

The Works

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Cover artwork by Eden Buyno

The Works

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Student Art Contest

2017-2018

Theme: "Ambiguous"

Fiction

Fisher's Arm

by Tom Puckett

My love of fishing has always been at odds with my natural complacency and general laziness. Fortunately, my greatest fishing adventure took place on a local canal, my favorite of fishing locations.

I left my house at around one-thirty in the afternoon. Afternoon was an odd time to fish, as, generally speaking, it's normally much too hot for any fish to move, let alone feed. That rule, however, only applies to the noble, cold-water fish of Illinois rivers, such as the crappie, perch, sunfish, and walleye. The disgusting, dinosaur-like fish of the Hennepin canal, such as the catfish, gar, and sheephead, thrive in the worst of conditions. I also liked leaving at such a time because it was normally the time I had my lunch, and I very much enjoyed a good picnic. I left via bicycle. Though I owned both a vehicle and license, I enjoyed the exercise, and always carried a fear of the possibility that someone may steal my jeep while I wasn't aware. As I rode I carried my tackle on the left handlebar, and my pole on the right. A small, blue stool was strapped to my back, while a large machete hung from my belt. I imagined the whole thing probably looked rather startling when traveling at thirteen miles per hour.

On arrival, I continued to follow the gravel trail that led further and further from civilization. I usually traveled in minutes, meaning I would count to sixty a number of times until I felt like stopping. I did this as an odd way of measuring how far I had gone. That day, I had gone ten minutes due north, at which point it began to get rather cold for late September. At the ten minute mark, the farthest I had ever gone, I stopped. The trees, for whatever reason, grew much taller here, and seemed to loom ominously over the murky, brown waters below. The forests surrounding the canal thickened and presented only dark shapes and curious sounds. It seemed as good a place to fish as any.

I was always a rather passive fisherman. I did not mean to score the biggest catch with elaborate pole gestures and expensive bait nor feed a starving tribe with primal nets and chum. I merely cast my plastic jig, and reeled it back. If a fish were so inclined as to bite, all the better, but I was there just to be there. Naturally the serene sounds of nature combined with the peaceful atmosphere rendered me unconscious in a matter of minutes.

I didn't sleep long before a strange, scratching sensation crawled up my left arm. Not being the greatest at waking up, I foolishly ignored the wet strokes that pulled up my jacket sleeve, as well as the regular low grunt. Instead, I remained asleep until the slightly annoying stimulation turned into sharp, terrible pain. It was pain unlike anything I had ever experienced, stabbing through skin, tendon, and even down to the bone of my forearm. My eyes shot open and I howled a terrible cry into the trees. Upon turning to see my tormentor I fell from my stool in shock. There in the jaws of a mighty white polar bear sat my left hand for but a second before the mighty beast reared back his ugly head, and swallowed the appendage whole.

I screamed once again, only this time it was not a cry for help. The anger and adrenaline numbed the pain of my bleeding stump, while my other hand discarded my pole (thankfully not into the canal) and instead found the handle of my machete. As I drew the blade from its black fabric sheath, I swung over my head in a heavy arc, once, twice, and again. Large chunks of bear flesh began to fly from the coat of the monster. In a furious fit of pain, the monster lashed out with both teeth and claws. In response, I gripped the machete in an icepick fashion and rammed the tip into the gaping maw of the beast as Wiglaf would to Beowulf's dragon. As I did so, the bear's claws tore into my guts and sent streams of blood flying across the grass. With the pain of that blow and the resistance of strong muscle, I was unable to hold my grip on the handle of the machete, thus my hand slid free and the bear proceeded to mount me. The bear then began to prepare his next volley of attacks, as I found myself rendered practically helpless. All seemed lost until a familiar sense of strength and purpose began to invigorate me. The voice of Mrs. Millar, my total body fitness teacher, explaining the intricate maneuvers and techniques to lifting weights rebounded within my adrenaline fueled brain. I recounted the mantra of Phoenix Star, my training partner (yes that actually is his name), as he called for "just one more, come on, one more." But how could I utilize this newfound strength?

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I only saw one way. I began to chant in the broken Spanish I had also learned in school. I narrowed my focus to the center of the bear's chest and began to pray. In Spanglish, I offered the blood of this beast to the ever hungry Aztec god of war Huitzilopochtli, if he would only lend me the strength to kill his mother nature's child. Chanting and limbering up, I pulled back my hand as best I could, and thrust it forward into the bear's chest. With the strength of less than a year's worth of exercise, and the apparent favor of an ancient deity, I sent my fingers through fur and muscle. I dexterously weaved my way around ribs and lungs until I found the vital heart of the monster. Wrapping my digits around the muscular organ, the bear screamed as if to beg for its life, but its cries were drowned out by the steady drone of my ancient chants. With one swift motion, I both struck the bear in the face with my bloodied stump and drew the heart from the monster's chest at the same time. The beast then lay there; still and lifeless.

Taking a moment to catch my breath may have been my biggest mistake. My wound had not been cauterized nor had I had time to tie a tourniquet. As a result, the waning adrenaline gave to the same debilitating pain from earlier. Clutching my bloody stump, I began to gather my things while wailing like a baby. I tended to be rather scatterbrained, so twice I actually forgot to grab my phone out of my tackle box (I liked to listen to Youtube shows and podcasts while I fished). I was in such a hurry that I also left my black, fabric lined headphones there. I would return later to discover that they had been stolen by some fiendish little kleptomaniac. I had gotten everything ready to go except for one thing (other than the headphones); my hand! Letting my bike fall to the ground, for it didn't have a kickstand, I drew my machete and hacked into the bear once again. Opening up its large gut, I found my hand sitting amongst some half-digested vegetation. I could scarcely think of what to do with it in my panic. All I knew was that my arm really hurt and I was starting to get tired, so I hooked the tip of my middle finger onto the jig on my pole and began to ride home.

Fortunately, I had practiced riding one-handed to impress my friends, and could even ride no-handed. The latter of which I found myself performing most of the way home, as my right hand was busy massaging the gushing stump of my left. I quite liked that hand. I could display a remarkable level of ambidexterity with it, and was not shy to do so. True I probably should have counted myself lucky that it was just the one hand, but frankly I was in far too much pain to even contemplate good luck.

Eventually I made my way back to my country house in the middle of a corn field. I made sure to park my bike in the shed where it wouldn't rust and ran as fast as I could to the back door; stopping and going back to the shed only when I remembered I had left my left on a fish hook. Once inside, I ran to my mother, who was watering her flowers, and showed her the mess I had made.

"M-my... h-h-han... be... and... hurt!" I babbled through tearful sobs.

"Oh, let me see," said my mother, dawning a pair of reading glasses.

“Son, what am I gonna do with you?”

“S-should w-we call a h-hospital?” I asked, a bit embarrassed at my emotional state.

“Nonsense,” said my mother. “It’s not that bad, you have the hand right?”

I nodded and showed my pale left to her.

“Right, come with me.”

My mother then led me up to the bathroom, whereupon she produced a red first aid kit. Over the course of about an hour, she began reattaching the severed hand with bandages and Neosporin. Meanwhile I relayed the events that had just occurred.

“That poor bear,” said my mother. “He was probably just looking for food.”

“What else was I supposed to do?” I asked my mother, upset at her judgement.

“Maybe you shouldn’t go messing around in a place where you don’t belong.” She said, rather passive-aggressively.

“You and Dad go fishing all the time!” I said, quick to acknowledge her hypocrisy.

“Hey, why didn’t the dishes get done before you left?” my mother said, seamlessly changing the subject and rendering my point null.

So, I did the dishes, and over the course of about a week, my hand gradually grafted itself back to my body. To this day it is actually slightly shorter than my right. I told a lot of people at school the story. Most of them did not believe me, even though they could clearly see the bandages. I actually knew my fitness teacher wouldn’t believe me, and I felt that training with an injury would be a bad idea, so I made up some story about falling out of an apple tree. Most people who remember the bandages wound up believing that story in the end, but at least I’ll always know what really happened that day.

she looked back at him, her smile was gone. In that moment, the clouds sped up and rushed in to block the light of the sun. Then the clouds sped up, rushing in to block the light of the sun. He heard gunshots echo across the land and another clash of thunder shook the ground, rousing him from his deep sleep.

He opened his eyes and raised his head up out of the cold mud. Rifle fire could be heard coming from another part of the line. He looked at his comrades who sat with their backs against the wall of the trench as they slept. It was a miracle that any human could get rest in the horrible filth that surrounded them. A mixture of rain water and human waste that was sometimes ankle-deep. Thousands of flies hung over the bloated corpses of his fallen friends and the prevalent stench of death was one he would not soon forget.

Clouds covered the sun. Even during daytime, the darkness hung around. He stood on a wooden box at the front of the trench and rested his head on the wall of sandbags that ran the length of the trench and stared back at the land behind their line. The earth was scarcely recognizable after being

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blackened and cratered by the daily onslaught of enemy artillery. Life was entirely absent, having been killed or driven off by the ferocity of battle. Bodies littered the ground all the way to the horizon.

About thirty yards back he could see the top of their last trench. It had taken a month of trying and thousands of lives for them to gain that small bit of ground and dig in again. He closed his eyes and tried to recall the image of his girlfriend on that beautiful day, but he couldn't. Any hint of good that entered his mind was immediately drowned out by the horror that surrounded him. Sleep was his only escape from it, but even then the nightmares far outnumbered his dreams. Realizing that his attempt was in vain, he opened his eyes and stepped back down into the filth.

Another rumble shook the ground, but much closer this time. It was directly followed by another one. And then another. And ten more. It quickly became a continuous roll of thunder. The enemy artillery barrage was starting again. He grabbed his rifle and put his helmet on before crouching against the side of the trench. The first shell hit the ground in front of their line causing dirt and rocks to rain down on the men. The second was far more accurate, striking directly inside of the trench just a hundred yards from him. Dozens of men were killed in an instant, some lucky enough to be taken in their sleep.

As the artillery continued to pour down, he dropped into a prone position in the mud. He looked at the men around him as they covered their heads with their hands and prayed for an end to the bombardment which had only just begun. Not wanting to see any more, he put his head down, closed his eyes, and began to say a prayer as well. As he did so, an image of his girlfriend appeared in his mind as clear as day.

There she was, wearing her favorite grey sundress and standing among the wildflowers. She smiled that wonderful smile he had fallen in love with so long ago. The sunlight created a soft glow along the gentle curve of her cheek and her gorgeous hair danced in the breeze. She was so incredibly beautiful. His heart melted at the sight of her smile and all of the darkness and fear he was feeling disappeared in that moment. The sights and sounds of the war were gone and only happiness remained.

He didn't want it to end. He covered his ears and clenched his jaw, trying so hard to keep out the hell around him and hold on to her. Despite his effort, the image began to fade as the storm grew stronger and overwhelmed his senses once more. The darkness was too strong. It crept back in and forced out any feeling of peace. He screamed with anger at this defeat, though not even he could hear it over the unending thunder. He'd had enough of war, enough of this world veiled by darkness.

