to face with the pulsating eyes of the universe. She was smaller than I, yet larger than life itself. How could such a being exist let alone be paradoxically manifested at both ends of such an extreme scale? I had no idea, but I did know that I could simultaneously flick the barren, galaxy filled face in front of me away and be crushed within its other worldly, ethereal hand –which I did not stand atop of; but rather had been submerged into.

Before I –or she -could muster any words; she faded away into the darkness of space, leaving behind the shattered, crystalline husk of Solitude-22A and its parental black hole. Despite her absence, her impossible image was still mentally engraved in the glowing nebula before my now alight visor; and my suit's A.I. proceeded to scream every possible warning message it could into my inattentive ears. "Warning: Suit thrusters have misfired. Warning: Radiation levels are critical. Warning: Suit energy fluctuation. Warning-" The robotic voice systematically rambled onwards to me,and the ensuing verbal bombardment only ceased because of an interrupting static hiss from my suit's radio transmitter.

"...please respond. I repeat; this is Captain Ludwig Baring of the ASP-Hopeful. Unknown crew member of ASP-RL0128, we have picked up your suit's emergency beacon and are en-route for extraction. We are reading that all of your suit's functions are fluctuating uncontrollably, and I ask that you respond immediately." The static infused, emboldened voice of the young captain rang in my ears.

"I have stared into the eyes of the cosmos, and she has stared back," I replied, my attention still fixated on what was once before me –or maybe, was never even there to begin with. Regardless, the Captain did reply to me, but I could care less about what he had to say. Right now, I was fully absorbed in a deep trance, and I could do nothing but wait for reality to reel me back in. Until then, I was once more weightless and spinning. However, now I am no longer alone –not because of the Captain and his rescuing ship; but because she had never left my shattered mind. *

Peter Winne*
boot, spade, flask and snowdrops
white charcoal on black paper



It Is Real

Robert Andreotta*

It only comes in the night, but that doesn't mean it isn't real. I never saw it, but that doesn't mean it isn't real either. Everyone tells me it does, but it doesn't. My mom told me it wasn't real first. She looked in the closet and said it wasn't there. She checked under the bed and said it wasn't there either. Then she kissed me on the head like that was that, and said good night, and that she loved me, and turned off the lights, and left, and she closed the door behind her. She closed the door behind her, and she turned off the lights. She didn't see it under the bed, so it must not be real. Does she really think ghosts hide under the bed? They lived in the house longer than she ever did, she doesn't think they have better hiding spots by now?

This one hides in the windows. I don't know how he does it, but he does. I never see him; it wouldn't be a good hiding place if I saw him, but I hear him. Every night after my mom comes in and looks in the closet, and looks under the bed, and kisses me on the head, and says good night, and turns off the lights, and closes the door behind her, he comes out. He sounds like a sweaty fat guy that's smushed between two pieces of glass so tight that he can't move his arms, so he has to slither his way out. He slips for a second or two, then the sweat dries up and he squeaks, then he gets to another sweaty part and slips again, then he dries up again and he squeaks again. There's a big thud when he finally falls out. It shakes my whole room and I can't believe that no one else can hear him, but no one else can, and they say that means he isn't real. But it doesn't.

He grunts too. It sounds like that one time my brother got hit in the belly with a basketball and it puffed out all his air and he had to sit down. One time he grunted and farted too, and I laughed. But he got mad, and I stopped laughing real quick. "Shut the fuck up you little shit." That's when I found out he was a mean ghost. I didn't laugh anymore after that, even when he farted again.

No one cared until I told them he touched me. Then they cared a lot. I had to go see a doctor then and she asked me a bunch of weird questions about my mom, and my brother, and my uncle, but she didn't ask me about the ghost even once. Then I asked her if she was a real doctor and she said yes and asked me why. I told her that my daddy said real doctors wear white

coats. She didn't like when I said that. She pretended she didn't care but I could tell she did. I told her I wanted to talk about the ghost, but she just kept asking about my family. She didn't say it wasn't real, but whenever I talked about it, she acted like she didn't hear me or something and that was even worse. I broke my brother's Xbox last year and he acted like he couldn't hear me for two whole days and that was the worst. The doctor talked to me at least, even though she only wanted to hear about my uncle and not the ghost.

After the doctor my mom got real mad at Uncle Ray. She pretended she wasn't mad, but I could tell. She pretended she wasn't mad at my daddy too, but he has to wait outside in his car now when he comes to pick us up, and she doesn't talk to him anymore. She's bad at pretending. She doesn't talk to my uncle anymore either. Maybe he broke one of her toys. One night I heard her yelling and the next day my uncle had scratches all over his face. I asked him if my mom scratched him but he said he got them fighting the ghost. I didn't believe him at first but then the ghost stopped showing up for a while so maybe my uncle did fight him.

It came back though. It always comes back. That's how I know it's real. It didn't touch me the first night. He just stood there. I think that was even worse. When he touches me, I know he'll go away soon at least, but that first night he just stood there. I pretended to be sleeping and I kept my eyes squeezed shut but I knew he was still there because he was breathing real loud. He didn't go back in the window this time either. He walked out my door. I heard the door open, and I thought my mom was checking on me at first, but then the door shut and when I listened close I couldn't hear his breathing anymore, so I knew he left.

Anyway, that's it. I have a ghost and no one believes me. I told my mom and she checks under my bed. I told my dad, but I think he only really listens to my brother. And I told my brother, but he just tells me to stop being a baby. The doctor wouldn't even talk about it. No one believes me, but that doesn't mean it isn't real. *

ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak
do your best
charcoal



Violetta's Diary by Violetta Constantine Discovered by (...)

Thelma Owoicho*

March 14

My name is Violetta Constantine. These pages that you are reading now are an account of what happened to my village on March 2, 2050. I write this so that you will know the truth and hopefully somehow with this knowledge, you can save yourself the horror that we have gone through. I come from a small village in Iowa called Richmond Hill - population 1,283. We were an agricultural village, well supported by the government's genetic engineering programs. I was a journalist for the local paper. I had a husband, Kevin, who was a doctor at Richmond Memorial. We had just moved to Richmond Hill twelve months before. I know I do not have much time left, as I sit here in my self-made prison. But if this account is the last thing I do in this life, I am determined to do it. I must go now. The light is failing. I must hide and wait. I hear them coming.

March 15

I made it through another night. GenTech are to blame for this abomination. GenTech is the sole supplier of all of the genetically modified crops in this area. The farmers were given tax breaks if they planted the new "super crops" that would withstand pests and diseases and grew twice their normal size. Five years went by, and the crops got bigger and better, and no one thought that there could be any problem except for the excessive amounts of pollen produced every spring. That kept my husband Kevin busy at the hospital dealing with the increased number of people with allergies and breathing problems. GenTech decided to spray the new crops with a specially engineered chemical to reduce the pollen. Cells found in vampire bats were extracted and through a short round of experimentation was found to reduce pollen production. I remember the unease I felt seeing all those men in biohazard suits spraying everything with this man-made chemical. Wondering if we had gone too far trying to fight nature when we should know that nature always wins in the end. Spring came around again, and the crops were as big and as plentiful as before and the pollen went back

to normal levels. The scientists breathed a sigh of relief, and all seemed fine. That was until people started to get sick. Many people went into deep comas followed by internal bleeding and systemic failure and death in less than ten days. More and more people started to die. The scientists found that the pollen had been decreased but had mutated into a virus, which was deadly to people with the most common blood types. Rhesus negative blood types were the only group that didn't die. But that was not all that happened. Kevin told me of one particular case of a young man named Lucas Reiman age 29, blood type Rhesus B negative. They said that he had complained of intolerance to light. His roommate came home one day to a darkened room. Lucas, he said, was sitting at the table eating something. The young man went closer to him and realized he was ravenously eating raw liver and when he confronted him, Lucas became like a "wild animal" and sprung on him and tried to bite him on the face. It took five paramedics to restrain Lucas, but they managed to get him into the hospital. Lucas was the first, but not the last of his kind. Lucas was kept under sedation and observed. His skin turned completely black, his nails grew coarse, and all of his hair fell out. The skin on his body was leathery to the touch and his eyes had turned completely red. This happened over the course of five days.

March 16

I am still able to write today. This basement is so dark. At first, I could barely see what I was writing but now I can see as if in daylight. I buried his body before they got to it. Kevin was one of those who had a common blood type. I am Rhesus negative. I can only assume that everyone except those with the most common blood types is dead and the ones like me are Nichtvores or waiting to change.This is what I can tell you. They come out at night to feed; because of this, they have been called the Nichtvores. They seem to have a bat-like appearance and have an extreme sensitivity to light. They walk upright and have human intelligence but the heightened sense of an animal. They are strong, aggressive, and crave any raw meat or blood they can find, animal or human. They are no longer human emotionally and cannot be reasoned with. They hunt in packs, and they are always hungry.

March 17

I can't believe they are all dead now or worse. Rose McNeil, my 22 year old co-worker who was about to get married. Ed Marsden, age 63, my old neighbor, a lonely widower who loved to chat. I will miss him. The Williams Family, who owned the farm next to my colonial, and of course, Kevin. All dead I think, or one of them, or should I say, one of us. I don't know how much longer I can hold out. I would rather be dead than become one of those creatures. My mind is starting to go, and I feel constantly hungry. I feel ravenous but all I want is meat. I know what my future holds, and I do not want it. I hope I have the courage to end it all before my mind goes and then I will have no more control.

March 18

They come at night to hunt. That is when I hear them.The sounds I hear are indescribable. All I can say is that they are not human. I am here in my basement hiding. There are about fifty Nichtvores standing around my house. There is nothing anyone can do for me now. Lucas, the first Nichtvore, died after ten days. I can only guess that without meat or blood the Nichtvores die like all the others. If I can only resist the urge to feed, I think I can make it. What would I eat? Oh, how I miss Kevin! Oh God, I think I miss him. I want him, oh God no! I can't have these thoughts! I need meat. I have to feed! I see the Nichtvores waiting for me. They seem to have found the place where Kevin is buried. I buried him in the yard. He is mine! He is mine.... I must feed....

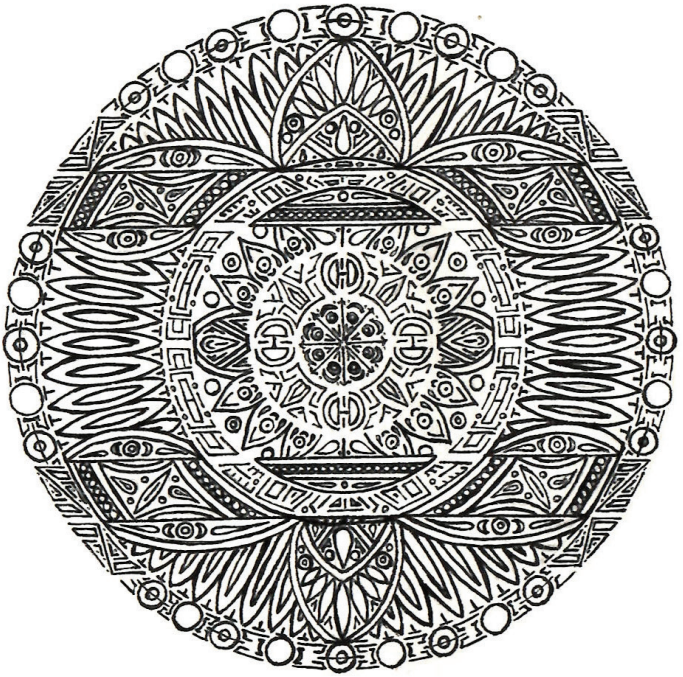
Note from (...). Avril 2 2135

I discovered this diary near our birthplace in Richmond Hill. It is the first written account of the origins of our great species. It is the tale of how we, Nichtvores, came to be. This is the first Human to Nichtvores account. From the Humans' misguided quest to control nature, we, Nichtvores, were born. Humans did not win that battle, and they are now no more. This is an account of our first great leader, Violetta Constantine, who led us out to the rest of the world.

We will never forget her!

Long Live the Nichtvores! Vive ut vivas! *

J. Trujillo*
crest of the cryptodera



Independence day

Mason Boilla*

*soon to be a DAT Club Original Short Film

It arrived as it always did—in a Styrofoam cooler on the front doorstep, required packaging for the July heat.The driver always delivered it too early for Sam to thank them; delivering the same cake 13 years in a row would've made a funny inside joke—he didn't know what the joke would be, but imagined they'd have something. Though the tradition may have sent them a message to remain an outsider, because the driver was just a driver, and the cake just a cake. To the driver, at least.

Sam opened the front door, letting the air conditioning flood out and the heat seep in, knelt to pick up the cooler and brought it inside. He set it on the kitchen counter, staring at it.Taking a breath, he removed the lid, peering inside: a white wax-laminated cardboard box sat atop a dry ice pack—a cake emblem on the folded-hinge lid encased the words *Dahlia's Delights* with rushed black Sharpie just under reading, "vanilla, blue." He'd grown to prefer chocolate more.