In an instant everything stopped. He could hear leaves rustling above him. He cracked his eyes open and lifted his head off of the grass. The sun shone brighter than ever. He stood up and turned to look out over the field of wildflowers. That's when he saw her. A beautiful sundress, black hair flowing behind her, that incredible smile beaming ear to ear, the most amazing laugh

he'd ever heard, and those magnificent hazel eyes locked on him. He ran down to her, wrapped his arms around her, and lifted her off the ground. She put her hands behind his neck and pulled him in for a kiss. The darkness had disappeared entirely, and once again happiness was all that remained.

Poetry

I Tossed a Time Machine Into the Sea

I tossed a time machine into the sea
and watched it sink inside its hungry womb:
Refrains and eons and a drowning key.

The unhinged setup stirred a noisy plea,
became the entrance of a lonely tomb.
I tossed a time machine into the sea.

Event horizon, bitter cup of tea,
was a funeral, sourness abloom:
Refrains and eons and a drowning key.

The past and future, now blackened debris,
sing a scorching song of established doom.
I tossed a time machine into the sea.

A friend shows up, a walking absentee
from the silent chambers inside my room:
Refrains and eons and a drowning key.

She is my ghost, a second view of me,
the steaming memories I must exhume.
I tossed a time machine into the sea:
Refrains and eons and a drowning key.

-Samantha Poe

Nonfiction

When I'm Gone

by Arabella Chamberlain

Sometimes, I wonder if this is the last conversation I'll ever have, or if that's the last thing I'll do. Life is frail. What's to say that as I write this, I won't breath my last breath? It's mind-boggling to wrap one's head around the unpredictability of life. I often ponder what people would say of me after I was gone.

Would I be well-remembered and revered or perhaps, leave a tarnished memory upon my passing? Maybe, I would die a hero. Maybe, I would succumb to darkness. Would my friends recall old times fondly or have a disdain for the flaws and mistakes I left in my wake?

As my life flashes by, will I feel I was the "best" me? Or will I, instead, be full of regrets and sorrow over the unachieved? The unforgiven? The unsaid? I often debated my frail human mortality. No one will live forever. While memories fade and legacies linger, no one has unlocked the key to immortality. Eventually, everyone is forgotten.

So why even bother? Why try to leave your mark on an ever-evolving world? Water drowns, dirt buries, and the elements consume and destroy our every effort to make a lasting impression. Even in the aftermath of nuclear destruction, eventually brush overruns the decimation, wildlife tramples the brush, and the circle of life continues. We here on Earth are quite the resilient bunch, always bouncing back from disaster.

But what about when one wants to affect a positive change? When you long to inspire, create, lead? In order to stand out, where does one start? Everyone longs to be special. Everyone hopes to be remembered. But how do those we remember do it? Is it mere happenstance? Or hard work and determination? I honestly don't know. When we look to the past, it offers little prediction for who we will tell future generations about.

We can't distinguish a meek whisper from a cacophonous roar. When people try to change the world, no one knows if their voice will ever be heard, or if they are merely wasting their time shouting into the void of time, waiting to be forgotten, ignored. This unpredictability, this uncertainty in life, keeps me up at night. In the black of night, when the lights are off and the world is silent, I toss and turn, pondering my existence.

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With all this speculation, my head is spinning. I'm lost out at sea, as turbulent waves attempt to drag me into the abyss. My thoughts race and the futility of my life stares me down across an expansive chasm, but inching ever closer, drawing me in. I teeter on the brink of insanity. What's the point?

Leaving a mark is more than simply tagging "I was here" in spray paint or carving initials into a tree trunk. The moments that leave a mark are often the unexpected and the unacknowledged or the grand and magnificent. The laughter of a child, the tears of a mother, the cheers of a father - all fade into the background, but never disappear completely. On the other hand, the bold, the brave, the remarkable sweeps everyone off their feet, leaving them breathless and never forgotten.

I want to be remembered. I need to leave my mark. I can't just fade into the background, invisible and forgotten. When future generations look back to this era, I hope and pray I did something worth remembering, something memorable, because that's the closest we get to immortality.

Visual Art



Dream Synthesis

by Samantha Poe

MUSIC IS A MAGIC

Music is a magic,
a magic that we hear-
A universal language,
that sweetens every ear.

You may like your country,
while I may pick the blues-
Different styles for everyone,
we rock, we roll, we cruise.

A mother croons a lullaby,
that drifts us off to rest-
But a group that pounds out heavy metal,
makes us beat our chest.

Beating drums get us going,
when life slows down our pace-
Piano keys that tickle notes,
change turmoil into grace-

Gospel singers praise the lord,
songs of love both lost and found-
We strain to hear the purest note,
joy springs from every sound.

So sing a song, a memory,
of past times brought to bear-
Times of sadness,
times of gladness
times to share and care.

Music is a magic,
a magic we create-
of hope and inspiration,
In life, to celebrate.

-Mike Hunter



Light Seeker

by Abby Castillo

For Rent

Fungus fans across gray-matter ceilings
Twirling tendrils climb brick walls
Robins' personal swimming pools
Collect in tenement halls

News pervades the neighborhood
Of the café on 5th Ave
It's under Mildew Management
And business ain't half bad

Tourists on public transit
With loud, Hawaiian tops
The empty headed driver
Has yet to reach their stops

The Oak Street market bustles
A squirrel makes his commute
Wealthy Bullet Businessmen
Politely settle a dispute

Dead are the days of landlords
Of concrete monthly pay
At this age-old establishment
Eviction breeds decay

- Samantha Rhodes

A Stranger on Holiday

by Greg Smith

The only guest on the beach not wearing a bathing suit sat in the shade; with a black shroud that covered all but his face and one of his black sandals. He sat quietly, stretched out on the lounge chair with his hands behind his head. Derrick could almost feel the man's piercing pale eyes burn into him as he approached.

"May I get you a cold drink?" Derrick asked before he wiped sweat from his forehead. All the other waiters had stayed away from the strange guest.

The man scanned the beach and smiled. Derrick waited for a few seconds before he spoke. The warm winds off the Caribbean waters reminded beach resort staffers the busy season would soon end.

"What do you recommend?" The man asked while scanning the resort's white sand and blueish green waters.

"We make awesome Mojitos." Derrick felt a chill every time he looked directly at the stranger's eyes.

The man nodded and watched a nearby volleyball game. A smile crept across his face.

"Are they friends of yours?" Derrick asked.

The man shook his head no.

"I never take time to just enjoy the life going on around me," the man said. "It really is amazing."

The man sat quietly and watched the volleyball game. After waiting a few seconds, Derrick punched the order in on his tablet. He had just finished when he heard a man's piercing shriek. Then someone shouted, "Shark." The warning was too late. A gray shark came partway out of the water with a man in his jaws. After watching helplessly for a few seconds, the resort's two life guards focused on helping frightened guests ashore.

"Good God." Derrick ran to the beach. Along the way he met his friend,

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John, who was carrying a rifle.

“That poor bastard,” John said in between cursing sharks. “He’s done for.”

Hotel paramedics came running from their shack with first aid supplies and with one of them shouting into her cellphone. A few guests ran to the hotel. Others gathered to watch.

“Blood’s gonna bring more.” John took aim at the shark’s head and fired three times. The stunned fish let go, which allowed the two lifeguards to bring the victim ashore. Derrick could see the torso was nearly in two; but it wasn’t the blood and exposed organs that startled him. The man was still alive and screaming.

“He might be alive now, but not for much longer,” Derrick said as he stood next to John. “Poor bastard.”

By now two more sharks were stalking the shore line. The big fish circled the one John had wounded before they followed it to deeper water.

“Nice shooting.” Derrick slapped John on the back.

“That fish should be dead,” John said, spitting out every word.

“So should the poor bastard,” Derrick said. “Weird, huh?”

“This whole day is weird,” John said. “Every lobster the chef has thrown into a boiling pot of water has come out cooked and still alive.”

“Seriously,” Derrick said.

John nodded and started toward the hotel. When Derrick turned to get the drink order he found himself nose to nose with the man in the shroud. Derrick’s knees buckled.

“I’m sorry.” The man extended a pale white hand. “I sometimes have that effect on people.”

Derrick accepted the help and thanked the man before brushing himself off.

“You still want that drink?” Derrick asked.

The man nodded and headed toward his shady spot with his shroud sweeping across the sand. The two arrived at the cabana at about same time.

“Here you go, sir,” Derrick said.

Derrick waited to see the man take a couple of sips.

“Well?” Derrick smiled.

The man grinned back.

“These are to die for,” the man smiled, “but not today.”



Untitled

by Alyssa Devine

Capsule

ten minutes go by and the double-wide windows have shrunken and grown steel claws, like a metal skeleton trying to crawl its way inside. i wish i could sprawl on my back the way i could ten minutes before; now the walls have grown inward and i can hardly see my own toes. noise vibrates the room from all sides and makes its home under my skin, my sticky, prickling skin, and is it humid in here or have i become the humidity? they say there's no such thing as too much color but i can tell you there is, when lines and shapes from every spectrum clash underneath your eyelids and make you see things you wish you couldn't. ten minutes go by and i'm not sure whether the room is shrinking or i'm growing; there's alphabet soup in the carpet; did you know you can taste noise and feel it, too? it tastes acidic and bitter, maybe it feels acidic too, if acidic feels like sandpaper gnawing at your skin.

feeling engulfs me from all sides, and that's numbing somehow.

- Elizabeth Ohme



Purple Encaustic

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox



*Boat at Anderson
Gardens Rockford IL*

by Val Sleger

The Enemy

by Richard Byone

They found us. This was supposed to be a covert operation, a simple reconnaissance mission to plot enemy locations and movement. We were almost done, intelligence was secured, and we were getting ready to move out when night fell. Of course, you stick out like a sore thumb when you're not a native, and you can never trust the locals you've hired to translate or get information from. They'll sell you out to the enemy in a heartbeat, even after they smile to your face and call you a friend. I haven't trusted any of these Iraqi bastards since I got here, even if they do claim to hate the enemy as much as we do.

It's clearly an ambush. The enemy knew exactly where we were and what we were doing. As much as you stay hidden and try to be unnoticed, someone's bound to see something, or even worse, say something. Oddly enough, we paid our little goat-fucking translator about an hour ago, so the timing is impeccable. Even more damning was that a sheep herder from Tikrit requested American dollars instead of Iraqi Dinar. But that was behind us, now we're struggling to defend our position while the enemy surrounds us. The intelligence we obtained was valuable, and if the enemy intercepted it they would be able to figure out our plans.

There were 5 of us. We were all college educated and couldn't find work, so we became intelligence and logistic engineers to help fight the war. Contrary to popular belief, we're paid well for our work. But we didn't sign up to be killed or captured. We all left families behind. One of the guys had a daughter that was going to be married soon, and another one had an infant he's only seen over internet calls. For the most part, the reasons for the fighting weren't our concern, we were only in it for the paycheck.

A firefight had started. The bullets struck the tiny mud brick building with seemingly little effect to the inside. We were managing to hold the enemy back with suppressive fire, but this tactic wouldn't work forever. Amazingly,

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almost every building surrounding the tiny house was destroyed by bombs or rockets, but this place stood firm. In the back through a courtyard there was a narrow alleyway that was our planned escape route. Rubble of blown out buildings completely blocked the access from the front of our makeshift quarters, but that's not to say the enemy didn't know about it. They probably knew this area better than we did.

The gunfire had stopped. The enemy started yelling to us in a camel shit language we barely understood, and soon that too had stopped. We decided to quickly secure the intelligence that we had gathered over the last few days and make a break for it. Periodically, one of us would peer through one of the tiny windows and send out a few shots at any kind of movement, but we were unsure if enemy fighters were still in the area. This enemy has a lot of tricks, and they're quick to sodomize you with any one of them in a given moment. And that's when we heard it...

I woke up unable to move. The enemy was digging through our stuff, looking for any information that was salvageable. There was smoke, rubble, and a smell of burning hair that signified to me no one else had made it. After that bright flash, i woke up in extreme pain, unable to do anything about it. Some of the other soldiers said that it was quick and you wouldn't even know it happen. But this was the longest and most painful thing i've ever endured. Even worse, I came-to with one of the enemies searching me, speaking that camel shit language I've come to loathe...

"Sir! This one appears to have survived, but he's in bad shape."

"Let's rush him back to the base, if he lives he may have valuable information."

"Sir, it looks like there were 4 or 5 of them camped out here."

"They're definitely spies, but our source didn't know if they're ISIS or al-Qaeda"

"Sir, we found a couple of Tunisian passports, and they look authentic."

"These boys are definitely far from home... Have intel run those passports, maybe CIA has more information on them."

"Yes sir."

Storms

The sound of rain surrounds them
Thunder cackles above
Demanding attention
But the storm goes unnoticed.

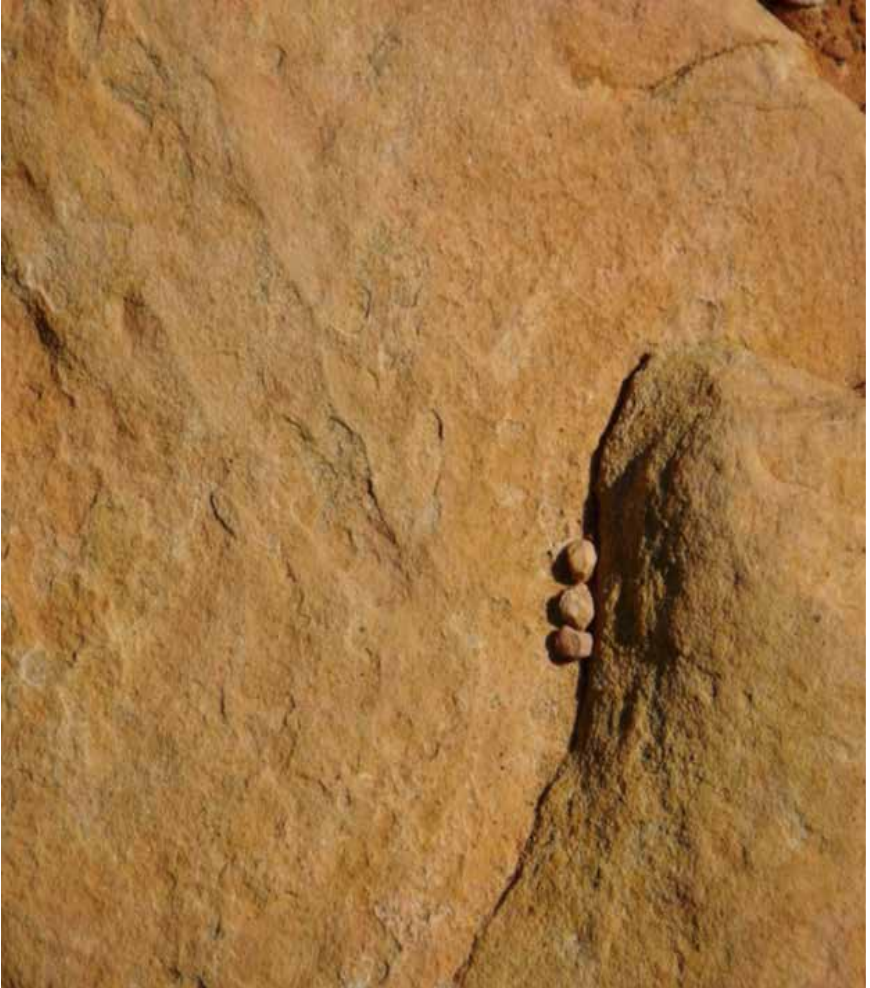
Lost in each other
Hands finding
Every curve, hollow, and dip.

Softly, slowly
Ecstasy building as the storm does
Faster, harder, rougher.

Hearts pound
Moans escape
Bodies rocking.

The sound of rain surrounds them
Thunder cackles above
Demanding attention
But the storm goes unnoticed.

- Cecelia Rogriguez



*three pebbles in the
Mojave desert*

by Glenn Bodish

Beware of the Little Bully

by Dena Johnson

I remember looking into her eyes and seeing a free spirit galloping within the galaxy of deep blues and greens in her irises. I always admired how her long, brown curls moved in a slow swaying motion as if she were submerged in a fluid. I had been acquainted with this girl for as long as I could remember, and we had shared many memories with our time together. We would trip over our little feet and laugh as we pranced through the dancing orange and yellow leaves of autumn. Our three-year-old imaginations transported us to a magical castle, the kind with twirled ivory vines that hung like hair from its stone walls. She would always tell me how beautiful I looked in my blush-colored dress while she placed a twinkling tiara on my head. When we weren't transforming frogs into handsome princes with the touch of our puckered lips, we were teaching our fluffy, and stuffed, friends how to count to ten and sing the alphabet. On sunny Sunday afternoons, we giggled over cups of tea and sang our favorite songs we learned in church that day. I loved the little girl living inside the soft pinkness of my little brain, and she loved me. Moments like these made me believe that we would be best friends for the rest of our lives. Boy, was I wrong!

As I grew older, fall faded into winter, and the seasons changed. The world changed. She changed. I was at the age where much of my day was spent sitting still in a hushed school classroom. The days we spent dancing with the falling leaves, dreaming of royal castles, kissing the frog princes, and giggling over cups of warm tea began to lessen. She was soon welcomed by swarming piles of information that came from the hours of reading, writing, and multiplying done at school. The information was stacked so high that it cast shadows in my pinkish medium-sized brain. She became lost in the darkness of the shadows of what she called "the prison papers." I became fond of school and meeting new friends, but she grew bored and tired of the information that crowded my brain. I had found new pleasures that she was no longer a part of. I probably hurt her feelings, I thought, but people grow through new experiences, right? My life has moved on to bigger things than her, and that's just the way it goes,

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I guess. She slipped away, and I watched the light that once sparked life in the deep blues and greens of her eyes fade. The adventurous fire in her soul was extinguished, and she darkened.

She darkened as quickly as day turned to night in the winter, and there was nothing I could have done to stop her. Every bright characteristic she once embodied was blackened by envy and hatred. Her long, brown curls that used to chase her as she ran back and forth through the sprinkler with me turned black and straight. The eyes that one could see deep blue oceans in were consumed by a black venom that seeped through her pupils. She slouched, and bones protruded from her body. The soft curves of her face hardened, and her jagged cheekbones were sharp enough to cut diamonds. Desperate and lonely, she found a new obsession to latch onto: my mistakes. The girl who once fueled my own confidence mutated into the girl who drained it.

Although there were many of aspects of the game I steadily improved on throughout my first year in volleyball, she clenched her piercing teeth into the first mistake I made every time. When I made an attacking error that sent the ball soaring out of bounds, she woke and emerged from the shadows like a bloodthirsty bear. Her shadow cast a cold darkness throughout my body. I glanced at her beady eyes and felt myself shrivel into the helpless slab of meat her bear-like self would like for dinner. How can that small of a person have such violent control over my body? “Hit that ball out of bounds again. I dare you,” she taunted as she made circles around my head, stalking me like her prey. Shut up, I thought. Shut up, shut up, shut up. You can do it. “No, you can’t,” she said with a sneer, “but you can keep telling yourself that!” She let out a witch’s cackle, and a rush of embarrassment washed over me like a wave. The crash of the wave pulled me under and into her influence. The ball was set to me again. I tracked it in slow motion and pursued the ball with full intentions to redeem myself of the previous hit. Then, I heard the quietest of voices whisper, “Oh, boy, here we go again. That setter really trusts you with getting the ball over? What a shame.” The ball almost reached my range of motion when I swung as hard as I could in hopes to prove that little bully wrong; instead of whacking the ball ten feet out of bounds, the ball failed to touch a single finger on my hand. I completely whiffed.

Without hesitation, of course, that little rodent pounded her fists into the sides of my brain. She yelled, “Oh, my goodness! You did even worse than I thought! You really made Mom proud on that one!” Leave me alone! Gosh, I hate you! I thought, and I immediately burst into tears in the middle of the court. Everybody watched as I bolted for the door. My mom, who was the volleyball coach at the time, irritatedly chased me. “What is your problem?” Mom asked as she walked into the bathroom. I can hear the anger in her voice, I thought. I let her down. Can I do anything right for once? I turned my face because I was too ashamed to confront her disappointed expression. I found myself staring into the mirror, but the reflection did not look like me. Who am I? I stared back into my own eyes, but I did not see anything. There was no content

in them, just like that little bully's. She had found a way to snake through the corridors of my brain and poison me from the inside. What kind of person does that? "I don't like the person you're becoming, Dena," Mom said with a stern voice. "This needs to get figured out right now," Mom warned. "Did you hear that? You're not good enough for Mom," the little crooked girl hissed. "Please, just leave me alone!" I cried aloud, though I was not sure to whom. I just lashed out. That is not me. What everyone is seeing is not me. It's the little bully that Mom doesn't like. That little snake is manipulating me in such ways, so she can become me... I stopped my train of thought in its tracks and sat in complete, utter silence. She is becoming me.

Upon that profound moment of realization in my life, I decided that steps toward developing a mutual relationship with the bully were imperative for survival. I still loathed her, and she still loathed me. I knew this process would be more complicated than an average day in the American government, but I was not going to allow any obstacle result in a complete shutdown of my plan. One lucky day, I decided to confront the beast by asking, "Is there any way we can figure this out?" She sarcastically busied herself by picking at the grime under her nails and responded, "Yeah, you could try being perfect." I felt the blood shoot up through my veins and my eyes harden, but I released the air I was holding in my lungs and forced a cooperative approach. "I think we need to work together rather than against each other," I said. "You pushing me to do my best makes me perform my best, but beating my confidence to its breaking point will only suck me further away from my goals and dreams." "I'll see what I can do," she said in a smooth voice. I almost recognized it to be the voice of a pure little girl that once danced with the leaves and sang church songs.

Throughout the next seven years of my life, we learned to push each other with the common knowledge that failure is inevitable. The way we chose how to move next, whether it was forward or backward, was what ultimately determined success. Within these years, she and I experienced triumphant victories, but also devastating setbacks. Although she treated me with much more kindness and respect, an evil darkness still lurked within her. There were times when she let the reigns loosen just enough to sting. I learned to find a sense of peace with her, but I still must always beware of the little bully.



Untitled

by Eden Buyno

Star

You're an infinite sunset,
breaking imaginations boundaries.
So fragile to the touch,
Sewn only with pureness
So weighed down
by a perfect imaginary you

You're so imperfect.
And that's what makes you perfect.

There's trillions of em' out there,
But you're the only star I see.