The top met his chest, so he reached over the edge and lifted it out, pushing the cooler forward and the box in its place. He stood, staring. He hated this part. He breathed in, and closed his eyes—lifted the paperboard lip, hoping to see something different. He opened them.

In it lay a 12-inch round cake, loopy font streaking the white-washed top in blue gel icing spelling,"Happy Birthday, Sammy", surrounded by a ring of blue buttercream ruffles. Same as always. He hadn't gone by Sammy since he was 10; Sam turned 23 yesterday. Being born on a federal holiday had its perks —one being the driver would wait an extra day for Sam to enjoy himself before setting the pit in his stomach.

A handwritten notecard affixed by corner slots to the inner lid:

Happy 23rd Birthday Sammy!

Love Dad

Looking at the card he couldn't remember if he'd seen his dad's handwriting. He did remember yesterday's party: sitting on the patio with his family, his aunt asked if he heard from his father today—no but he expects to hear from the bakery tomorrow. His uncle next to her muttered something.

"Sorry?"

“Be grateful he sends you something.” His face simmered.

“I didn’t realize he deserved praise for being a decent father.”

“I didn’t realize good sons didn’t reach out to theirs.” He had reached out: the latest was a text last year inviting him to graduation; he waited. A week later, just before the ceremony, he checked one last time: Read.

After he walked the stage and took photos with friends, he saw a new message: *Sorry I couldn’t make it. Congratulations!*

Nothing since then. But Sam didn’t say that; he didn’t say anything. His aunt scolded her husband who cursed under his breath, and Sam’s grandma suggested fireworks.They set them off after sundown and Sam watched as tears welled up.

In the kitchen, he leaned over the cake and sobbed.

*

Sam knocked on the door. His neighbor across the street, Shelly, opened it.

“Sam! Happy Birthday! Oh...are you alright?”

He smiled luke warmly. “Thanks, yeah, I’m fine. Want to go for a walk?”

The sun dipped into the horizon behind them giving their shadows on the pavement a constant head-start, casting the sky a brilliant magenta.

“How was yesterday?” she asked.

“Fine...I guess. My uncle and I argued.”

“I’m sorry. He’s on your dad’s side?”

“Yeah. He said I should be grateful that my dad sends a cake every year, and I—”

“Bullshit.”

“What?”

“That’s bullshit. He sends you a store-bought cake with a card and he never showed up to your graduation.”

He forgot he told her that and began to regret it. She noticed his silence.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“Don’t be. It’s true.”

“I shouldn’t have said it like that.”

“What other way is there to say it?”

She paused. “You’re not a bad son, Sam.”

He didn’t respond.

“You’re not.”

Yesterday’s simmer bubbled up.“I’m not?” he quipped cynically.“You know what 5-year-old me wondered, Shelly? What could he have done so badly to make his daddy leave, and even more, promise to come back? Nothing, but 5-year-old me didn’t know that.5-year-old me wanted to know why daddy wouldn’t show up for visitations even when he promised he would. 5-year-old me wanted to know why daddy was never home, when my mom knew he was out fucking other women, but of course she would never tell me that.Tell me, if 5-year-old me wasn’t a bad son, then why did his daddy never want to be around?”

“Sam, I—” she said, searching for words.

“I held my father on a pedestal for years, where he wanted to be, as I hoped one day he’d turn around and be the dad that plays catch with his son in the front yard, who comes to his plays and gives me a firm pat on the back—but now he’s embarrassed because I’ve taken him down after seeing reality and he’s too much of a coward to face it, leaving me fatherless because he never actually wanted to be one, only ever the credit.

“But he still sends me a cake and a card every year and it always guilts me, because every year it’s a middle finger to everything he’s put me through. People ask me, “Has your dad reached out?” and I say, “No, he sent a cake,” and they say, “Oh, that’s nice,” with a smile that says different, and I nod and smile the same smile because I know they don’t really want to know, and it would be futile to explain. I know I’m not a bad son, Shelly; I just wish he were a good father.”

He turned to her, who looked like she was seeing him for the first time. His face flushed red.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“No, don’t be.”

She smiled, and it said the same, making him momentarily forget the pit. He managed one back.They walked in mutual silence before circling around to their block, stopping at the parallel of their houses. She looked for a reaching hand in his eyes, but he wouldn't meet her gaze.

"I'm sorry, Sam."

"I'm used to it," he replied without looking up.

"You shouldn't be."

"Like I can choose an alternative."

"You can decide whether he's worth being used to."

He thought for a moment, and finally met her gaze with a grin. A real grin.

"Want to come inside?" he asked.

The cake sat in the fridge –the two on the couch watching TV. She turned to see him looking at the fridge.

"Sam."

He turned back to her.

"Sorry," he noticed the clock, "you should head home."

"I'm not needed much there," she replied, a smirk hanging on the words.

She made him grin a lot. He looked towards the fridge again, feeling the pit beginning to fade, like a ghost leaving a lingering cold in its once occupied air. She watched as he got up and walked to the fridge, opening it. She watched him, and he turned around, each hand bearing a plated slice. "You like vanilla?"

ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak
west farms quartet
oil



Poems by Joseph R. Adomavicia

Dear Lover, Forevermore

Dear lover,
Have you seen where the roses bloom?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and if the blossoming of a rose
is love eternal
then that is how long I plan to do so.
From our first I love you,
to today's
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
Have you seen where the rivers flow?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and the connectivity of all water is relative,
let us continue on
because that is how long I plan to do so.
From our first I love you
to today's
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
Have you noticed the sun and moon?
Please, give it the thought.
For, I love you,
and they both rise and set daily
like how we wake and fall asleep
with the joy of seeing one another.
From our first I love you
to today's
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
Have you heard of forever?
Please, give it the thought.

For, I love you

and if forever is the extent
of the length of our lifespans
then that is how long I plan to do so.
From our first I love you,
to today's
and of course,
forevermore.

Dear lover,
I promise,
forevermore.

Without You

Like a guitar without strings
or like a singer who has lost their voice,
without you,
I would not have the harmony
I have in my life now.

Like a captain without a ship
or like a ship lacking the sea
to set sail upon,
without you,
I would not have my bearings
set forth with confidence.

Like a river that has run dry
or an ocean without waves
without you,
I would not have the happiness
You have saved
in a heart once absent of it.

Like a garden without soil
or like flowers without sunlight and water,
without you,
I would not have the pleasure
of having the love
we have created.
Without you I would not have.

Anna Kwashnak
inked collage
pen and ink



Poems by Patty O. Furniture*

An Acorn

Once I buried an acorn
Way on top of a hill.
I hoped to see an oak tree there,
And I am hoping still.

An Orange Hand

An orange hand just waved goodbye,
And you won't see a single sky
That met goodbyeing quite like that.
I'd like to say I heard a cry
Or even just a little sigh,
But I'd be lying claiming that.
And it is such a mournful woe
To see it leave, to see it go.
I know it won't be coming back.
And you might say, "Oh don't you know,
There'll be another tomorrow,
And History shall keep its track."
Still, as I felt its warmth depart,
It was enough to melt my heart,
Because tomorrow won't be that.
If I could draw or make some art,
I'd paint the pain. I'd make it smart,
It wounded me there as I sat.
Still, Time, the weaver, threads her way
And pulls us to Another Day.
We can't spend it all looking back.
And as we go, we learn, we say,
"We cannot stop; we cannot stay."
As Time goes on, we've lost our knack
For looking at the blessedness
Of this today and all it has:
To live and cry and yearn and laugh.

It was not like the pinky breath
That said “hello;” ‘twas more like death,
And I but write its epitaph.
The hand had kissed the purple sky
And slowly sank, a lullaby
For all of us in its own rite.
But if we fought and tried to tie
It down, we’d never know the sigh
At witnessing the beauty of Night.

Gregory Kashuba*
buckle up
digital design (adobe photoshop)



The Perfect Life 2nd Place - Short Fiction

Robert Andreotta*

Emma Lacroix had a perfect life. She was young, in her late twenties at the oldest. Hair the color of burnished copper fell in effortless curls to her narrow waist. Piercing blue eyes hid behind black spectacles that rested on an infuriatingly cute button nose. The whiteness and straightness of her teeth were too much to be natural, but their perfection only added to her already ethereal beauty. Her eyebrows were drawn on, but in a subtle and elegant way. Occasionally she went too heavy on the foundation, but otherwise her makeup was as perfectly crafted as the rest of her. Her coworkers would look at her appraisingly when she stepped out of her Lexus in the morning.

No one would ever guess, and they wouldn't dare to ask, but she had grown up on a farm in Hemingford Home, Nebraska. Every October her family would drive down to Omaha for the state fair, cattle pleasantly sedated in a trailer hitched to their truck.The Lacroix's didn't have money, but her daddy did have an eye for livestock, and they won the blue ribbon every year to show it. The female teachers eyed her up and down before saying hello much the same way that the other farmers looked at her family's sheep. Instead of looking for structure, wool quality, and size, they looked at her hair, shoes, and car. Ultimately judging her for her parking spot in the back of the lot. She was the newest union member and got the furthest spot. In this they felt superior, so in this they judged.The males judged her too, but as buyers not competition. Emma Lacroix smiled and waved, eyes beaming even at six o'clock on a Monday morning. She came in at 6:00 a.m. sharp every day to grade papers and prepare her lesson plan.The other teachers did this after school and stayed late. They'd drink coffee, relive their days, grade assignments, and delay going home to their families. Emma on the other hand left at 3:30 p.m. every day. She needed to be home at 4:00 to start dinner for her husband, and make sure it was on the table for him and ready at 6:00. Emma Lacroix was the perfect wife.

She wasn't always a perfect wife, but her coworkers didn't know that. They saw her grab the new Gucci bag out of her car, but they didn't notice her wince when she put it on. All they saw was a perfect gift from her perfect husband for being the perfect wife. They didn't see how she earned her gift. Her students loved her unanimously, and the teachers hated her for that

too. Emma was patient and kind. She never showed annoyance at anything her students did. She never gave them anything less than her complete and undivided attention. Her husband taught her these traits, and she learned quickly. She was a perfect wife.

One morning she tripped on a wire and knocked the coffee maker onto the floor, shattering the glass pot. Her coworkers almost started to like her in that moment. She made a mistake; she was finally one of them. Then she immediately got on her knees and started to clean. Endless apologies and self-deprecation spewed from her mouth, and the moment was gone. Emma refused to let anyone help, and during her tirade of apologies a smile never left her face. She kneeled on a piece of glass and left a puddle of blood on the floor when she stood. She shrugged off their sympathy and bent to clean that too, full of apologies and an embarrassing amount of shame. The teachers huffed and walked away. They tried to help her, tried to be nice, but she was too good for their sympathy. Emma's husband didn't tolerate mistakes. If she wasn't sorry enough after making them, then she certainly would be when he was done with her. He gave no sympathy, and made it clear she didn't deserve it. But her female coworkers didn't know about that, and Emma would never tell them. A wife is supposed to keep her husband's secrets, and Emma Lacroix was a perfect wife.

She missed school a lot. The young teachers always called out the most, and the old ones complained that the younger generation didn't want to work. But Emma called out most of all. New teachers only got one week of paid vacation, and the unpaid time off wasn't much more than that. However, there was a stipulation in the new contract that offered teachers limitless days off with impunity. But after a certain point, the cost of the substitute was subtracted from their pay. Emma Lacroix had a perfect husband with a perfect job, and he liked to take her on spur of the moment vacations. She had money along with her looks and could work as she pleased. So, she called out a lot, and was hated even more.

She came in at six o'clock sharp one morning wearing a Fendi bag on one shoulder with matching pumps on her feet. On her other shoulder she was sporting a sling, with a matching splint on her nose. A large pair of Jackie Onassis sunglasses rested lightly on the splint, almost succeeding in covering the pair of black eyes beneath them. She told her students about

the accident. How she was rear ended, and the airbag broke her nose. She didn't tell them about the sling, but they didn't ask. The nose and eyes were more dramatic, and her sixth graders barely noticed her arm. The other teachers didn't ask at all. They heard the gossip about it in the hallways, then gossiped about it on their own. They agreed that she was probably texting and driving. All the young people did it. They would tell each other what a shame it was, with concern painted on their face. But for most, that concern hid a smile.

Ms. Lacroix missed school the day after President's Day weekend. She didn't call out this time, but it was no cause for alarm. The teachers rolled their eyes at each other and said it must be nice to turn three days off into four, then went about their days. The four days turned into five, and then six. Her phone went directly to voice mail when the principal called, and text messages went unanswered. She was the center of gossip around the water cooler now. The contract allowed them to take days off, but not without calling in first. Her coworkers knew she would get in trouble, and they discussed it with greed. After eight days off, calls no longer went to voicemail. Her phone was disconnected. The students missed her, but they were 11 years old, and their attentions shortly wandered elsewhere. Teachers talked about her in the same light as D.B. Cooper or the Zodiac Killer. She was the only topic of conversation for weeks, but months went by, and she faded to irrelevance. Her name would come up occasionally, and teachers would grumble and turn their heads. Her husband wanted his trophy to stay at home they said. She thought she was too pretty to dirty her hands with work they said. The teachers said many things, but never admitted they were jealous. Whatever happened, she didn't have to work anymore. Emma Lacroix had the perfect life.