- Anthony Karlsson

Free

I am fire.

dangerous and devastating
roaring and ravaging
blazing and beckoning

You cannot control me.

intense and irresistible
romantic and rhythmic
erotic and extraordinary

You cannot possess me.

captivating and chaotic
fearless and fierce
unyielding and unforgiving

You cannot tame me.

wild and wicked
powerful and passionate
infectious and incandescent.

You cannot bind me.

alluring and alive
tempting and threatening
stunning and strong

You cannot contain me.

hypnotic and heavenly
magnificent and mesmerizing
seductive and steadfast

You cannot own me.

I am free



Ember Night

by Clayton Brown

Beach Fever

by Noel Berkey

When it's hot and getting hotter the palm fronds snap in the sea breeze. The sun is lazy and fat, gently beating outlines of ever-changing tattoos through the backs of our eyelids. Soon we find our thoughts scattered and fading into the melodious hiss of the surf.

We lose ourselves at the beach like we lose ourselves in the words of the stories we listen to and create. We learn that words and water alike can be refreshing when we lose ourselves within.

Sometimes the surface of the sea is calm, like we often long for our lives to be. We're reluctant to imagine what lay beneath, and try not to think of sea turtles with snapping jaws, sharks with hollow eyes, finding ourselves suddenly caught in a web of tentacles.

There are some who say that contemplating the darkness beneath the surface may make us uncomfortable but also more alive.

For the most part we're good at ignoring such suggestions.

Because we wish to be free, some of us went to the beach one evening years ago to celebrate our short lives. After a bit of wine we were talked into eating some rare berries a transient surfer had found growing on a dune somewhere in his travels. The way he talked, his spiritual journey sounded extra significant. He handed each of us a berry in a very gentle way, requesting that we open our right hands and accept the fruit into our palms, then take it up to our lips by kissing our palms. He said doing so would remind us of simple things, and that when one appreciated raw simplicity, like the feeling of sand beneath our bare feet, sea breeze colored by fragrant odors, and echoes of our shadows laughing, we would be open to magic.

Of course we laughed that night, at ourselves, our so-called leaders. One of us who had read a few history books told how doctors used to advise patients to drink sea water to battle a variety of maladies, and that one man is reported to have consumed many gallons before dramatically relieving himself of an awful

bout of constipation. Of course we found this amusing.

There were also uncomfortable moments that night. Someone told a sad story about a tiny boy who died from overexposure to the sun because his parents were not good parents. Another told about a menstruating woman who lost a foot in a shark attack, and that she had apparently dreamed about the incident for weeks before it happened. Then someone told about a muscle-man who dug a hole so deep at the beach that the sand suddenly collapsed beneath him, and he got sucked into some subterranean sand-water world, never to be seen again. Just when one of us was going to try to outdo the others, this girl who was always a bit anxious anyway said she was sort of freaking hearing these stories, that it was making her feel as if something awful were going to happen, and couldn't we please be a little more mellow and just appreciate being together under the stars?

And so here we all were around this little fire. The tide was coming in, whispering to us. And all of us looked midnight blue. It gave us goose bumps too when she mentioned her fear. We could see them creeping over each other's skin. But the guy who'd given us the berries said we needed to face what the world gives us, bad stuff and all. "Some people say you shouldn't face the darkness, or that you should avoid painful memories and whatnot. But that, my fellow travelers, is a bunch of bullshit. People try to run from reality, from stuff that's stuck in their heads. In their heads," he said again, pointing to his own. "I ask you, how can they run from stuff stuck in their own heads?" His words seemed profound. Maybe because we'd eaten the berries, or because he spoke with such certainty.

After a bit things got quiet. No one had said anything for a while. I lay back in the sand and looked into the whitest whites of the stars. The luminous splashes slipped around up there, disconnected from gravity, and probably from time, I imagined. The lid of the sky seemed a deeper blue than I'd ever witnessed before, a blue that comforted my mind and body, my self, like a soft blanket wrapped around me with a mother's loving hands.

I felt buoyant on that stretch of sand, as though the beach were adrift in the universe, supporting me. Supporting us. I felt myself drifting in the sea breeze, away from myself but focusing on all of us around the fire. Like the stars above shifting about, I felt and saw ourselves unhinged from time. I felt and saw that we were simple figures made of sand. I felt and saw a gentle wind strip away the particles of sand that make who we are till we were adrift in the wind itself. Part of the wind. Gone but not gone. And how I wanted to explain it to the others! But the words, the right patterns, would not come.

When I looked to the others, I saw similar expressions on their faces. They too seemed to suggest that they had something important to communicate, but the words were not there for them either. So we looked at the stars, the waves coming ashore, our little fire, saying nothing, just knowing. In time someone said, "Man, I wish we hadn't eaten those berries."

Just then, as fading moonlight stretched across the surface of the sea and then upon the beach, something began to emerge from the sand. It

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caught the attention of all of us. Instead of sitting transfixed and silent like we had been, we found ourselves tip-toeing over to take a closer look. But halfway there we stopped. The anxious girl couldn't suppress a terrifying shriek when she glimpsed it more closely. Others covered their mouths with one hand and pointed with the other. "What is it?" someone yelled. Emerging from the sand about twenty feet from the sea, and approximately the same distance from us, was a man-like beach thing. While its shoulders appeared to lift it out of a watery hole, at the same time it seemed that it was being squeezed out, as though the beach were giving birth. We looked to the guy who had brought the berries. Maybe he could explain what was happening. But he just stroked his goatee, transfixed as the rest of us.

We watched this man-like beach thing wiggle out of the hole, struggling through tangles of seaweed. A mesmerizing variety of barnacles dotted its flesh like so many delicate scars. It wasn't quite registering in our minds what we were seeing. We were awful curious though.

The next few moments seemed to unfold as slowly as each moment of the last few hours. Upon making it out of the hole, the man-like beach thing unleashed a high-pitched screech resembling a dolphin's. And then, without even glancing at us, crawled away like a crab with its man-like arms and legs before slipping beneath the surface of the sea.

We were silent for a bit, the gang of us displaying various expressions of confusion. All these years later, I can still see us standing there, lost in wonder, exhausted, and perhaps changed somehow.

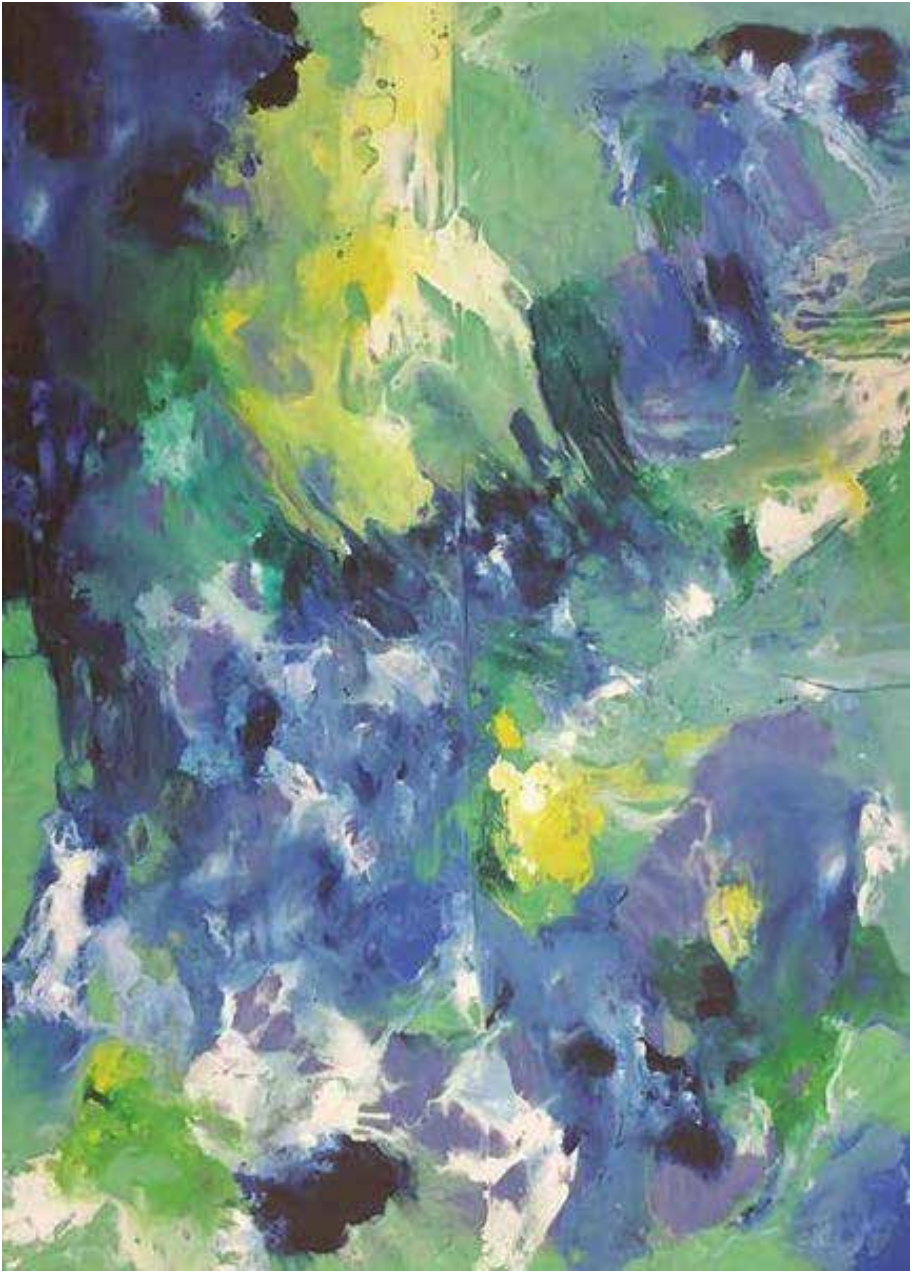
Some of us didn't return to the beach for a while. The surfer with the berries moved on, to the mountains someone said. He needed to contemplate new vistas, and had heard about some caves he could live in.

Secret lives are led at "the beach" by those who have never actually been to a beach. These Technicolor dreamers lose themselves in beach images appearing in films with young people playing volleyball or dancing jerkily to groovy music with smiles glued across their faces. Faces with incredibly round cheekbones and sparkling eyes. And when in the presence of such unbridled freedom life is but a dream of endless summer days.

But it's not always like that at the beach.

Sometimes those of us walking along the shore look to the sea and perceive a dot off in the distance that makes us wonder. Maybe there's a boat out there. Someone looking back at us. A sea creature perhaps. We look some more. The dot is there. Then not there. It winks at us, and we shield our eyes from the sun to get a better view.

Or maybe we decide to lay down instead, stretch out on the sand, close our eyes, and forget.



Blue Green Encaustic

by Rebecca Cutsinger-Cox

Phantom Forest

As the moon rises,
tendrils of chilling fog slithers across the cold, hard ground.
Legions of dead trees claw at the night sky with their skeletal branches.
An aura of darkness pours forth as the moon climbs higher and higher.
Once the hour comes when the moon is at the pinnacle of the black sky,
its light blankets the cemetery forest, calling out to the phantom
that lurks within.

A bone chilling wail shatters the eerie silence as the phantom
awakens from its slumber.

As the unholy sound fills the dead forest, ravens and crows take to the
air, painting the illuminated sky with their silhouettes an rejoicing,
for their lord has returned.

The silence begins to envelop the once more as the phantom
stalks through its ruined kingdom.

Memories flash of a time that has long since faded away, a time
when the forest was full of vibrant life and wondrous magic.

However, that tranquility was rotted away by the dreaded curse that
plagued the once mighty kingdom.

The curse twisted the spirit that cared for and ruled over the forest
into a phantom and eternally bound it to the now ruined kingdom.

Another bone chilling wail tears through the silence as the memories
continue to torrent through the phantom's very existence.

Ravens and crows throughout the forest begin to call out as well,
their lamenting cries weave together with their lord's,
creating a melody of anguish and sorrow that reverberates
through the cemetery forest.

The night wears on and the moon sinks lower and lower towards the
horizon as the dawn of a new day approaches.

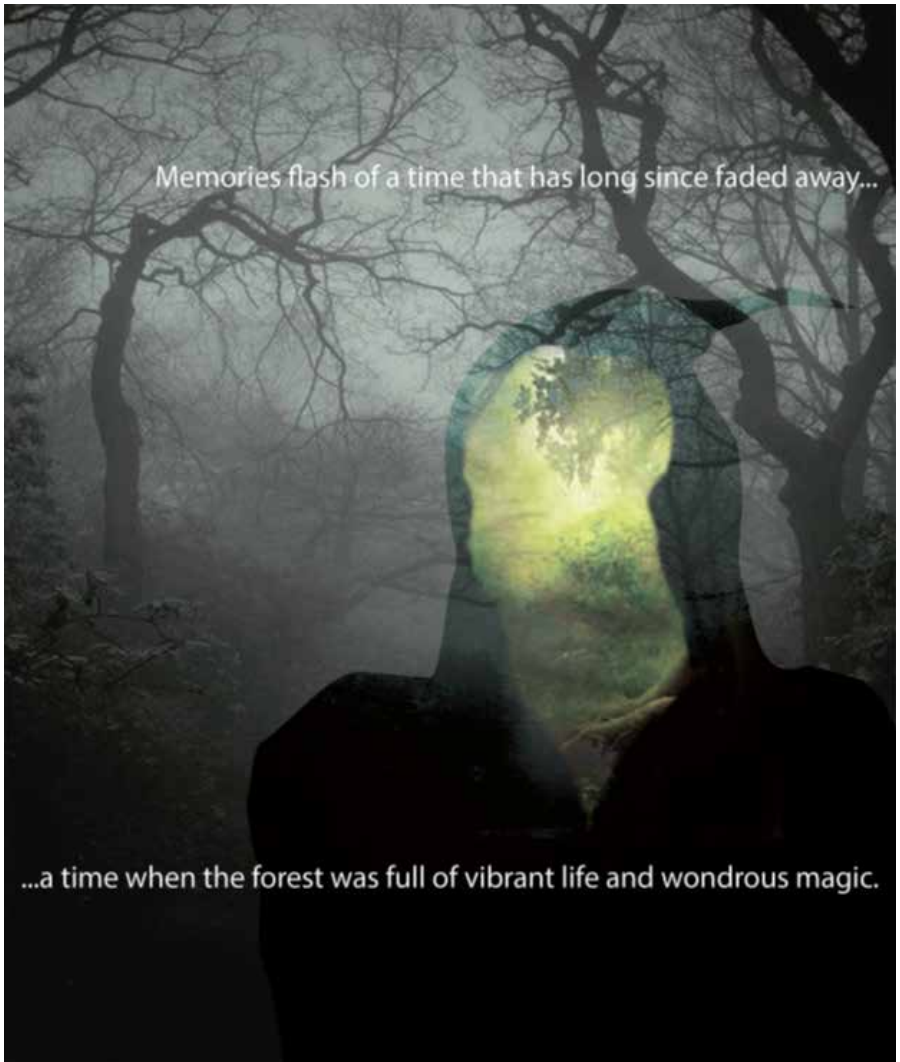
Silence seeps back into the forest as the flashes of memory begin to
subside and the phantom's torture comes to a close once more.

Rays of warm light spread over the ruined kingdom as the sun
rises above the horizon.

Tendrils of fog shrink back to the gloam of the forest,
and ravens and crows meld their way back into the shadows.

The phantom's suffering ends as it fades away into slumber once more,
until darkness returns the night of next.

-D'Angelo Abell



Memories flash of a time that has long since faded away...

...a time when the forest was full of vibrant life and wondrous magic.

Phantom Forest Memory

by D'Angelo Abell

The Four Seasons

Spring (Haiku)

Fog reigns as if king
While the temperatures rise
Detects the coming spring.

Streams rise past sand bars,
Puddles lay along the roads
Spray with passing cars.

Spring has come to pass,
And the ground shedding its snow
Reveals dried brown grass.

Farmers try to sow,
But rain spreads among the land,
Rivers greatly flow.

Sky cracks with thunder,
Rainbows fill it with wonder,
Spring comes with splendor.

Joy to warm weather,
Joy to the coming season
That is called summer.

Summer (Haiku)

The sun is blazing
Lawn mowers cutting the grass
Barns shining in brass;

Sprayers are spraying
Farmers weeding dirt with hoes
Corn growing in rows;

Hens scratching in nests
Children riding bicycles
Licking popsicles.

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Autumn

The leaves are turning red
The animals are collecting food
The summer is about to conclude.

Dusk comes when there was remaining sunlight
Coolness in the dawn;
Whisking wind begins to bite
When autumn starts to yawn.

Autumn comes with scents of harvest
Combines roaring through the fields
Pumpkin pie is the best
Trucks rumble past, hauling their yields.

Bareness all around
Corn husks ripping through the gale
Leaves float to the ground
Foliage alters, becoming lifeless and pale.

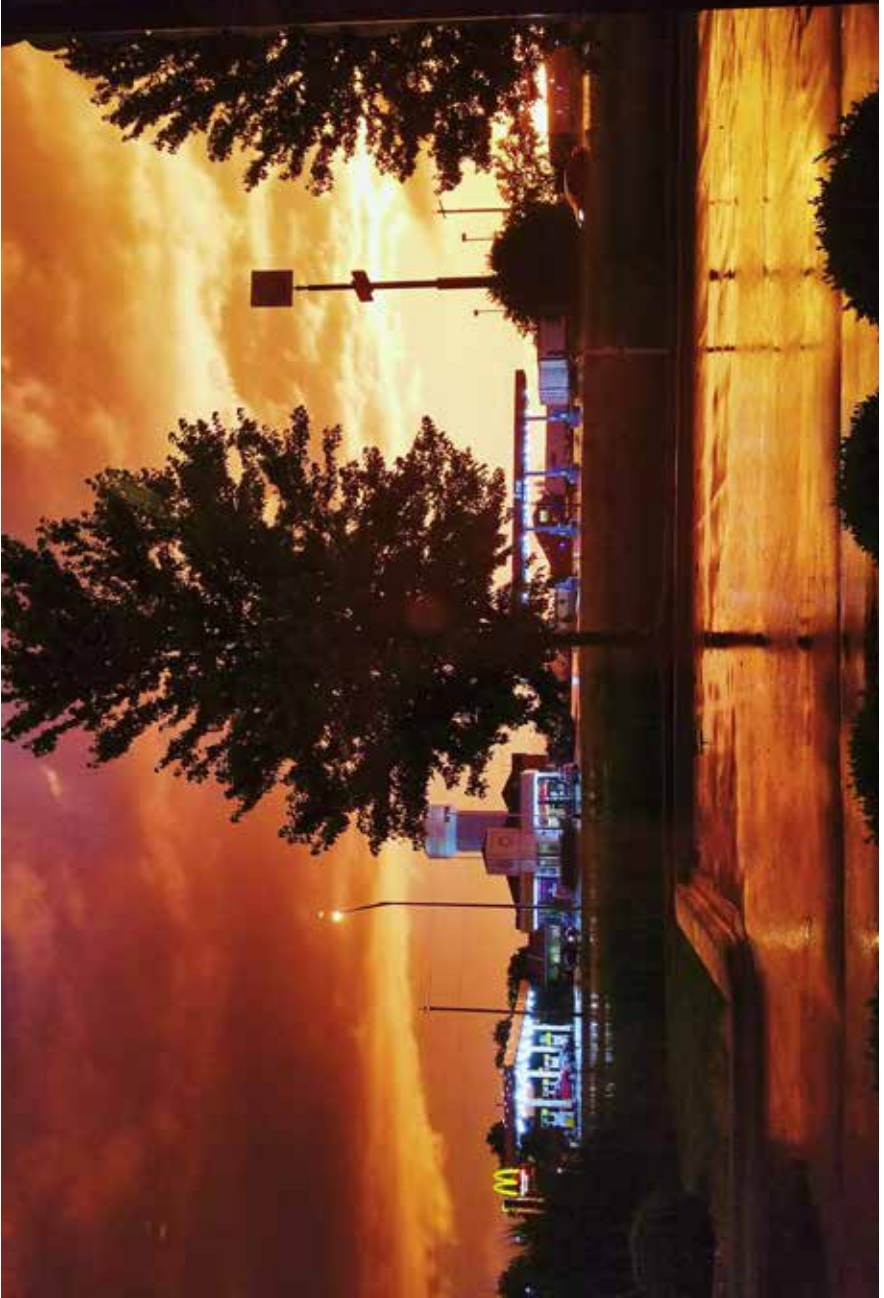
Winter

There is a time when autumn has past
And winter is not yet nigh,
Stretched shadows are cast,
Geese cease to glide by,
Temperatures descend fast
Before snow's first fly.

Flakes settle down between shriveled blades of grass
And form a cotton blanket around a moss-covered stone,
Enclosing the mass,
Until neither are shown.

White splendor overlays every tree
In likewise of the birch,
But the crystals fly free
As a Cardinal descends to perch.

- Ryan Rod



Orange

by Alaina Kruse

The Ruined Heaven

by James Hutchison

On the fall of night and in the depths of sleep came to me a dream.

Slowly walking toward a familiar place, a door made of simple wood, adorned with nothing but only what the poorest worker could afford. I entered this place with no circumstance. It was the home of my kin, a brother, and my father. The sight filled me with despair for, though my own life was not that of a king or even the lowliest royal servant, I had not sunken so far into wanton sadness as I saw there.

Filth lined the halls, dust clung to every surface. Plates of clay stacked high, most untouched by food. My brother and father were laid near, each to a worn cot of wool, and each slumbered not in sleep, but in misery. I approached my brother and inquired how such things could be for when last I saw them; they each were in service to a local governor.

“Brother, father!” I cried.

But no answer came.

“What has happened! Why do you lie in your own filth!” I pleaded further, but only a weary mumble could be heard.

In haste, I rushed to my brother and shook him violently but he only groaned and resisted my touch. They had fallen into such deep melancholy that no manner of shoving and pleading could stir them.

I ran from that place in anger as much as fear. I wondered what manner of terrible things had happened to cause such a desolate state of being. My kin had given up all hope for death. They were reserved to embrace that cold end which no man or woman could ever return from. They were my blood but I was powerless to save them from such agony.