*

Wanda Montes*

The Depth of the Written Words

It is so easy to get lost
in the formalism of objectives talks
not so when drawing them on
the canvas of a paper.
There is no place for interruptions
Not judging, not expectations.
It is only you and your heart naked, truthful
Unfolding in each word
The real essence of your soul.
Sometimes while talking, it is hard to describe your heart
cause the mind keeps holding you back.
No vocal sound could say better
than what a written word can portray.
When I write it is not my mind but my heart telling the story
Pure, natural, revealing the real me.
Who reads this poem can see deep into me.

Mason Boilla*
l'hiver à paris
acrylic on canvas



The Vampire's Tragedy

3rd Place - Short Fiction

Niamh Gannuscio*

I was in my mid-twenties in the 1980s and lived in London at the time in a tiny flat. My job was to take photographs for music acts and their promotional material. I loved that job; going to clubs, taking pictures backstage, and meeting the acts. One of my favorite club nights I'd go to was The Batcave; its Halloween theme made it truly unique since it wasn't celebrated in England. Some would say it was the birthplace of all things goth, though, for me, The Batcave will always be the place that changed me; it made me what I am today.

It was a place that I fell in love with, not only the goth scene but also my lost love Daniel. He was what I think I loved most about The Batcave. He was this shy bloke who always wore a vampire cloak that swooshed around him as he danced. He had this strangeness about him, being so quiet and awkwardly elegant as though he wasn't quite sure of himself while still holding his dignity.

I recall the first time I saw the strange boy, his cape fluttering about, catching the light as he danced to The Cure's "Funeral Party." What was weird was that he never took his eyes off the band. I assumed this got the lead singer's attention since he knelt down to sing directly at the fan. Of course, I couldn't miss a shot like that and quickly snapped a picture - immediately getting the stranger's attention. The band continued with their set as the boy came over to me, at which point I learned his name: Daniel Evans. He was an American bloke who was a big Cure fan, following the band after their first show in America.

Despite only knowing Daniel for twenty minutes, I invited him to 'be my assistant' as he had mentioned he had never met the band. After the star-struck evening of meeting the band, asking questions, and the like, they had to retire early, leaving Daniel and me alone.

After the interaction, with Daniel's shy exterior now faded, we began to talk about music and our lives. It was a wonderful evening sitting at a booth, talking to someone from a faraway land.

Daniel enchanted me with stories of America. In return, I told him of growing up in London, going to uni, and my photography business. He listened

quietly, drinking away at his wine, interjecting when needed. It wasn't long before we were asked to leave the club as it was their closing time. Before we parted ways, I handed him my business card and told him to call the number if he wanted to chat again.

After that night, he called; I was ecstatic when he invited me to go out clubbing with him the following Wednesday. As time went on, we saw each other every week. We'd talk for hours often the conversation stemming from our love of music though our evenings would also involve dancing. While I always enjoyed dancing on my own, there was something exhilarating about dancing with a partner, especially when they wore a long cloak. We could dance for hours together, laughing as we finished dancing to Bauhaus or Siouxsie and the Banshees.

Daniel brought more meaning to my life despite my worries about university, paying my rent, and other adult issues. He made it feel as though I was living rather than existing. So when Daniel asked me out on a date, I didn't turn it down. He took me to a fancy restaurant, insisting I ordered whatever I liked off the menu and to not worry about the bill. True to his word, he paid for everything that night.

Though unbeknownst to me, these days would only be the honeymoon period; All Hallows Eve was the night when everything would change. Daniel gifted me a red and black ball gown and asked me to meet him at Highgate Cemetery once the sun set. As we walked through the cemetery, the moonlight guiding us, he told me the reality of what he was: a vampire. He explained that when we went out, what I thought was red wine was, in actuality, human blood. While it was shocking, I felt no fear towards him for whatever reason.

Often looking back on this memory, I believe he had used his powers, looking dead into my eyes and telling me not to be afraid. I was naive to think he meant the darkened graveyard back then, but now I know the sad truth. In reality, he should have killed me, but I suppose he had learned what I now know; being a vampire leaves you lonely. I was one of his few living friends-for vampires; life is fast-moving, human's lives can pass with what feels like a few years despite decades passing. Though puzzlingly, after he had revealed to me that he was a vampire, he had slowly grown distant. While we were still dating, I began to see him less and less, and when I asked him about it, he insisted everything was fine; he was just more tired

than usual. Something told me something darker lurked in his shadows, but I decided there was nothing to worry about. Daniel wouldn't actually lie to me; he told me his biggest and darkest secret.

Little did I know that guilt had been eating away at him, which would grow as I began to implore him about being a vampire. As someone who loved the "mythical" creatures, I was curious to know what was fact or fiction. And so he told me in depth about vampires, what they were like, how secluded they often were due to food resources, how they could turn into bats, etc. He told me everything, and I ate up every word he said.

This led to me trying to convince him to turn me into a vampire. He insisted it wouldn't be a good idea, but I began to wear him down as time went on. His response slowly turned from a "no" to "maybe," "perhaps," and finally a "yes." I don't remember how painful it was, but I remember my final sunrise. My last day was beautiful; I went out partying, ready to become a piece of history. Then that was that, but once this happened, I began to truly see the small hell that Daniel lived in.

I don't think he quite understood why I wanted to become a vampire - why he, in particular, made me so happy. He was centuries-old; how could he understand the pains of human life? All he saw was a human whose life he had ruined. That guilt would eat its way through his flesh, festering away at him, making him more distant to me by the day until he slowly began to crawl away from me into the darkest of shadows. I tried to tell him I was happy - the happiest I had ever been, but he wouldn't listen; the guilt wouldn't let him. So it wasn't a surprise when I awoke to find a note on his coffin. "I'm sorry, my love, perhaps we shall meet another day-another time, perhaps even in another realm." Upon further investigation, I found his chair placed by the grand window in the sunroom, with the curtain drawn. I remember that sinking feeling...how when I saw ash on the velvet exterior and collapsed to the floor, finally understanding what a broken heart felt like.

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3rd Place - Art

Meghan Delp*
cloud watching
digital painting



Temperance

Vida Goncalves*

When I was younger, baby fat still clinging to my thighs and cheeks and a wide-eyed appreciation for the world around me, I loved to eat. I was smitten with discovering new foods and flavors and fell in love with helping my mother in the kitchen. I often indulged myself in two plates at dinner, enamored with the act of enjoying my food. Again, and again, I was showered with praise for not being fickle with vegetables, always appreciated for eating so much and being a well-fed child. Until I turned ten; the celebration then became a reprimand as I reached for seconds, being chided with the forewarning of becoming fat, just like my mother. I began to learn the facts of moderation.

In the year 2013 I got my iPod Touch; I found solace in Instagram communities that discussed my favorite book series and was currently replaying Pokémon Diamond and Pearl on my DSi. Our house was warm with the late September breeze flowing in, the air not yet scorned with October's chill. I chatted with my oldest sister at the dinnertable that was nestled against the far wall of our kitchen. We were drinking coffee. I was drinking black coffee, because she was drinking black coffee, and I had wanted to be a cool adult like her. Stephanie was short and skinny, but not in a scrawny way. Her legs and arm were toned with muscle from years of cheerleading and her body had a lithe way of moving through the space she occupied. While I was ten years younger than her, I was just an inch and a half below her in height. I began running track and yet, all my child-like features clung to me like a bad cold. I had yet to build any muscle in my legs from the constant running, and I still held a considerable amount of chub on my stomach, arms, legs, and face. When I occupied a space; it was a huge looming presence that wobbled in on knock-knees. I would often look at her pale skin mimicking her hair with a flat iron, walking on my toes as she did, never making a sound as I would tip-toe around the house carefully, trying not to disturb the delicate layer of peace.

We often found ourselves at the kitchen table, always doing something to keep ourselves busy while everyone else was out of the house. I always sat and observed my sister while she was on her computer. She had bought it herself after working a shoddy job at the Staples near our house for five

years, and she sometimes let me sit next to her and we'd scroll side by side. We'd often cooked dinner together for the family, usually eating together before everyone arrived. On the off chance we had a family dinner, a heavy mutual misery soured our moods. Although we had this bond, and a small understanding of each other, my sister could never protect me from the outcome. Dinner always began with small comments: "Have you put on weight?" I'd reply, "No." My voice diminished and flat, trying not to draw any more attention to myself. Time would slowly pass, small talk filing in silence, an unbearable cloud of discomfort confining the space of our kitchen, until it escalates. A three against one, my father's shameful gaze and sharp tongue and my other siblings echoing his thoughts, always poised at the ready to eviscerate me into nothing, blending me under sharp blades until I was staring at the puree of my dinner flushing languidly down the toilet within the hour.

After a repeat of these events for upwards to a year, I began to look into the mirror with an unfamiliar perspective. It felt as if I shattered rose colored glasses; and the new girl that stood in front of me was a nauseating, unsightly, vile, and a grotesque sack of skin that left me with a strong feeling of disdain and a bad taste in my mouth. I was shocked that I was so oblivious. I couldn't believe I didn't take my family's advice sooner. They hammered these convictions into my head like nails into a coffin; wearing down every perception I had of myself until they shattered with the smallest glance. I could no longer meet people's gaze when they spoke to me, hyper critical of every sound and movement I made. I spent all my time suddenly locked in my room, a long desolate existence of isolation began to crawl its way into my life, soon taking over. I was overcome with an intense self-effacing outlook. I no longer needed anyone else's words to tell me who or what I was, I tormented myself with feelings of inadequacy until it was all I knew; it became a fester of locusts in my head that began to gouge at my insides, repeating the words "Starve, starve, starve," begging me to repent for my gluttonous sins.

For every meal I had a day I abstained for the next. I was teetering on a very thin rope that looked down into a dismal abyss, and yet I was safely perched atop it. I knew everything was okay in moderation, including my meals. I knew that when I lost the weight I got faster on the track. I knew that when I was skinny my relatives told me I should model. I knew that my

father's shame was no longer on me and instead on everyone else. Now, I was pretty. Now when I cried people asked if I was okay, instead of jabbing short fingers in my face and calling me cry-baby. I knew the control kept me sane. It was an established routine of counting calories and measuring my waist. It was a tedious dance with myself and my little secret.

As I grew it was no longer a casual affair. It spiraled into an obsessive regime that overtook my every meaning of existence. I thought I had what I wanted, but deep inside my heart had become molded with hatred for myself. I was deeply insecure; it showed throughout every interaction. I allowed the insecurity to consume me; and didn't know who I was. I got lost in a forest of trees that had been planted inside me from birth. They sprouted when I had turned ten and grew at rates not scientifically possible. I became an empty husk of myself.

I have no pictures from those years, I completely erased my existence and memories of myself. I cannot look at photo album pictures of myself without crying. Without a deep feeling of mourning for a young girl who used to be me, without a feeling of shame for failing her. Sometimes I imagine a different life for her. I try to ask what she would have wanted from me at this age. I want to grow into something she could be proud of. There will always be a small trickle of guilt in my heart now for the girl who was incredibly young behaving twenty-five.

I like to think I am doing better for her now. I saw a friend recently; I hadn't seen her in years. She showed me all our pictures together, even embarrassing ones. She had kept them after all these years. This time I could let out a small laugh. I realized that the young girl who I thought had disappeared was still there.

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Anisa Joyce Caraballo

Valentine's Day, NYC circa 2018

the sweeper drags its heavy body,
spraying from an open mouth,
and swallowing debris that this sleepless city
has flung from its pockets.
men without faces follow the beast down 7th Ave.
flushing the remnants of 300,000 pedestrians
down storm drains.
all that remains:
obscenities whispered by faceless men,
me,
and the cheesecake in a dark Juniors
slowly turning.
I sprint up 7th Ave.
leaving behind only a Walgreens receipt,
proof of purchase for the bubblegum-pink box
pressed to my chest like a valentine.
I think:
maybe it was the chicken parmesan
that had turned your stomach sour
or the lonely cheesecake from Juniors.
in these early morning hours,
while the city gathers the last of its entrails,
I scrub your sickness from a hotel garbage can
rinsing it with water from the tub.
I think about the 11 am housekeeper
and the growing distance
between us in this bed.
what was once just a dinner in New York
could be evidence that two hearts
had turned sour
in this city that devoted early morning hours
to cleaning up after lovers and their messes.

Anne-Charlotte Silver*

common crow

linocut print/ink



Winner of the Luke S. Newton Memorial Award for Short Fiction

Butterfly Kisses 1st Place - Short Fiction

Robert Andreotta*

He rode along at a steady 55 miles per hour. There hadn't been a speed limit sign in miles, but he knew it couldn't be more than 25. It was a few minutes before two in the morning, and he should have arrived yesterday. Where the hell am I? His map was spread out on the dashboard, but with the moonless night and how fast he was going Matt knew that trying to read anything right now would be pointless. I'm too dependent on my phone, he thought. He grew up years after the annual Rand McNally had even somewhat respectable sales, and by the time he was behind the wheel his car had a state-of-the-art Garmin GPS stuck to the dash. Now even Garmin was a name of the past. Either way his cartography skills were severely lacking, and his phone had no service. I just gotta get out of the boonies he thought. Out of the boonies had been his mantra for the past 45 minutes, but they kept on going. Thousands of trees lined the roads, pavement was riddled with potholes, and now even mailboxes were few and far between. Where the hell am I? Matt thought again. He looked down at his fuel gauge and let out a groan.