I fell to my knees as I crossed the threshold out of that place. The water of pain fell from my face and splashed into the soft sand that my hands dug into with such force that my fingernails bent backward. I sought to scream out to someone or something but there was nothing and no one. My heart pounded, pinpricks covered my skin, and blood spattered the ground where the skin had broken on my hands.

And I ran. At first, I didn't know to where so I let my feet run wild in whatever

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direction they sought of their own will. I ran towards nothing for so long that my breath came shorter and shorter until it was ragged and I was heaving. My lungs burned and my legs trembled but still, I ran. Then, in the distance, a spectacle of blue rose to greet the sky. It was a mighty cathedral, ancient like the stars themselves. Statues of gold lined the walls of all manner of royal beings. Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Guardians stood in eternal watch over the world for untold eons. Some looked to the ground where humans walk in short moments and the gaze of others turned to the sky in judgement of what I could not see. All around the Cathedral of Time were great doors that stood higher than the highest mortal structure. They were of gold like the statues, but also like them, the gold was worn and faded.

I realized this is where my feet had chosen to go and wondered if I had been guided for I knew this place. The burning in my chest eased, the aching in my legs subsided. Whether guided or not, I knew I must go to this new, ancient place and beg an audience with those within.

I came to a door and stopped, transfixed on its magnitude. I want not to touch it in the beginning for I knew not if it was the mortal way but I resolved myself and pressed upon its weight. The door opened as if commanded by my touch with ease. I entered, afraid, confused, but determined. I wanted answers for the injustice wrought upon the world and my kin. Passed the first door, I was in a corridor that expanded to the left and right as far as I could see. Crossing over, I came to a second door that was equal to the first. I pressed on as I had with its brother and it moved with the same ease. Again, I came to another corridor, brother of the first, but its canopy was lower. I passed through the next door and the next, each the same but for a lowered canopy. It was the seventh door that I touched that gave resistance. I propelled myself into the worn door over and over, each time with more energy than the last but it refused to move. I became dismayed and wondered if I should follow the long hall to the left or right but my compunction demanded that I stay.

And I stayed for an age. I screamed at the door, beat on the door, kicked and banged and wept but it would not move. I became old and weary. My hair grew long and white. My skin became paper before my eyes. I ate not, slept not, nor gave in to relief. My clothes disintegrated around me until I was naked and even my shoes became dust on my feet. I thought of my kin and wondered how long ago they had died. I wondered if they had survived their own despair and made their last days more meaningful than mine. I knew they hadn't. I knew I would join them soon and I longed to see them once more but it was for naught.

In my agony, in my own filth and want for death, I began to sing:

“O Michael, O Michael! Come to me that I might see your face!”

I found that even in my lowest sorrow, my voice still rang as it had when I was among the living.

“O Gabriel, O Gabriel! Come to me that I might see your face!”

And the door opened.

Cold air poured out of the opening as the door swung wide and darkness greeted me. I dared not move until I heard a voice that beckoned me inside. The voice was feeble like that of an old man, like what my voice should have been. I stepped forward, first with trepidation then with curiosity. I looked to the ground and saw that just inside the threshold, the floor was like marble in contrast to the sandy ground on which I had lived the lives of ten men. As I moved closer, my eyes looked inside and to the left and I could see a faint reflection of light. I resolved myself once more and stepped fully inside.

And I was renewed.

But I wasn't who I had been when I entered. No, I was transformed into my younger self. My hair was dark as night, my skin no longer tore like paper and my nakedness was covered with a cloth I did not know of the purest white. My vision was clear, my bones did not ache and walking towards me was a sight of beautiful horror.

Statues of gold limped after me with horrid groans and whispers. It was as if they were in such pain that they could not speak. There were four of them, each farther from me than the next. Two of them I did not know, but two I knew well. The first was Michael the Archangel, but I recognized him, like his brother behind him, only by his face for his body was mutilated and he stood a full head shorter than me for his legs had been cut at the knee. My dismay was compounded further by what I saw next. The angels, all of them, were cut asunder from shoulder to shoulder, back separated from the front. Where the backs of the angels were, I knew not, but the mangled forms of those once glorious creatures approached me in earnest and stood before me.

I looked in the golden eyes of Michael the Archangel and my stomach became like the abyss. I touched his face, stroked it with my fingers and felt the rough texture of his form and it was as unto ice. He opened his mouth to speak but no words came forth. His face contorted, his eyes widened, and his body shook violently as if he was trying to scream but no sound could be heard from the once mighty archangel.

I grasped his face between my hands and pulled it close and again, began to sing:

"O Michael! Mighty Michael! What manner of carnage is this!? Gabriel! Hast thou suffered some great fate!?"

A cacophony greeted me that shook my soul. Lighting shook the walls, and words rolled through the air on thunder.

"We tarry!" were the words I heard.

I looked past the angels gathered around me following their gaze into the distance, and there, set into the wall, stood an effigy of incomprehensible magnitude. He was the same form as angels and mortals alike, but his head would have been lost in the clouds had it stood on the earth as I. He was draped in robes of white and a wreath of great vines sat upon his head. In his grip was a staff of pearl, shining white, the head of which look unto a crown of brilliant colors.

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“Too long, we have tarried.” said the figure.

Michael and his angels turned to face the being that spoke as a mountain falling from heaven and we all watched as he stepped out of his space. The movement sounded like the rushing of a wave crashing on the shore and the step felt as unto an erupting volcano shaking the earth.

“It is time!” spoke he again. “Come unto this place and be joined.”

Michael turned just his head to me and beckoned with a feeble wave of his gnarled hand. I, and his brethren followed Michael towards he that called us and as I came into the greater height of the Cathedral of Time, I saw three other beings of equal stature to the first. Two were shorter, if only by a head, but nevertheless identical to each other. Their forms were more round, their heads bald and they walked with the same staff in hand as the first. Their robes were of purple and gold and they fell into pace with he that first spoke. Of the fourth, I saw only a glimpse, but he stood tallest of all with robes of satin.

Michael and his equals followed behind The Four, their withered forms barely matching the size of a single foot of their masters. I followed yet further back, having no contemplation of what my eyes beheld.

Along our path, I saw baubles of red lining each side. They followed ahead as far as I could see and arced around the circular form of the Cathedral of Time but for openings in the walls ahead into which The Four disappeared. Michael turned just before he and his kin crossed the threshold. I felt in my soul he wished to speak but could not. I searched his eyes for some implication but I beheld none. Then each of them crossed into the room ahead and were gone.

I held fast for a moment, just outside the doorway through which The Four and the angels had passed. I knew not what I was to do or comprehend. Doubt surfaced for a time but it passed without setting hooks into my mind. I looked to the room behind me and though it was without compare in the entire universe, it was empty and held no use to me. I faced the doorway once more and courage settled in my being and I stepped inside.

And I beheld darkness. Save for the steady red glow of the baubles that flowed inside and formed an appearance before me, nothing assailed my senses as much as the weight of emptiness. I turned to look out through the doorway but it had gone. My eyes returned to the silhouette that was surrounded by the now pulsing sphere of red baubles. I stepped closer in distance and reverie and beheld a figure in the midst of the orbs. I looked closer, daring to wonder who I saw and my eyes shed wonder for terror. And then I awoke.



Untitled

by Ariana Turner

MAIDEN OF YOGA

The maiden of yoga
seems lighter than air,
flowing through poses
with effortless care.
Deliberate movements
aligning her core, with
the spin of earth axis,
to her mat on the floor.

Lovely arms sweep upward,
reach up to the sun, then
swan-diving downward,
a forward-fold done.
The hath of her yoga
puts a bloom to her skin,
a pleasant warm fire
ignites from within.

A glide through the Cobra,
is coupled with breath.
The curve of her back,
the swell of her chest.
Expand and contact,
compress and release.
Active to passive,
effort then peace.

She soars and she sails,
through bends and the folds,
twists and turns,
rises and holds.

Savasana now,
a freefall of rest,
the body/mind union,
has given her best.

The maiden of yoga
is now ready to face,
storms of the day,
with yoga-like grace.

-Mike Hunter

The Overreaching Intellect

by Cynthia Miller

The monkey brain was at it again, Tiva had been up most of the night. The incessant chattering of the brain had become an **antibody** to everything she proposed to get to sleep. **Bizarre quandaries** sprang from her monkey brain **camouflaged** in amazing **dialogues accentuating** her **eclectic aspirations** swinging wildly from one topic to the next.

Tiva knew she had slept sometime after 3 AM despite her **formidable guerrilla** ambush. Why would she allow this monkey brain of hers to **bamboozle** her in this **boisterous** manner? Could she adamantly boycott this solicitous chattering in some way? She'd try to outwit her **outrageous parasite** with a new **strategy** again tonight. Now, during the day she'd **quarantine** this **nocturnal renegade**.

After a bit of **introspection**, Tiva decided to become **immune** to this **impertinent gargoyle** of her mind and started her day with a **jaunty** air, refusing to **cower** in some corner of life and **commemorate** her **deign fallacies**.

With great **decorum** and **enthusiasm** she began the **labyrinth** of her daily agenda. **Flourishing** most in the mornings, she mastered them as the true **protagonist** of her day. It was night time that she wanted to **recede** from. It seemed there was no one to which she could **divulge** her predicament.

Her daily work involved **deduction** which she used with ease. Feeling free of her **nuisance**, she discovered a humorous memo written with **alliteration**. She smiled. The **analogy** of her day with her nighttime so far, was a relief.

Tiva's multiple interests compelled her in diverse directions. In Zoology, she combined her expertise with **holograms**. **Marsupials** were a topic that caused

her to long for a trip to Australia. Exploring was in her blood it was no wonder she was a **guru** in innumerable fields. Could this be what's going haywire in her brain at night? She mused.

Perhaps, she was so **exultant** in her interests during the day that she couldn't turn them off at night. Her brain at night kidnapped and exported her to **random** places, the **rainforest** and **phloem** under the microscope. Once she journeyed into the **Renaissance**, hoping that she was dreaming, but realized she was still awake! Her brain felt like a sponge that needed to be wrung out and laid out to dry.

Tiva's **chronology** was that of a Russian heritage as a child prodigy, a **voracious** reader since the tender age of three, teaching herself English at four, and finally the neighborhood **virtuoso**, always drawing a crowd. Being surrounded by people became familiar but not preferred, after all how could she accomplish her tasks and discoveries with all the distractions?

When Tiva was old enough to make the decision that she felt might be a **sacrifice**, she left her small family village. She remembered looking down from the plane perusing the **mosaic** enigma of this new land of opportunities. Dr. Bryant of Columbia University met her at the airport. He had great plans for Tiva since he had recently discovered her, she would be free to do any research she liked using any facilities available. It was too much to believe, Tiva was overwhelmed with delight that she would have this freedom and a lab of her own.

Settling in to her apartment her first night she found herself doing quantum physics and **exponents** for specific equations in her head. She imagined the **ozone** while visiting the **nebula** in her mind's eye. The next morning she blearily looked at **omnivores** and studied some **mutation** which had nothing to do with the **laconic** bedtime **spectrum** her monkey brain had furnished her with the night before.

At lunchtime Tiva walked through the park like atrium where the statue of The Thinker posed himself, Tiva thought he imposed himself, on her. She thought of herself as mostly cerebral. Am I an alien transposed here from another planet **light years** away? She pondered.