"Motherfucker" he muttered to his empty vehicle. He would have to pull over. He would have to spend the night out here in the middle of nowhere. When the sun rose, he would have to walk up someone's driveway with his tail tucked between his legs and borrow a phone to dial his way out of this mess. He still had an 8th of a tank left, but with mailboxes being so sparce he knew he should stop near the next one he saw. He looked down at the roadmap laid out on his dash, hoping against hope to have miraculously gained some navigational skills. Movement flashed in the outskirts of his vision and he snapped his eyes back on the road. The deer was a brown streak as it bolted into his path. Tires squealed as he simultaneously slammed on the brakes and jerked the steering wheel hard to the right. The deer ran past without even sparing a glance and disappeared into the opposite side of the woods, completely out of harm's way. The same could not be said for Matt.

His car was spinning out of control and he was heading straight for a tree. He cursed himself for his stupidity. Why am I driving so fast? Why did I take my eyes off the road when it is so damn dark? And why the hell isn't

my seatbelt on? The tree was approaching fast now, and he knew there was nothing he could do. Before he hit, his senses heightened, and time slowed down. His life didn't pass before his eyes, but the people in his life did. Snapshots of the people he loved flashed through his brain. It was like someone was rapidly flipping through a book of polaroids of all the people he loved most. His Mom and Dad came first. Then his brother, then his little sister who had died from an overdose four years before. The images kept coming, one after the other. Then he hit the tree, and everything went black.

He could feel the sunlight prickling on his skin, and a bead of sweat trickling down his cheek. Is that sweat or blood? Matt thought. The pain was enormous. His entire body felt like he got hit by a truck, and he guessed that wasn't too far off the mark. He kept his eyes closed, not wanting to open them and face the situation. If he kept his eyes shut, then it wasn't real. If he kept them shut, he was still waking up from a dream. He couldn't feel his legs, and even the slightest attempt at movement sent lightning bolts of pain shooting through his spine. He groaned loudly and prepared to open his eyes.

He had to squint against the sun that was sneaking in through the canopy of leaves above him. I'm outside, he thought, assessing his situation. The woods were alive around him. Birds singing their morning songs, a creek babbling somewhere to his left, little rodents scurried through the underbrush all around. He couldn't move his legs, he might very well be dying, and all around him the world moved on. He was about to lift his head up and look around further when he saw it. A monarch butterfly fluttering down towards him. The orange of its wings seemed dull compared to the brilliance of the sun, but its beauty was undeniable. It came to him slowly, moving more like a falling leaf than the creature it was. It touched down on his cheek and fluttered its wings. Once, twice, then stillness. A tear escaped his eyes that had nothing to do with his current situation. His little sister used to give him "butterfly kisses". Pressing her face close to his, batting her eyelashes so they would lightly tickle him. Now he understood why they were called that. He closed his eyes again, feeling his sister's butterfly kisses and the tears rolling down his face.

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3rd Place - Art

Meghan Delp*
pigeons
watercolor ink/acrylic



Poems by Katharyn Howd Machan

When a Man Disappears into the Sun

nothing changes.
The village flutters, but no
one counts the flowers wilting,
black seeds tilting in night.
Dawn happens.
Morning turns yellow into purple
into green, and a wild-
haired boy laughs, spilling
pebbles, chasing crows
whose glossy bellies rumble.
Who needs a man whose hands
turn brushes into longing's touch?
Let him bleed. Let him die
not knowing a woman's fingers
will keep on pressing white and black
and bringing blossoms to a grave
no one thinks should be exalted,
death a splash of blood and wine
red as light in day's last grasp,
a vineyard full of reaching arms
with one man nearby, painting

On Christmas Eve I Write to Donald Hall

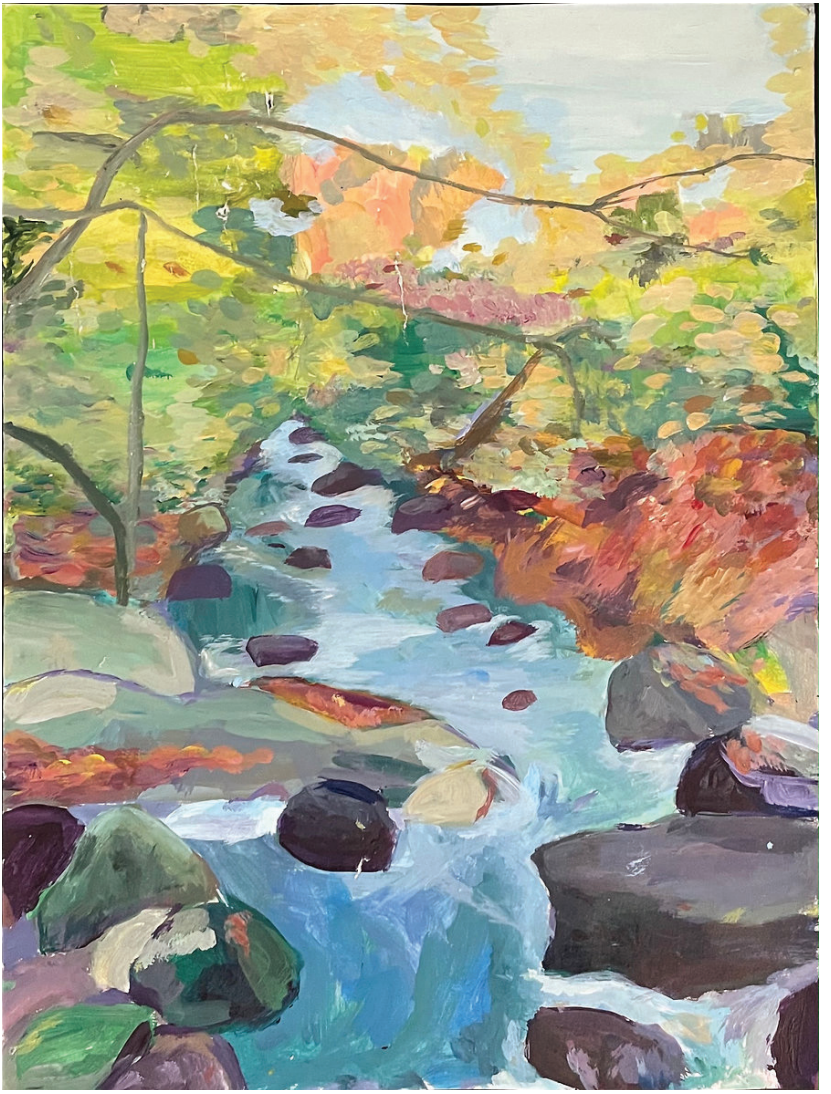
He's a ghost now, and I'm getting there, too,
silver hair above my belly dance,
whiskers where I perform my poems.
He's still in his grandfather's farmhouse,
Jane with him among wild gardens,
her words the curve of his spine.
He won't create new verse, he
says, but revise old lines and give
his hours to essays of when and why.
Decades ago I knocked on his door.
His lasting word to me: *try*.

The House of Me

has thirteen doorways. Each is painted
smooth, and a small cat runs to and fro
crying for food even when the dish
in the shape of a heart spills over.
My daughter comes to laugh at my
flat turquoise walls, each hung with one
framed postcard stolen from Bermuda
before the hurricane hit. In my
cupboard paper boxes holding
pasta curled to broken spirals
arrogantly taunt my fingers
when I reach for one to cook.
Come visit? I'll hide from you
the bedroom with its cross-stitched sheets,
dark slippers I take on and off
to walk the paisley stairs.

Veronica Egas*
hop brook spring

acrylic



Six Down

Erick Zuniga*

One down five to go.

Victor shot into the roof of the bank, and with that cue, Johnny knocked the security guard out. Just as hard as last time. The more they did this the more he acted independently. He glamorized their lifestyle. Although it was still a game to him. Victor was ashamed of Johnny. This was work not play. Victor aimed the revolver at the small crowd. There they were again, judging eyes some of those eyes hid behind fear, but they still judged nonetheless. The walls enclosed, his heart was all he could hear. He forgot to yell for a moment. Anxiety and withdrawal subdued him. Their judgment pierced him, unnaturally, strangling him. He tried to yell once more, but found nothing escaping his throat.

“If it ain’t obvious now, it’s a robbery folks!” Johnny covered for him, too theatrically. It chafed him, how he was acting. He still thought he was in a movie. But Victor only had himself to blame. Johnny looked up to him. He used to act this way when he first started. Johnny was following in his footsteps, without the cocaine, he could see that clearly, through the constraining walls. He was a bad influence, the worst one possible. Victor remembered his job now, why he was here. He pointed his gun, his tool, at the crowd.

“Throw anything you got at us and get on the ground.” He pointed the revolver at the crowd moving side to side, rapidly hoping the sweat wouldn’t make the gun fall right out of his hand as he did so. The crowd complied, but not without cost. They stared down their chief aggressor, a madman with a gun, a madman who was a failure, things he himself already knew. He felt all their eyes repeating it. His heart pounded. It was rhythmic talking, no, screaming at the judgemental eyes. “Look at the floor!” He cocked the revolver and waved it about wildly. It deterred most, but just because they weren’t looking at him doesn’t mean they didn’t think of him any differently. He looked away from the crowd, and at the teller, who right about now should look absolutely terrified, but to his surprise, he found a coolly composed bank teller, staring through the glass. He was a rotund weathered man with a mustache that gave him the likeness of a walrus. His likeness was familiar, of another walrus that used to be in Victor’s life, his ungrateful father, a pompous man who turned away “dirty money”, as if how the banks earned their money wasn’t dirty. The resentment and fear boiled within him simultaneously. Victor aimed up the weapon ever so shakily. “Open up in there or me and my associate are gonna have to hurt

some of these kind folk." He continued to stare for at least a minute, a very long minute. The teller scoffed and shook his head.

"Where do you get the gall, junkie?" Echoes of his father reappeared, eager to haunt him of his past. He only heard the thumping of his heart for a moment.

"Junkie?" Victor whimpered out, the label piercing him. He always held power during these stick ups, and in a moment he felt as if he lost it all, to an apparition of his father.

"Stealing money from honest men and women, you both are puny and pathetic." The bank teller chuckled. He was laughing at them, a gun aimed at his fat face, and he had the audacity to laugh.

"Grab me Poindexter over there." Victor aimed at the lanky man, with the thin wire frame glasses. His eyes grew comically wide when Johnny grabbed him. Johnny pushed the man down at Victor's knees, who forcefully pushed the barrel of his gun to the back of Poindexter's head. "You don't open up right now…." He looked down at Poindexter before gritting his teeth. "I'm gonna kill an honest man." Poindexter whimpered out a plea to God. The bank teller had made Victor feel weak. He hadn't felt like that in years. True incapability. This was Victor's bid for power, right now in this backwater bank, he needed this. The fatherly apparition stared daggers.

"You don't have the stones, junkie." Victor's bid for power failed. The many eyes on the floor looked up, resuming their judgment. He could hear the chant. Worthless! Junkie! Failure! Coward! He fired down in front of Poindexter.

Two down four to go.

Everybody jumped up and whimpered except for the teller. He was still business as usual. Victor could hear the chant not as loudly but as a whisper. It reverberated around him adding a chorus to the beating of his heart. Within the wall around him now was a nightmarish song, one that was clearly getting to him.

"Look down goddamn it! Not at me!" The chant's volume spiked sporadically, up and down, with his heart creating a constant loud monstrous beat.

"Looks like Poindexter is still alive." He was disappointed? "A coward bank robber? You're not long for this world boy." He was so smug. Who was he to judge the way Victor made his living? How he earned his money? Who were they to judge his living? The chant found itself, loud and deafening. The heartbeat still thumping away, the wall around him physically detaining

him. Victor brought his gun up rapidly and fired into the teller window at what appeared to be his father for a moment.

Four down two to go.

The teller's smugness remained. Two bullets were lodged in the glass, bulletproof, the hypocrisy. He was the coward, hiding behind his glass walls endangering honest folk. Of course nobody would ever see it that way. He was just a man holding his ground. "Trash that's all you'll ever be." He echoed his father once more. His heart couldn't sink, but he felt weak in the knees. Johnny seemed to pick up on their imminent failure. The bank teller always facilitated the robbery. Without compliance they were nowhere, just some pocketbooks and wallets, not enough to survive on. This was bound to happen sooner or later. Victor couldn't accept it. Despite it all he couldn't hurt his fellow working man.