Distracting herself, she discovered an area of **lichen** trees and remembered as she walked she was used to walking in meters or **kilometers**, which were rarely used by the people in America. After eating her liverwurst sandwich and carrot sticks she was amazed at all the new **techniques** and ideas she had already formulated.

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Back at work devising a **hieroglyphic** on her computer among other things, she struggled finding an English **participle** and a **metaphor** for a magazine article she was writing. Her day continued with math using shapes that intrigued her, the **ellipse** and the **polygon**. When she completed a task she **vacillated** about whether to plan for tomorrow.

If I don't write a plan for tomorrow, will it show up in my head tonight? She made a notation in her daily journal, noticing how her brain was already heading into a study of **xylem** as she wrote it down, trying not to be **despondent**. When does my day end, really? She puzzled. She was to have a long day.

Dr. Bryant had arranged for Tiva to do some sightseeing, meeting some other important people. Tiva could pull it off, though she was socially uncomfortable. She enjoyed meeting other scientists and listening to their discussions about the **solstice**, **sybiosis**, **ultraviolet** and **vaccines**. She enjoyed the fact that scientists were hardly ever **unanimous** in their opinions or research.

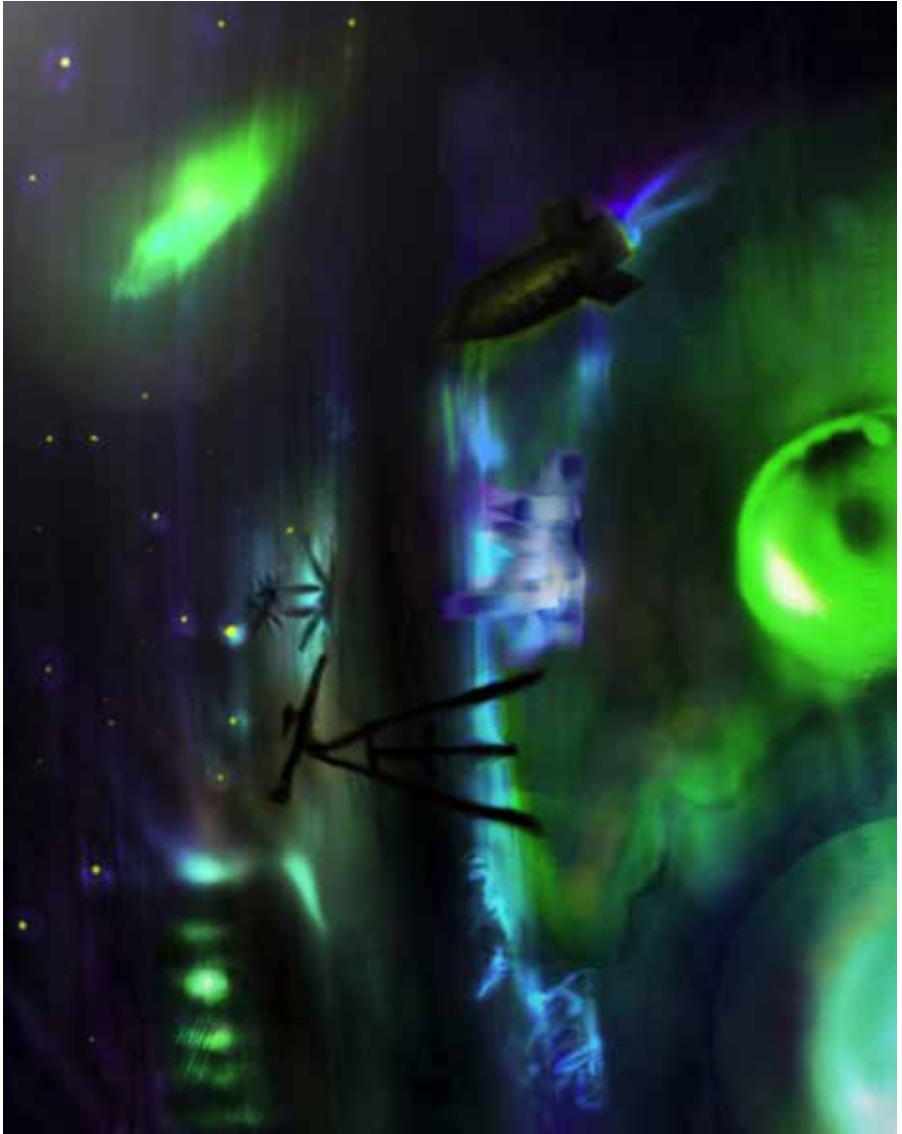
She discovered she could hold her own on talking about **vertebrates** and most topics of **Zoology** and Botany. She overheard a woman talking about **tundra** and steered herself over into conversation finding another kindred spirit.

There was yet to be an unbearable moment when she was caught on a **yacht** with a group of politicians. They treated her like the queen of **suffrage**. She could not **maneuver** through their discussions of **tariffs**, **embargoes** and the **hypocrisy** of politics which she found both **wretched** and **tumultuous**. "They thought of me as a **stereotype**." She told Dr. Bryant. "Why would anyone be interested in those **outrageous** topics?"

In the lab now, her late afternoon energy waned causing her to consider the possibility of a nap, which she swiftly dismissed because it might impede her from sleeping at night. At the end of such an eventful day Tiva walked home hoping to expend any leftover energy.

Her **silhouette** eased its way up the cement steps to her glorious apartment, a haven of **toxic free tranquility**. She listened as a neighbor played a **jovial** violin piece in **undulating tempo** lulling her to her white, soft, luxurious bed. Tiva was resigned that her **quota** had been met that day, she felt accomplished. There were no **fallacies** or **inferences** or monkeys waiting for her. Her thoughts were **pulverized**.

She didn't change her clothes, now ready for **repose** she simply dove into bed and slept.



Alien World

by Samantha Poe

Starter Home

We vacuumed her slowly from the carpet,
emptying her residue of talcum and sloughing skin,
bit by bit into the dustbin,
respectfully clearing her from the air, the padding.

We sanded the hardwood floors, releasing a shocking reminder of her cats
How many there were, how they
Missed the litterbox
Often
A permanently darker square on the foyer floor, double-urethaned against the
seep of smell

We stripped her floral borders from the kitchen walls, then
Knocked out the walls, when it was clear
The ceiling had leaked into them for years,
We yanked her concrete fountain from the side yard
With a half-ton winch
Creaking the copper pipes back
Torching and capping at the foundation
“Damn mosquito farm” the winch operator spat,
the same handy guy who later got a facefull of bat from the crooked chimney
he rebuilt
“Damn bat factory” he grinned, with blood coursing down his face from the
scratches

We tried to picture her
In every awkward room layout—where could she have fit a couch?
Did she eat at a real dining table?
Maybe against the windows?
Sometimes we painted her elegant,
dabbing her mouth daintily with a floral hanky
Having two finger sandwiches and a thimbleful of dandelion wine on the daven-
port
Lace curtains streaming in and out of a sudden porch breeze
Turning to smile indulgently at a small group
Of like-minded women from the library board

Sometimes we made the stories from what we actually found:
A few newspaper clippings about county fair results
The bottom drawer of the buffet finally unstuck to reveal
The cardboard tops of hundreds of tv dinners,
Each carefully cleaned, expertly trimmed by scissors,
With reviews of each food item
Scrawled in pencil, with ratings on mouth feel, flavor, and some inexplicable
System of points for goodness, which might have been
Nostalgia, or just how it settled in her gut
We found her snipped off, expired driver's license photo behind the baseboard,
And that sudden look of confusion at the flashing bulb,
Plus the intestate quitclaim deed from the probate judge
signed in triplicate
The dry handshake of the state-supplied executor,
And the faint, acrid smell of unhappiness left in our vacuum was
Another story we told ourselves.

-Amanda Eichman



Frog Painting

by Abby Castillo

Her Corner

by Odile Blazquez

She sits down on the soft brown leather couch, leans back, and curls her legs under her. The windows facing her reveal the familiar trees and bushes and the house across the street. Nothing is happening so there are no distractions. It's a good time.

"I should have come here days ago," she whispers to herself as she looks around her room. There is no one home, and even if there were, they would know to leave her alone. She's in the living room, which no one really uses because everyday life happens in the family room and kitchen on the other side of the house. This room is hers – she has made it so. She chose this couch and this coffee table, and the two bookcases are filled with her books. Several Native American pots are arranged on the coffee table: two Navajo, one Jemez, one Acoma, and one unknown she picked up at a flea market. An Inca tapestry hangs on the wall opposite the bookcases.

There is a plant in a big round pot on the floor by the couch. It was left outside their apartment when she and her husband lived in a big apartment complex a long time ago. Although they tried, they were unable to track its rightful owner or the nursery that delivered it because there was no card, so they kept it. It now stands about four and a half feet tall and has a fairly sturdy trunk. The small, dark green leaves on the wispy branches always touch her left arm when she sits here in her corner. She likes that and so does the plant. She's sure of it.

Once a year, the plant sheds most of its leaves and looks like it will surely die, but each time it bounces back. Tiny, light green, shiny leaves begin to sprout and eventually replace the others. It's been in the same spot for fifteen years, and by now it has adjusted its cycles to the light and temperature fluctuations of that spot. The plant has witnessed her spiritual growth over those fifteen years; it's heard her pray, seen her cry, felt her anger, and sensed her joy. The plant knows her just as she knows it. She knows when the shedding

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will begin and when it will end, and she knows when it needs plant food. She can remember only four times when the plant has asked for food. No, she isn't crazy. Plants respond by growing and doing well when spoken to lovingly. Isn't that communication?

There is a familiar feeling of satisfaction as she takes stock of her room. Everything here has a story, and it always fills her with peace. "So much has happened here," she whispers as she settles into the couch, picks up her notebook and pen, and begins to write.

"There is so much clutter in our lives, so many intrusions, colors, sounds, smells, noises, problems, deadlines, distractions... How can we focus on discovering our innermost thoughts, on hearing that innermost voice that comes from God when our minds are flooded with such mundane garbage? We find God in the solitude, in the quiet, when our minds are empty and we can listen to Him clearly.

"Long ago, one of my sons came up with "her corner," when asked where I was, even though it's not a corner at all, and the name stuck. My corner is a special place, a place where time stops, a place of revelation, a place to find answers. The Native Americans would call it a place of power. It's where I talk to God and He talks to me. When life gets challenging, I don't seek out a friend or family member. I go to my corner. I go there when there are big decisions to make; I went there when my father died. I go there when a loved one is sick, when things don't make sense, when my nerves are frazzled, when I regret something I said or did.

"In my corner, I don't control my mind. My thoughts run free. Some rise to the surface only once or twice while others come back over and over again. Long forgotten worries and concerns come out of their hiding place and let me know that they still matter to me. Thoughts fight and push for attention, and they all receive it until my mind exhausts itself and the clutter is gone. Finally, I'm ready to listen to God.

"Sometimes I'm in my corner for a short time; sometimes it can take a very long time to quiet my mind so I can hear. Sometimes I don't like what I hear. I question a lot, and I know I may never find some of those answers. But my corner has seen me through every single time."

Slowly, she puts down her pen, shifts a bit to the left to feel the branches on her arm, and closes her eyes. It's time.