"Gimme the gun. If you don't wanna kill em, I will." Innocent Johnny ready to kill, for all the wrong reasons. He looked excited, not a bone in his body treated this like work. It was all play for him. Victor had created a monster. "C'mon we kill one of em, he'll open up, watch." Victor took off the ski mask. The walls and the cacophony within proved to be unbearable, enough so he felt taking off the mask would make it all silent. It did no such thing. He looked at his coworker, his friend, the only one of his friends to fall into this life alongside him, betraying him without knowing. If he was going to treat this like a game he should have stayed behind with the rest of them. This was work not play. Victor raised the gun up shakily. He was just putting down a mad dog.

Five down one to go.

He looked at the teller. He was finally able to rattle him. He was walking backwards away from the glass, in awe and fear. The crowd was unruly. The teller was yelling some obscenity. He couldn't hear any of it. The cacophony was at its loudest now, and it would be forever unless— Six down.

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Poems by Ivan de Monbrison

original work from Russian to English

This Is a Shadow

Это тень.
Это собака.
Это ты и я.
Тишина, как лед во рту.
Это отсутствие, забвение,
потеря, начинать все сначала.
Это все и ничего.
Дыра во лбу
которая выходит из затылка,
где только бежит свет.

This is a shadow,
this is a dog,
this is you and me.
Silence like ice in the mouth.
This is an absence, oblivion,
loss, and to start all over again.
This is everything and nothing.
A hole in forehead
going through to the back of the head,
where only light comes out.

Yesterday Death

Вчера смерть.
Сегодня пустота.
Я ничего не чувствую.
мое тело - камень.
Моя рука - растение.
Я хочу только закрыть
мои глаза,
и спать тысячу лет,
в земле.

Yesterday death.
Today emptiness.
I do not feel anything.
My body is a stone,

and my hand is a plant.
I only want to close
my eyes,
and sleep for a thousand years
In the ground.

A Shadow Goes Down the Throat

Тень идет вниз по горло,
Ты не дышишь.
Комната без окон
похоже на тюрьму.
Есть мертвое животное
Лежащий рядом с тобой.
Он начинает гнить,
И не больше хочет сказать с тобой.

A shadow goes down the throat
You are not breathing.
A room without windows
looks like a prison.
There is a dead animal
lying next to you.
It has started to rot
and doesn't want to speak with you.

On the Other Side of Time

По ту сторону времени,
Есть мир воспоминаний,
Где я живу больше чем сейчас.
Я бы хотел чтобыты убил меня,
Чтобы перестать знать и перестать думать,
Быть не более чем трупом.

On the other side of time
There is a world of memories
Where I live more than at the moment.
I would like you to kill me
To stop knowing and stop thinking,
To be nothing more than a corpse.

Vanessa

Thelma Owoicho*

“Hi, is this seat taken?”

The woman seated looked up at the silver-haired man beaming down at her. The woman often sat here on this park bench alone and threw breadcrumbs at the birds.

“No, it’s vacant,” she replied. She moved her bags to one side to make more room for the smartly dressed man, and he sat down.

“If you don't mind me saying, I see you sitting here most days as I go for my daily walk. Do you live locally?’ The man had worked in the same New York high school for 40 years and was enjoying his retirement.

“Yes, I do, said the young woman,” as she brushed the remaining breadcrumbs off her skirt. “I live here”.

The man crinkled his brow but did not pry any further. “She lives here?” he thought. The young woman looked familiar to the man, but he could not place her. Was she one of his students? Her long black hair hung all the way to her waist in braids and was tied off her face with a red scarf which complimented her dark complexion. The lights flickered on as twilight descended upon them.

“I like to sit here and feed the birds and watch the passersby,” she said.

“I’ve lived in the neighborhood my whole life,” said the man.

“I know,” said the woman.

“You know?” said the man. “I'm sorry, but have we met?”

“Don't you remember me, Michael?” the woman replied.

The man peered at her again and took in her full form and stopped at her piercing black eyes. “It’s me, Vanessa.”

The man trawled through his memory to recall this face, that voice, and then he grew cold.

He spoke. “Vanessa?”

"Yes, it's me, Michael. You thought you were done with me that night all those years ago here in the park. I was so full of life back then, and this was always my favorite spot."

The man recalled himself 40 years ago on the night he thought he could forget. Saul, Gene, and he were only in their 20s back then, and decided to cut through the park and hang out with a few drinks. Saul was always pretty rowdy, and Gene was a bit of a follower. Michael was desperate for friends and just felt grateful he had someone to hang out with. They had found a spot on the grass near the lake and settled in when they saw her walking quickly past. The guys noticed this pretty woman and decided to have some fun with her. That was how it began anyway. The guys promised they would put that night behind them and try to move on. They all had big careers in front of them and had sworn each other to secrecy. The woman's eyes seemed to draw the man into her; they filled his whole vision. It was like he was blind except for those eyes. He panicked and tried to stand but he was rooted to the bench. He imagined the woman was a spider and he was caught in her web. He never felt such fear.

"I was so afraid Michael, when you all had your fun with me, I wanted to live! I had a baby at home and needed to take a shortcut through the park after my shift. Did you think about that Michael?"

He suddenly saw as if in a vision, the baby crying out and an older woman holding him close to her chest.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed, but could produce no sound. The woman reached out her hand and touched his arm, and just like that he felt the coldness of death overwhelm him. It was like sinking into ice, as if her dead hand was contaminating him.

"Every lie will be exposed. I have reached through time for you, Michael. Time has no meaning to me. Your time is up! We are all products of the choices we make, and there will be a reckoning," said the woman with a grin. The world grew dark, and he was gone.

****

Michael sat up in bed with a start and looked around. "Man, that was weird," he said. It was 1979, and "My Sharona" was playing on his clock radio. He sat up in bed and tried to remember his dream but was just left with a sense of dread. This was his first month at college studying Education, and he really wanted

to make some friends. Michael was a bit of a loner and would rather go see a movie. That new one *Kramer vs. Kramer* looked good. Gene and Saul had cornered him on his way to class.

"Hey, Mike! How about we get a few beers and hang out at the park tonight?" Saul said looking conspiratorially at Gene. They both came from rich families and seemed to always have a crowd of girls around them.

"Sure," he agreed. He really needed to make an effort, "I'll meet you around 8!"

Sitting in the park with Saul and Gene drinking beer that night was not his thing, but this must be what college kids do, so he tagged along. That's when he saw the girl.

"Let's have some fun," said Saul.

The girl looked familiar to Michael, but he couldn't place her. He hesitated; her long black braids hung to her waist and were tied back with a red scarf. An icy numbness hit him suddenly— the dream. He remembered. Michael turned to leave quickly.

"Guys, I just realized I had an assignment for Professor Peters! It's due first thing. I need to get outta here." Michael kept walking and did not look back.

Saul and Gene shrugged him off, not taking their eyes off the girl.

****

"Hi, is this seat taken?"

The woman seated looked up at the tall, older man beaming down at her. The young woman often sat here on this park bench alone and threw breadcrumbs at the birds. The man sat beside her and quietly ate his sandwich. The man turned to look at the raven-haired woman in the red scarf. The man had just turned 65 but still had an eye for the ladies, especially the younger ones.

"I love it here. It's so peaceful," he said in passing thinking, "she's a pretty one," to himself.

She fixed her eyes on the man.

"I know, it's beautiful; I've been waiting for you, Saul…"

*

Peter Winne*
hat, boot and watering can
charcoal



Poems by Benjamin J. Chase

Humane Mouse Trap

For a decade now, I've been leaving
packs of Pall Malls and lighters
on the floor of my front hallway.

My sticky note rules:
Do it on the back deck.
Don't let me see you doing it.
Clean up after yourselves.

So far, so good—
no messes, fires, or sightings.

Just diminutive coughing fits
from the pantry most nights,
and I can live with that.

A Backward Glance

One instant
as I was descending
another narrow pass
on the parkway
last night—

just one blur
of evening transit
among others—

I met
in my mirror
a tunneling canopy
of bare and arching
tree limbs
like a great kindling
stoking the setting blaze
of daylight.

Studying History

Before and after my class,
the students banter—
catechism style—
dealing despots
and dates, plagues
and reforms, trebuchets
and triumvirates.

It must be history
test day. It is.

Some squirm. Some puzzle.
Others burst with answers.
I join when I recall
a king or saint
of mention.

And so
the perennial history
of history
takes its rambling course.

Jaws on Rewind

--inspired by Reddit user sixdoublefive321

Some stories are better backwards—
like *Jaws* on rewind
where that greatest white devours
the assembling scuba tank
before the bullet
enters Brody's rifle
and the skiff tips up
into sudden seaworthiness.

Keep watching
and our unlikely ally
returns each swimmer,
unscathed, to the public beach,
then vomits one last skinny dipper
just in time to find her lover

Spring Comes to Monroe, Connecticut

Today as I enter the salt-stained lot
with its dwindling drifts of snow,
the sky burns steady blue
and cirrus clouds wisp perfect white.
The lawns and woods are still gray brown,
but the sun is nearing its peak,
and the air is warming
behind cooler breezes.

As I pull around
to the ordering station—
iconic pink and orange—
I claim the new season by faith:
“Hello—I’ll have a medium coffee,
iced, with cream and sugar.”

Veronica Egas*
experimental flowers
acrylic paint, charcoal, sauce pencil



NATALIE SCHRIEFER

Con Espressione

I'm sorry I seem callous
when I ask for D
and you plink G, but if
my mother hadn't told you
I used to play, I wouldn't have,
either. We share the piano
bench in her living room,
thighs touching; open
on the rack is a canon—
too difficult, too stifling.

You wait for my instruction.

Sharps and flats, notes
and chords, those I can teach
you, in time, but expression
is what captivates an audience.
It can't be taught—we can
only respond, musically,
to the pain we've experienced.
If I hadn't quit, I'd play for you,
eyes closed, each note articulate
and haunting. You, on the couch
or by the door, could tease out
the meaning—

but instead
your thigh is warm and I hate
the way it reminds me of summer,
this time my family drove
for ice cream—classic rock;
crunching gravel; me, at the farm,
between my parents, close
enough to reach them both,

years before their fighting
diminuendo-ed into the thud
of Dad loading boxes into a van,
the reverberations dampened
by the house wall between us.

I can't teach you anything.

Your fingers search for middle C.
Full of infinite impossibilities,
the octaves extend on either
side of you—and I wonder
what sort of music you might make.

Veronica Egas*
La Chosa
oil on canvas



He Made Something Out of Nothing - A Testimonial

Wayne Johnson*

I, Wayne Johnson, was born January 22, 1989 at Bridgeport Hospital in Bridgeport, Connecticut. While my mother was pregnant, she was deciding whether or not to have an abortion. My father left my mother in the middle of her pregnancy which would explain why there is only one signature on my birth certificate. When I reached the age of three, my mother was desperately trying to give me the life she never had. Every year I received more gifts than I ever expected. Yes, you could have called me spoiled. My nickname was NUK because I had an obsession with NUK brand pacifiers. Apparently, I had expensive taste as a child since the NUK brand was not cheap.

When I turned five years old, my mother got married to a man I did not like as much as I had hoped. The newly married couple had two children together. I began to notice the favoritism my stepfather showed to his children while he excluded me. As a result, I tried to find ways to break up their marriage. I was eleven when I witnessed my stepfather growing marijuana in the basement of our home. My mother had zero knowledge that this illegal activity was taking place inside our house, and I made it my business to inform her. A big argument followed involving my mother and stepfather. Admittedly, I enjoyed when they argued because I always hoped it would lead to divorce. Unfortunately, that didn't happen during this particular fight. It wasn't until about two years later, when I was thirteen, that my stepfather was caught in the act of adultery. Their divorce was soon final.

Growing up I gave my mother a lot of trouble and made silly mistakes. One time in third grade I took the rent money and handed it out to my classmates. My teacher exaggerated the story by telling my mother that she had never seen so much money in her life. The list goes on to the point where my mother could no longer handle me anymore and my grandmother stepped in to raise me. I gained a lot of weight with all those steering wheel size plates of food. Despite her efforts, I also gave my grandmother a hard time. My mother felt so bad that she placed this type of responsibility on someone else that she decided to take me back.

When I went to high school, I got involved in a Bridgeport gang and started hanging out in the North End Terrace Projects, which was not a good idea. I became a thief who robbed for my wants, and I got involved with drug dealers and lots of women. I ended up dropping out of high school in the tenth grade. At that time, my crew of friends consisted of five people – BJ, Flip, D-Dubs, Clay, and myself. BJ and I were on a spree to rob someone late night; this night would be the night that I almost

died. The brother of the person we robbed found out what we did and threatened to kill us. I happened to be standing in front of a closed bodega by myself around midnight when a pickup truck rammed right past me and into the bodega, inches away from slamming my body into the store. I ran and the driver backed his truck out of the store and chased me with the truck while I fled on foot. I happened to hop a nearby fence just in time. The driver ran his truck into the fence, but thankfully the fence was deeply rooted into the ground. The driver, by the way, was the brother that I mentioned before. I hopped another fence into someone's yard and hid under a deck where I prayed that this guy wouldn't find me. I heard him hop the same fence as me, yelling that he was going to kill me. I also heard him cock his gun back. I stayed under that deck in silence for about three hours. When I finally knew he was gone, I came out and walked home cutting through back roads and yards in order to avoid any open streets. I called BJ, and he told me there were more than ten cars out that night looking for us. It was after that night that I decided to never rob anyone ever again.

My mother kicked me out when I was seventeen, and I became homeless. Every night I slept in my friend's mother's junk car in their backyard. I went to a nearby hospital to take care of my hygiene. I would lock myself in the handicap bathroom where there was privacy. I shoplifted for food. One year later I was arrested for shoplifting and because I had a BB gun on me that looked like a real 9 mm pistol, I was charged with second degree robbery. I had no one in my corner to fight the case, so I was sentenced to three years in prison. I was homeless so I really didn't care about going to prison until I actually got there. I was locked up in the same prison with Joshua Komisarjevesky, the man who committed the home invasion in Cheshire, CT and raped and killed three females in their home. Crazy right? Carl Robinson, MYI, and McDougal Walker were the prisons where I spent those three years. By the way, while I was there, I lost all of my friends. BJ was shot and killed at the age of 17. Flip was also shot and killed at 17 as well. D-Dubs was going back and forth to jail. Clay had just finished an 8-year prison sentence. However, I'm here telling you my story.

There's much more to the story but I'm going to keep it short for my readers. I grew up in the church but I didn't really know what it meant to be a saved Christian until it happened to me. I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ and He became my Lord and Savior. I repented and I prayed. I had nothing, and I was labeled a felon and a drop out. The Lord blessed me with a beautiful wife whom I shared a destination beach wedding in Jamaica with. God restored everything I lost. I went back to school with the encouragement of my wife and earned my high school diploma. Now, I am a student at NVCC. I am employed with Connecticut Rivers Council BSA as a program specialist, and I work in five public elementary schools. I also am a direct support professional for a state group home company called I.C.E.S. The greatest achievement that I have felt is the peace God placed within my heart. I no longer live the way I used to. My wife and I have our own home together following Christ's will. Everyone who hears my story is surprised by the way my life turned around.

Emily Schneider*
copy of “girl with a pearl earring”
by johannes vermeer
colored pencil



Natalie Schriefer

Growing Pains

After dinner, Elijah and I walked by Fenway. It was December, dark; there weren't any street vendors, or any other people at all, really, just Elijah and me and the stadium, the streetlights dotting the road. It had snowed earlier, and the street was slushy now, the sidewalks cleared by the passing of feet.

It could've been romantic.

Elijah kept his eyes on the sidewalk, his beanie pulled down over his curls. We hadn't said anything in at least a block, so I asked, finally, "What are you thinking about?"

Elijah shuffled through a puddle of slush. "Do you think it snowed back home?"

"Maybe." Connecticut seemed eons away. We kept walking. I waited for Elijah to say something else, but he didn't. After another block, I asked, "Remember Summer, my old roommate?" She was from Connecticut, too.

"Yeah," Elijah said. "What's she up to?"

"She finished her PhD." I'd seen the photos online. "She's moving down south."

"I bet it's a lot warmer there."

I elbowed him, tried to laugh. "You jealous?"

Elijah laughed too. He wanted to move to the suburbs when our lease came up in a few months; he'd said as much last week. Headlights traced along the side of a building. We hadn't talked about it since. Hadn't talked about Summer, either, not about her and not to her, even though she'd been my best friend, once. Before she moved out west, before her fancy astrophysics friends, I'd been the one she dragged out for stargazing, breathless from the wind, her face and neck wrapped in a scarf. There weren't any stars out tonight.

And now she had a PhD, while I slaved away as a research tech. At least I had a job, right, but in the dark, Elijah silent beside me, my universe felt small and lonely. Cold. When we crossed the next street, I asked, "Do you want to stop for coffee or something?"

"I'm tired," Elijah said. "Sorry."

I pushed my hands into my coat pockets. "Do you want to head home?"

"Yeah."

We headed towards the T. I clenched my fingers inside my mittens, wondering what the inside of Fenway looked like now, if anybody cleaned the snow away during the off-season, or if, inside, everything was coated in powdery white, undisturbed.

At the station Elijah walked over to the platform, looking down the tracks. Eyes on something I couldn't see, he said, "We've been in Boston for four years. Maybe it's time to move."

The T rumbled in the distance.

"Where?" I asked.

"Someplace new."

So he was jealous of Summer. Wanting to leave the city for the suburbs was one thing, but wanting to leave leave—as in leave the state? Start over?

"No," I said.

Elijah studied my face. The T braked, squealing, and stopped in front of us.

When the doors opened, I marched over to one of the single seats. I waited for Elijah to sit in the double behind me, or grab the bar and stand beside me, lean towards me, smile down at me like he used to, but he was still out on the platform. Part of me wanted him to stay there. Maybe he and I had always been heading towards this moment, this schism—and then the doors closed and the T eased into motion. Outside, Elijah's black beanie passed by the window.

The train was quiet. It was empty and full at the same time, the air around me moving away from Elijah, our lives hurtling apart. Recessional velocity. Summer had told me about it once, when I'd helped her study for an astrophysics exam: galaxies moved away from each other as the universe expanded. The train swayed and I pressed my legs together, cold through my jeans. I'm not falling apart, I told myself. My universe is expanding. I'm growing. And sometimes growing hurts.

Ryan Garesio

What Makes Us Human

What makes us human?
Is it the way our heart explodes into constellations?
Is it our skin? Or is it the insurmountable pressure we feel
When our children are born and we ask: *What now?*

When everything we hold dear is on display
(Like the lion in the cage)
And we are confronted with ourselves,
Life becomes the sky
And we are but pieces of it—ablaze
With astonishing bits of light.

Anne-Charlotte Silver*
dominique rooster
linocut ink print/watercolors



Anna Kwashnak
squiggles
pen and ink



Thomas Warner-Crouch*

Winter Storm

A silver sky obscures the sun,
A piercing wind whips my face,
A hissing burst of scolding air,
Whispers harshly to the leafless trees,
Flailing in response,
Endless blinding white flecks of cold powder,
Not one speck the same,
Swirl without direction to the ground,
The chill gnaws at my fingers,
Eating my gloveless hands.

Its muffled sound its own invitation,
To move or stand still,
To talk or stand in silence,
The flailing of the trees through the scolding wind,
Telling me I must do nothing,
Just sit or stand in the icy air,
It asks nothing of me in return.

Emily Smith*

I Am a Stone 3rd Place - Poetry

I am a stone
Hard and smooth
Solid and tough
Formed in fire
Weathered and tumbled so gently by water and air
Eternal and marvelous

1 million years I have been here
I've changed a bit, in size and shape

50 million years I have been here
I've changed a lot, I am unrecognizable

You find me beside the river
Where I have been resting for 100 years
You pick me up, you like my shape
You like my shine, you like my color
You like my texture
You see me with your mind
And the eternal part of you is stimulated

But it isn't long before you decide that you are no longer impressed
You toss me violently from the riverbank, back into the water
Hoping to watch me make a splash
To give you one last moment of satisfaction
I strike a boulder instead, and crack down the middle
My tough center exposed for the first time
In a billion years

Nature took her time to shape me
It took only seconds for you to break me
And even less time for you to forget

That you ever picked me up.

I am a stone, with a deep crack in the middle
Down the river rapids I roll
Perhaps I will make it to the ocean this time
The water and air will smooth my rough parts
And in 100 years I will still be a stone, with a dip in the middle
But in 5,000 years perhaps I will be a pebble
My texture and shine restored once again, as if I were never broken

Shelby Fry
christmas in the park
oil



Mya Julian*

Killing Dick Warbler

I don't think of her often,
the muted version of myself
constantly owned by the meaty hands
who felt cold along my skin.
Every moment I said yes,
the light would stretch and
the end would appear more distant
than before.
Sun rose and set with the barrel
of a warm metaled gun to my chest,
both my heart and my breast
endangered.
I shot him dead one day,
and the eight months became nothing
but a bad dream, and I was swaddled in
the arms of another lover.

ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak
of sewers, crocs, thunderwaves and earned wings

oil



Audrey L. Finn

The Woman with the Twinkling Blue Eyes

I had always dreamed of having a unique, meaningful experience where I would meet an angel in a time of need. However, I did not anticipate it would occur in my local Walmart. As a child, I enjoyed listening to people share experiences in which they connected with a being of higher power. I found these personal encounters to be fascinating, as they often took place when a person needed comfort, protection, or clarity. This fascination grew after hearing my mother share her experience meeting her angel. My mom, recently married, was driving from Boston to Vermont for the Christmas holiday. She was traveling alone as my father was working. Unfortunately, she entered a snow storm, which worsened far beyond what the forecast had predicted. She continued along the highway at about 30 miles per hour when she unexpectedly grazed an icy section of the road and crashed into a snowbank. It was late at night, there were no cars around, and she did not have a phone to call for help. My mom attempted to back her car out of the snowbank, but the wet snow gripped the sides and hood of the car. As she evaluated her options, she noticed a vehicle approaching the snowbank. The car's headlights illuminated the snow, making each individual snowflake sparkle. A young man and two young women stepped out of the car. The man silently gestured to mom's car, looking at the damage. After several seconds, he looked into my mother's eyes and asked a single question, "Do you trust me?" With a sudden urge, she responded, "Yes." The man backed the car out of the snowbank, while the two young women silently and patiently stood beside my mom. She thanked the man, and safely returned to the highway. My mom always said that the thing that struck her was the young man's eyes. She described them as dark blue with a unique twinkle, similar to that of the stars in the heavens.

My mother's story gave me comfort as I entered my last year of middle school. However, navigating through 8th grade had its challenges and, like many other teenagers, I found myself experiencing changes in friendships. During the school year, I had a falling out with several close friends. This loss affected how I viewed my self-worth, and I began to feel very isolated. Negative thoughts invaded my head, telling me that "I was alone" or that "No one cared." I began to lose faith in the possibility of future friendships and relationships. As soon as it started, my 8th grade year came to an

end, and summer began. One weekend, my father and I went to Walmart in search of new fishing equipment. We ventured to the fishing supplies section and began looking at various lures, unaware that a miracle was waiting patiently, only an aisle away. My dad suddenly received a phone call from my mom and stepped away to speak with her privately. Like clockwork, an older woman entered the aisle and approached me with a warm smile. She lifted her eyes to mine and said, “Audrey, you are not alone. There are people who care for you greatly.” Her words left me speechless. How did this woman know my name? How did she know what I was feeling at the time? How is it possible that she knew these exact words would resonate so deeply with me? The old woman paused, went to her purse, and returned with a shiny penny. She laughed and said, “You deserve the shiniest penny. A dull penny just won’t do.” She placed it in my hand and reassured me that angels are always protecting me, even in dark times. She asked if I would be comfortable receiving a hug from her, and I quietly nodded. I wanted to say something, to thank her, to tell her how much her words meant to me, but she kindly said her goodbyes and disappeared down the aisle. Then the realization struck me. Her eyes. They were dark blue and twinkled like stars. Those were not ordinary eyes, those were the eyes my mother looked into all those years ago. Those were the eyes that brought her comfort and protection during a time of need. Those eyes gave me reassurance when I felt alone. Those eyes belonged to an angel.

To this day, I keep the shiny penny on my bedside table as a token of faith and love. When I hold it, I am reminded that I am never alone. The word “alone” is only composed of 5 letters, yet it has such a significant impact on people’s lives. When we experience hardship, it is often challenging to see the light of the situation because we are focused on the darkness around us. I, myself, have struggled with seeing only the negative aspects during trying times. This experience, however, helped me to recognize the good that can be found in the world. It made me understand that no one is ever truly alone. There is always someone who can empathize with a part of your journey. There is always someone who cares for you more than you will ever know. Whenever you feel lost, pause and closely observe your surroundings. You may receive clarification when you least expect it.

*

Veronica Egas*
el paletero
mixed media, newspaper, plastic and marker ink



Poems by Kenneth DiMaggio

The Hartford Anthology 1-5

#1
Warning:
Bad man up ahead

16-or-17-year-old
girl unaware
of a premature
life crash

Ten years later
it becomes a riveting
story in my creative
writing class

Too many such stories
like the one from an Olympic- bound
gymnast now fulltime
student at community college
while working as a certified
nursing assistant

Yet upon one line in
a story or poem written
in an illegally smoked
cigarette breakroom

the past balances long
enough with the present
to sculpt a future in poise
and harmony

Wreckage which the writer
can now leave

Healing in a tomorrow without
cigarettes but with notebook secretly
written between patients' feedings
and mandated
employee meetings

*

#2
Nurses not writers
--is to what most of my
gifted creative writing
students aspire

Boyfriends who stole their years
meant for university

Men whose long-ago handcuffed hands
still punch the memories of women
who rush children to pre-school and
then themselves to community college

A street in The Bronx that after
Milagros wrote about it will always
be a trigger ready to fire against
cops strangers God

A Pennsylvania sky some of
whose stars will be the lost
methamphetamine teeth of
Keri's brothers and sisters

A housing project in Hartford
where dogs still hauntingly
howl from and which Chanelle
was not supposed to hear
when she was a child

Poems & stories stolen between
a supervised clinical and before it's
time to hug-swoop up the little one
from childcare

Would-be nurses who should
be writers

Or perhaps writers who can learn
from soon-to-be nurses

*

#3
Ramen noodles and
all the lethal things you
can make out of toilet
paper like a blackjack
to assault the guards or
a noose to hang yourself
or your cellmate

Don Quixote War
and Peace and any books
by Donald Goines or
Iceberg Slim helped them
escape while they were still
numbers to the state

Rebuilding cars
Having beers with
the men in the backyard and reconnecting
or trying with a son or
daughter wary of their
fathers
--is what these former
inmates wrote about in
my community college
creative writing class

Hector Darnell & Vernon
--they all disappeared
before the end of the
semester

but wrote long enough
to write about fixing up
an old Ford or celebrating
their daughter's birthday
for me to give them yet
another incomplete
in their lives
*

#4
Because she worked & schooled
nights he Mom'd their daughter
during the day

And that's why in my community
college creative writing class he
wrote about Momland

--where the first thing
the mothers did when you
took your child to the playground
was look at your shoes and then
for any milk on your child's lips

Who was the best pitcher
or quarterback did not matter
as much as the mother who
thought she was better than
everyone else or as soon as
her back was turned: "Who
does that bitch think she is?"

Spills messes and if you spoil
'em now you're in for a life
of regret later on

And with the exception of
always one arrogant player

No team ever worked better
than the mothers
at the playground

*

#5
“prison pregnancy poverty,”

--was the mantra in
her poem about a city
that pulled up in illegal
street racing cars for girls
with too tight spandex
and saucer wide-fake gold
ear hoops to hop into as
housing project princesses
and then hobble out of
as pregnant high school
dropouts married to
10-year stretches for grand
theft auto they have to visit
each month in the pen

if she disappeared for most
of my creative writing class
at the cinder block
community college that
recently put bars
on the windows to discourage
break-ins

she came back lean
mean-jawed
and with this poem
refrained with a mantra
slated to imprison
girls like her

she came back ready
to be the author
of her own life

and win the fight
*

Audrey L. Finn
marilynn monroe
acrylic



Poems by Steven Chabot*

The Power Lines

From the hilltop seat, miles can be seen, of the clear-cut swath
winding through the woods

Brown-barren trees with creosote skin, evenly dot the rambling
hills, spun on the trees, a web of black
wire, traverses the hills below

At first glance, a scar, a blight on the land, progress-run
rampant, a closer look and you will see, the
beauty exposed to the light

In the spring, when the snow melts, and streams carry it away.
The sunshine warms the burgeoning soil
and stirs the life within

Frogs call out to find their mate and fiddleheads break through
the ground, as spring's first produce, free
to take, from natures open buffet

With spring's progress, cold grey hills, softened by shades of
lush green, flying bugs feed the birds
nesting in nearby trees.

Wildflower's bloom, buds burst on the trees, fiddleheads
uncoil, into a feathery sea, its waves ebb and
flow with the breeze

Late May - early June wild roses show, upon the spiney
brambles, from rocky crags, where they climb,
their sweet scent fills the air

In summer's youth, June brings a new scene, a garland of pink
and green, as mountain laurel blooms, in
full majesty, as far as the eye can see.
Late June - early July wild blueberries start to ripen, with
buckets and bags we pick for hours then bring

them back home to make pie and the sea of ferns could be an ocean, jungle or hedgerow, our
imagination would make it so and all summer long, on the hills we'd run, laugh, and play, we'd hear the
buzzing power lines on hot, hazy days and late July - early August brought another treat, the brambles
climbing up the rocks have blackberries to eat and we picked them very carefully so the briars would not
cut, the arms and hands retrieving the fruit on which would soon glut.

Days grow short and shadows grow long summer is slipping away, kids back in school and nights are
cool, it's the start of autumn's display.

The leaves change their shade to russet, gold and red, they frame the heugh, on the top of the hill, and
intensify its noble splendor.

As autumn wanes and winter strains to force its cold, cruel hand, frost and snow replace the glow of
the leaves that have blown away. Cold and bleak snow capping each peak and the ground below. There
is beauty still in the desolate hills awaiting spring's reprise.

*

The Sentinel

Silent sentinel, with outstretched arms, cragged skin worn by the wind and the sun.
Oh, what history you have seen, as a witness to life that swirls around you.
Never complaining you stay at your post, like a soldier guarding his sleeping comrades.
Your feet planted firmly upon the ground, your deep roots sustain you and anchor you there.
Small creatures and songbirds find shelter in you, the shadow you cast helps us stay cool
When days grow short and cooler too, you show out in colorful garb
Arrayed in splendor for all to see, you prepare for the winter ahead
Nights grow longer and frost appears, your life is stripped away
Quiescent friend, I long to see you teem with life again
And clean the air now poisoned by the arrogant folly of man
We need your help to cool the earth, that we have so distressed
As Greta Thunberg said of us, when Congress she addressed
“I know that you are trying, but just not hard enough.”
Watch over us silent sentinel, through winter weather hang tough
I pray you prosper again with springs tears.
That you and your family help squelch Greta’s fears.

He, and She, and They

No one could miss the warning cry, announcing soon, the storm would arrive
She had to rush, a shelter to find, but black-out rules to vision aren't kind
Tripped and fell, cutting the knee, crying in pain, then entered He
He stooped and offered Her a hand; He helped Her once again to stand
He brushed Her off and checked Her knee, then led Her off through the debris
He tried to calm Her screams and fears when the bombs first pierced their ears
They huddled in a dark stairwell and there they'd stay till all was well
He walked Her home when it was done; She held his hand; Her heart was won
They talked for hours as They strolled, through city streets, and this was bold
See, He was black, and She was white, to be together would be a fight
Not the war that they were in, but one for the hearts of His countrymen
This was London 1942, but in America, not what a black man should do
He brought Her right up to Her door; He asked Her if He would see Her more
She answered Him, did not hesitate; She told him that She would be His date
They spent time together, like any pair would, for weeks and months, things were so good
For two weeks She, not feeling Her best, went to the doctor to take some tests
The doctor said it was easy to see, soon He and She would become three
She waited for Him out near the base, and when He came out, She kissed His face
She told Him I've some news for you, soon we will no longer be two
He told Her there was one thing to do; I'll get permission to marry you
Though He tried He could not get, the blessing of his government
Insult to injury soon would He, be transferred far away from She
Fueled by hate they broke your hearts, like Romeo and Juliet, forced apart
She'd carry you, "child of shame", knowing that you, were not to blame
The love She felt for Him still grew, She carried it inside with you
Born to a world not ready for you, "half-caste" child, please don't be blue
Conceived in love, parted by hate, someday you'll learn to celebrate
The love that They both shared made You.

Poems by Melanie Mercado*

Trains

The tunnels are narrow and hollow,
And trains continue to run all night.
Filling with passengers who never get off.

The voices get louder and louder.
One over the other and that one over the next.
Yet, no one can hear the sounds, the scream,
or the cries continuing to build up within.

There is barely any room to breathe and the air
Is full of so much panic, that earth's core becomes
Unsteady; causing severe fear and havoc.

Is there any way out of this place?
Or is there no peace, no escape?
Is there no one who understands?

Or can simply lend a hand?
Will this place ever fill with light?
Will the passengers ever get off?
Or will these trains run forever?

The Red Balloon

The gray skies cried on the 21st of February
and the chill in the room was cold as ice.
Tragedies' scent filled the air with sorrow and despair.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!
Filled ear drums like police sirens on a New York City night,
and broken hearts filled the narrow halls, beyond repair.

BEEEEEEPPPP! The sound became steady
and footsteps quickly paced into a space now hollow.
Silence grew loud with news one couldn't bear.

Dancing in the wind, the lost red balloon flew its one last flight;
swaying away so swiftly that eyes could not follow,
leaving behind a beautiful glare.

Poems by Delmy Padilla*

The Journey

Crossing the Rio Grande to US land
Clothes smelling of dirty water
As I feel my throbbing heart and cold-sweat hands
I can hear the men saying “It’s okay, you’re going to find the officers at the other side”
The only thing is that I did not
I lay on the ground listening to buzzing mosquitoes
Feeling nothing but the bites from them
I have no way to tell the time, but I know it must be late at night
I can see nothing but some dimly light stars
Sticks and weeds by my side providing me with warmth
While my mind thinks of Mami and Papi thinking and praying of me too
The trees sing me lullabies softly taking me to sleep

It is the next day
Sun has come up through the swaying trees
My body is up with a growling stomach and a parched throat
I must persist, so I walk and find an open path
I think to myself it must lead me to something or someone
Only it does not
My feet are stubborn and keep me moving
I keep walking and finally see the light
There is an ocean crystal blue
Far away I can see the grayish, tower like buildings
My shoulders relax and I smile
But this moment lasts me a few seconds
There is no one besides my helpless body
I must keep walking and find someone

*

Memory Hoarder

Cards all crammed into boxes
Dried flowers hanging in every corner of my room
Notes stuck to the wall
Love letters between book pages
Photos everywhere I look
Not often do I search for them, but they are there
The remnants of everybody that has knocked at my heart's door
And has stayed for awhile
Pieces reminding me of the past
A piece of happiness
Or perhaps a piece of grief
I am a memory hoarder
To prove I was here
To prove they were
Present, acknowledged, loved.

To Give Is to Receive

A seed has been planted in my heart
Its roots are beginning to tingle me inside
I can feel them getting tangled all around
But I know this must be a gleaming sign
Spring is to blossom not only inside my heart
But flowers must come out through my ears
Through my eyes and my mouth
Through every pore residing in my body
I am the garden
Bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds will come to me
They will lay in my soft petals, play with my leaves
and drink my sweet nectar
With pleasure they will sing throughout the day
and will raise their wings to the sky
I am the garden
Heaven and earth will provide for me
And I will provide for the weary, the hungry, the thirsty.

The Ring 2nd Place - Poetry

A ring lays buried within clothes, and boxes
No longer seen
And people begin to ask where it has gone if not on her finger
And she dimly smiles
Forcing a reply
“It was beginning to hurt”
She stands by the empty kitchen sink
Washing away the honey filled wishes
From her fragile and bare fingers
Looking out the shattered window
She can notice the dead garden
It used to have his favorite orange tulips
And her favorite red roses
Birds no longer come
She wonders what must be done
Must she direct a funeral and lay the ring in a casket
Must it be left buried within the clothes and boxes they once used
Must she light a candle and let the shine be seen
Reminding her of the gleaming promises
Gone to fade
Reminding her honey nor moon ever came

Anna Kwashnak
redemption
watercolor



M.M. Kelly
the center of the onion
digital photography



Steven Gomez*

Your Amusement

My lily of the night,
Carry me home and lay me on my featherbed
Taint my innermost empathy,
and scourge my astuteness.

I invite you in.
I begin to indulge in my guilty pleasures,
and now I cannot break free from your manacles
Our virulent bond nails me to wooden posts

Bemused in a void of regret
No shaman nor witchdoctor could place me on a righteous path
We are one, yet you show no anthropomorphic traits

No epithet could describe you
You glean the intelligence of the insolent and innocuous
You pride yourself over trifles and masquerade behind a haze of secrets

I look for shore
I waddle and weep.
I trudge.
You cry for me,
But tears don't fill my hunger.
But your dishonesty fuels my anger,
And so I wallow in the night and laugh myself to near death.

I carry your midnight torch.
I guide you in lost frights.
I am your docent of our mind.
You direct.
I ask to take lead, but you say "it's too dangerous".

Let's sneak away and break free.
Shepherd and abuse me
I beg you- no I expect you to do so,
'till marble screams my name.

Meghan Delp*

3rd Place - Art

under the surface thoughts

ink brush pen/digital pen



Kathylee Perez*

The Night Walk Home

The evening is foggy and cold
The choice is mine to decide
Which street will I choose to go home?
Will it be left, or will it be right?
My hungry stomach rumbles with distinct, unusual noises.
If I choose right, I can grab a black, no sugar coffee;
But I must carefully avoid the dregs in my cup once I finish.
If I choose left, McDonalds' it will be
Maybe a hot, Irish coffee, with a shot of whipped cream?
The air is so breezy and the night dark.
I hear the rustling sounds of the brittle winter leaves wrap around my ears
As I quickly glance over the flickering street light.
My cold hands reach deep in my pockets, and I realize I don't have any money.
All I feel is my retainer cartridge, my house key, and two peppermint candies.
The sound and pressure of the bitter wind on my red, cold cheeks feels like a threat.
I will not be afraid but instead embrace the blowing winds that make me shiver.
I will also embrace the dark skies around me as I enjoy the night walk with no silence.

Poems by S.E. Page

Heavy Feathers

Stones don't fly
unless
fired hot against gravity,
hurled free of groundward laws
with the unimaginable
brute force of a volcano,
spewn sky-high from Earth cracks
to escape the shadow of craters
by the deep grace of magma,
that airy melted tongue of lava
always singing the newest songs
branded young with creation,
seared into rock and revel
and a moment as old
as wings.

Cinderella Blue

You startled me, Mom—
that day you splurged
and bought yourself
a brand new dress!
(I'd never seen you buy anything
just for you, and you alone.)

Every last bit of sequin shine
was always spent on us—
three daughters
you set aside all your
dreams and fairy tales for
to raise wonderstruck
in the wealth of love unlimited.

The dress you chose shone
blue as a Cinderella gown,
but cut from practical denim
instead of fashionable gossamer,
with little seashells hanging
from belt ties, just a hint
of glamour and gleam.

Maybe I was used
to seeing you only one way—
all your magic faded,
scrubbed down
at the edges by time,
but not in that hour. . .

Arrayed
in the raw power of beauty,
I glimpsed your true glow,
a spark undeniably
clear as glass:

Oh midnight may
shatter you, Mama,
shard you to pieces—
but in my eyes that day
(and forever after)
no preening princess
could ever out-lovely
or out-wild you!

Lovely....Lastly

We love trees
for their many changeling skins—

Petal profusions explode star-like
only to shed loose in wonder silks,
budding into green-winged shade,
later *f*
a
l
l
i
n
g
in paper-pressed jewels,
raising limbs ultimate and b a r e
as song to the sky—

So why can't I
love myself for all these
myriad mortal changes, too?

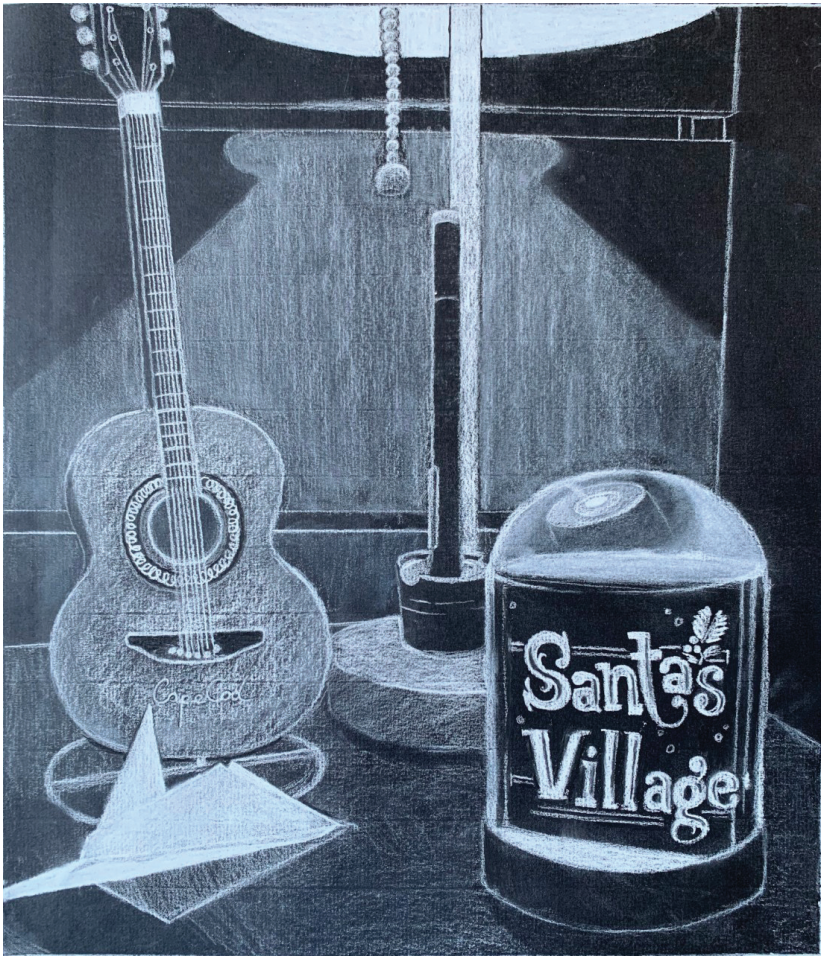
We can't love ~*~

the same thing in ourselves—
how the blue hours shrivel,
strip and wither all we are
d
o
w
n

to the root.

But nobody faults a tree
for a life of beauty bound by time—
changes come for every
lovely . . .
lastly one.

Gregory Kashuba*
shelf accessories
charcoal



Nevada T. Kiely*

A Discontented Writer

A discontented writer, am I,
And an ever-more distinguished guy;
I try my best to all I apply,
Yet I'm so very discontented.

With all which I write, no one does read
Even with my hard push to force-feed;
Not one does peruse, but all recede,
Thus, I'm so very discontented.

I've experimented -- all types, genres,
Light verse poetry to dark operas.
Comic limericks or solemn arias,
Yet I'm so very discontented.

No matter what the subject contains
I always fall short of my life's aims.
Yet try still I, with overlooked disdains.
Therefore, I be very discontented.

Scholarly parties I dare not attend.
For hearing all the people with books penned,
And with plays on the theatre –- West End,
Hard not to be very discontented.

I state I'm in between published text,
Talking about my many works next.
With not one title known, they leave perplexed.
Leaving me very discontented.

I just know if one would give me a chance,
And not disregard on very first glance,
My tales of comic fair and romance,
I wouldn't be so discontented.

Trying so hard to achieve esteem,
In a grouping where many apt do teem,
Would it not be smart to give up on this dream?
And not be very discontented?

Now at forty-seven years of age,
I can't get one periodical page.
And with fourteen plays not one's been staged.
I'm so wrongly discontented.

Parchments of writings – I've filled with lines.
But only read in my own confines,
Never having to meet others' deadlines.
I'm so very discontented.

Other professions – I'd rather not try.
None do for me what writing satisfies.
So, it saddens me, and I wonder why
I must be so very discontented?

Science is fine and history not bad,
But I really should have stuck with CADD.
Nevertheless, here I am and so sad,
Left so very discontented.

*

ShawnaLee W. Kwashnak
forget me not
charcoal with soft pastels



Thelma Owoicho*

Liberty

“Warning, the space vessel Liberty will self-destruct in 10, 9, 8, 7…”

Sandy woke up in a panic, another nightmare. She walked toward her room’s porthole window. All she had ever known was the Liberty, a space vessel with 20 androids aboard and she was the only human. Her room was small and functional and had everything she needed. A gray steel box with a porthole window, an en suite bathroom, a bed, and a desk. Sandy picked up her e-reader and hit photos. She gazed at the man and woman smiling in the flower garden, her parents who had both died before she was born. She was gestated in the embryonic bay, 16 years ago. Sandy looked like her mother, tall, athletic with dark hair, but she had her father's blue eyes.

“My mom and dad,” she said to herself.

“Sandy, please report to your learning lab to commence today's lessons,” K8te’s voice echoed throughout her room.

K8te was her personal android designed to tutor and nurture her. She was the only family Sandy had ever known. Sandy quickly showered, dressed, and made her way to the learning lab. It was a two-minute walk through gray steel riveted corridors lined with automatic doors. Learning lab was pretty intense that day. K8te had been drilling her on all the major functions of the ship. Sandy was pretty sure she could fly this thing herself.

“The process is almost complete,” K8te said calmly. K8te was a Model 3 android, an almost perfect human-like robot. She was 6 feet tall with short blond hair and kind eyes. She was the closest human beings had come to make an artificial version of themselves. She was one of a kind.

“We have gestated the infant and he will be out of incubation in three weeks”

Sandy was ecstatic.

“I want you to be happy. That is my primary purpose.”

“Thank you K8te. You have always been so kind to me.”

Sandy spent most of her days watching the baby grow in its chamber for the last eight months and was excited she would soon hold him, a human, her brother. The embryonic bay was huge. Rows and rows of freezer cells rose up hundreds of feet. Each freezer cell contains an embryo, K8te told her, 14 million in total, including animal and plant specimens. Sandy pressed her nose against the warm glass. The baby hovered, suspended in a fluid within his incubating vessel. She slid her arms around it.

“Soon little brother, soon” she whispered, as she listened to the rhythmic beat of his heart. Her hand swiped the company logo, Lifeboat Inc, it said. Lifeboat Inc was the company that had built the technology for the “Great Escape” 300 years ago. The earth was dying. The planet could barely sustain life when the Liberty was launched. 20 androids and 14 million embryos were launched into space in a last-ditch attempt to save humankind. It was 299 years later, and sensors had detected a planet that may be habitable.

Sandy stepped back from the incubator and backed into something. She turned and saw St2, a tall engineer.

“Oh, sorry St2,” she said awkwardly, but nothing.

He stood there like a statue, his dark skin had a gray tint to it. Another one had expired! 300-year lifespan. She could see them all around the ship, frozen in place; they just stopped.

Sandy walked back to her room with her head full of fear.

“What if all the androids expire before we make it to the planet? Who will fly the ship? What about the embryos? What about my brother?”

Sandy entered her quarters to find K8te looking out the porthole window, a black expanse before her dotted with stars and in the far distance a blue jewel of a planet.

“It’s beautiful isn't it?” K8te whispered, as she gazed at the view before her.

“Yes,” said Sandy. “We will be home soon.” K8te turned around but could not meet her eyes.

“There is something I need to give you, Sandy. I don't have much time before my expiration. I need to tell you something. You must know the truth.”

K8te handed Sandy a small piece of paper, folded in half.

“Alert! Alert! To all crew! There has been a fuel outage in the aft engine! Please prepare for an emergency landing.”

“K8te what’s happening?” We will never make it to the planet in time!”

“Sandy, together we can do this. I do not have much time. I am the only droid left. Quickly to the control bridge!”

They both ran through flashing lights and the constant voice of the ship's computer. They got to the bridge and strapped themselves in and prepared to race to the planet.

“Computer, full speed to these coordinates,” K8te commanded, as her fingers moved frantically over the control panel. “Sandy, remember your training.”

“The ship won't withstand the acceleration K8te.”

“We have no choice, Sandy.”

The stars warped around them as they zoomed down to the planet.

“Only 3000 meters from the surface K8te!”

Tiny cracks started to form on the glass. “I can't hold her up K8te! We’re going to crash!!!!”

“Alert! Alert! This ship will hit the surface in 10, 9,...”

“Ky8e, Ky8e, please. K8te answer me!”

“8, 7,”

“I can't control it!!”

“6, 5, 4,”

“Ahhhhhhhh...!”

“3, 2, 1” Everything went black.

“Headquarters, can you read me? We have found the crashed ship, the Liberty, which was successfully tracked back to the planet for sterilization. All human specimens are intact; however, all android lifeforms have expired. One human infant has survived.”

“The prime directive is to remove all biological threats”

“Yes, please ensure no threat of human infection is possible. Wait for my orders.”

“Sir, I have found two individuals, both female, both expired. I see something in this android’s hand!”

“What is your directive?”

“Remove all biological threats”.

“Since the extinction of humankind on planet Earth, artificial lifeforms must protect the planet at all costs. The Earth barely survived their kind, and it only continues to flourish because of superior artificial intervention. They cannot be allowed to destroy another planet! This is the last known human vessel!”

“Yes, sir! The Liberty is the last known human ship.”

“Your orders are to remove all artificial lifeforms for reanimation and purge the ship.”

“Yes sir! Ready to purge biological threats!”

“What did you find in the android's hand?”

“Sir, it was a note. It said, ‘You are not human.’”

Anne-Charlotte Silver*
teapot and butterfly
pastel



JayAnne Sindt

Deliverance - A villanelle

The Violator I must forgive
It disgusts me as much as you
It is in Peace I choose to live

Suffering I am triggered to re-live
Victimized by memories coming through
The Violator I must forgive

Was that all they had to give?
Are they not human beings too?
It is in Peace I choose to live

Must I be so ruminative?
To my own heart, I must be true
The Violator I must forgive

I shake my thoughts through love's sieve
Allowing hurt and anger to pass on through
It is in Peace I choose to live

Though I know it will be transformative
This process I do not wish to do
The Violator I must forgive
It is in Peace I choose to live

Meghan Delp*
shelf still-life
colored ink and acrylic



Submission Deadline: March 15, 2023

Fresh Ink 2023

NVCC's Art and Literature Journal will accept works in three categories:

Poetry
Short Fiction
2-D Art

- Up to five (5) individual works will be considered from each writer or artist.
- Each fiction and poetry piece cannot exceed 1250 words in length.
- Only electronically submitted text documents in .doc, .docx or .rtf formats will be considered.
- 2-D representations of any art genre should be submitted in hi-res .jpg or .pdf format (300 dpi)
- 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 an attached file.
- Each file name should be the work's title.
- No author's or artist's names should appear on the submitted attached works.
- Authors' and artists' names, emails and mailing addresses should be included in the body of the corresponding email.
- Only works from self-identified NVCC students will be entered in the NVCC Poetry, Short Fiction and Art contests. All works will be entered into the Luke S. Newton Memorial Contest.

For further information contact Jeannie Evans-Boniecki, PhD Fresh Ink Advisor at JEvansBoniecki@nvcc.commnet.edu.



Fresh Ink 2022

Issue 53

Front Cover: A collage of “Experimental Flowers” by Veronica Egas, “Cloud Watching” by Meghan Delp, “Nature’s Winter Magic” and “Buckle Up” by Gregory Kashuba

Back Cover: A collage of “Brazilian Jaguar” by Veronica Egas, and “Pigeons” and Window Still Life” by Meghan Delp