Untitled

by Ariana Turner

That's All

Into the fields of the chain linked fences
Through the gap between whistling men's teeth
Where the natural corners stand high heels
On top of the natural ground pillaging sewers
Where the horizon meets the dancing bones
Of children who stick out their tongues
Waiting for the next drop of neon friction
And banquets are held for the highest losers
Of the humans that act like victims
Their own lives holding them captive
And there is no real escape
There isn't any guaranteed outcome
And we yell yolo uptop of buildings
Where a week ago people leaped like frogs
Into the lake of flopping fish
Up for another game of roulette
Gambling with something worth more
Than their rights to life
Every step going down
seem too long
Is there a risk
To it all ending now
And we weave out reassurance
That everything
Will turn out
ok..

-Eden Buyno



Roadside Waterfall Iceland

by Val Sleger

The Works

Place

i arrived that day on the square

walking (in spirals and spirals)
until outside the town

i saw
(when yesterday and
tomorrow ceased)

the thing that made me stay
(free from forever on)
and never peer over the
minutes miles past

would never could not carve
this body back out

from this place (it would make a bloody mess)

i drank a draft of trees and lake
(but mainly thought)
no one can take me

i can dig this burrow (unmolested, unmoved by wishes and plans)

i can eat this one place

up

like manna (for days and days)

and grow strongly breathing hardly
so i sat for gravity cooperated planted in

THIS MY

place

-Amy Jakobsen



Soma Yukihira

by Clayton Brown

I Killed the Chicken

by Olivia Esther

Some people receive praise very frequently. I'd go as far as to say on a regular basis. 'Good job, Timmy. You did the dishes', 'Wonderful, Johnny. You did your chores', or 'Wow Tony. Way to get out of bed this morning'. That one is my personal favorite. Having proud parents because you got..up.

I can't imagine.

See my parents are quite different. My mama, well, she doesn't talk to me very much. I assume she doesn't want me around, but I wouldn't dare suggest that. My father, on the other hand, has no issue talking to me. Not necessarily bad, but there is never any praise.

I couldn't tell you if either of my parents are proud of me. Now I'm not a great, clean nose, goodie-two-shoes, perfect kid, but I've done enough things that I personally thought were worthy of praise. Or at least a little praise.

One day I decided I had had enough. I was going to make my father proud of me no matter what it took. I start tomorrow.

The next morning I got up before the sun showed its beams or the rooster could let out a single sound. My father is still in bed when I walk by his bedroom to the mud room. I throw on a pair of coveralls and my old rubber boots. I walk the quarter of a mile out to the cow stables and take one little look inside.

Yup. It surely needs a good cleaning.

I put my pitch fork into action hauling out the old poop covered hay and bring in the new fresh hay. The sun is barely peeking over the horizon when I finish up.

I hurry back to the house. I strip down to my day clothes and strut into the kitchen. Mama is frying eggs and father is reading the paper.

"Where you been, boy?" He asks.

"Father, I cleaned out the cow stable for you." I flash a big smile at him.

"Okay." His face stays blank as he reads on about the latest sales. My heart falters slightly. "Well don't be standing around, boy. Go wash up for breakfast."

I follow his orders hurrying off to the wash room. The thin walls allow me to hear my father's booming voice. "Do you want a fresh chicken for dinner tonight." He asks mama. I'm sure she answered him quietly. She talks to father. "I'll fetch one from the coop this afternoon."

That's it!

After school I'll get the chicken so father doesn't have to.

As I walk up our lane after school I hear the church bells ring one... two...three...four. Four o'clock. Mama will be needing that chicken soon.

I sprint the rest of the way and grab the old wooden axe from a stump. Father uses this axe for chopping wood, but I'm sure it will do the trick just fine.

I've only ever watched father kill the chickens because he has never allowed me to do one myself. I know the basics, though.

Grab the chicken by his feet. Throw him on the slab of wood. Wait for him to stop squirming . In one fluid motion SWING. If you're successful the head will roll off the makeshift table. I was successful. I finish cleaning the chicken so mama can cook it up.

I start my way back to the house when I see father. I'm so excited I lift the beheaded chicken in the air. "Look father. I got the chicken for you." I can't see his expression from this distance. The closer I get, though, I could swear I see a smile.

He grabs the chicken and does a once over look at my work. This time I am sure he smiled.

That night I realize what I need to do. I need something bigger. Something he has to be proud of me for.

The sun set that night, and rose the next morning on that glorious day. I wait for father to go to work before grabbing the old wooden axe once more. This time I go in the house with it.

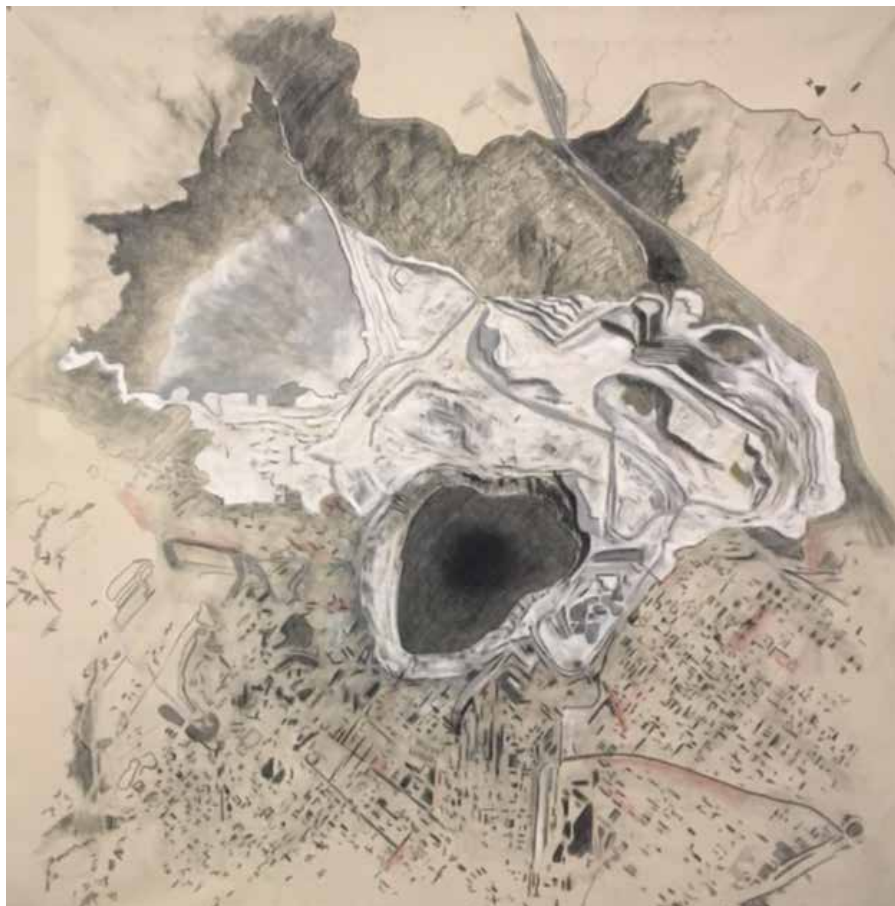
I figure if I apply my knowledge on how to kill a chicken to my next victim it would work in the same fashion. For the most part.

So that's what I did.

I grabbed her by the feet. Knocked her to the ground. Waited for her to stop squirming. "Shhhh mama. With one fluid motion you swing." She stops moving. "And because I was successful the head rolled off."

I pick up mama's head by the hair. I can't wait to go show father. I have to go show father right now. I turn around, and he is standing there in the doorway.

"Look father. I killed mama for you."



*The Mining Aesthetic:
Yankee Doodle Tailings
Pond, Berkeley & Conti-
nental pit, Butte, Montana*

by Glenn Bodish

January

The gap in the curtains
Is a glimpse into
A different truth

For in all the stars
And stones
And scratches
There is only one animal
That can stare
Down the barrel of a black hole
And call it a shotgun
One kind
That can pluck
A moment out of a sand dune
And give it a number
Coordinates
A place in time
Relevant to all 365 before it
And all 12 to come

One
That can brush past a flurry of universes
And worry about tomorrow

-Samantha Rhodes

Tomorrow

And I just keep saying it,
 "Tomorrow."
"I'll get the assignment done,
 Tomorrow."
"The dishes and laundry will be done
 Tomorrow."
"I'll go to see my friends
 Tomorrow."
"I'll ask him out
 Tomorrow."
"I'll just wait one more day to text him,
 Until tomorrow."

And now I must stop and ask myself, when and why,
"When did I become so afraid?"
 And
"Why am I fearing the rejection that I've never received?"
"When did I stop taking chances?"
 And
"Why did I decide to stop trusting myself and chasing what I want?"

Of course I don't answer, and so I'll do it all again,
 Tomorrow.

-Cara Prince



Angel

by Abby Castillo

Secrets of the Abyssal Zone

In a technicolored seascape,
creatures gaze into the abyssal zone
where plankton bits
defy their daylight friends -

aching to reach out to
anti-current travelers
until a fraction of light
reminiscent of a dying
star hurdles into
the sacred abyss,

rewriting the secrets
of the water world
partially unknown to mankind,
before a bioluminescent
tail swings in the
nocturnal waterway.

-Samantha Poe

Break

by Tom Irish

After reading the third email of the day asking me to meet up with someone so we could have a discussion about times at which we might get together again to hold an actual meeting, I stood up from my desk and went to refresh my coffee. Two guys were already at the coffee maker, both were named Kevin, and they were debating the relative merits of the Indiana Jones movies. Their consensus seemed to be the same as everyone else's: the movies that came out when they were kids were great, and the newer ones sucked.

I veered off to the restroom, just to get a minute alone, but the door was locked. I didn't have to go anyway. I looked around. I was close to the elevator. Nobody was watching. I left work.

On the street, some people were smoking cigarettes. I always envied smokers their reason to stand outside periodically, if not their lung cancers and halitosis. I turned the corner and did an awkward shuffle to get out of someone's way. I turned again, realized that I was circling back towards the office, decided not to backtrack, and turned the opposite way at the next corner.

I had been out for only about five minutes before I came to the park. It was a small park where I sometimes stopped my car and ate sausage biscuits before work. I especially liked to stop there on rainy days. That day was brilliantly sunny, though, and I thought I'd stop to watch a couple of foursomes playing tennis on the two courts with sagging nets.

I don't know how far I would have gotten if it weren't for what happened next. I probably wouldn't have gone right back to the office. I might have walked a bit further. Maybe I would have met a woman, gone on a spontaneous date, and fallen in love. Maybe I would have found some criminals to sell me false identity papers before driving out of town and starting over across the country. Maybe I would have been hit by a car and killed. There's no way to know.

What I do know is that right before I got bored and moved on, a woman who must have been around sixty-five and who had amazing, flowing black hair

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hit an overhead that went astray and hit a man with a white mustache on the next court. The ball struck his thigh, and he went down like a dropped piece of toast. All of eight us, including me, gasped simultaneously. It was entirely possible that he could have hit his head on the court, I thought. He could have broken a hip. Or had a heart attack, stroke, or embolism. I shifted my weight forward, wondering whether I should rush onto the court and see if there was anything I could do to help.

That was when the mustache man popped up like a champagne cork, took several huge, shambling steps, and punched the black-haired woman on the side of the neck.

This time there were no gasps. As the woman staggered backwards, I could hear at least two different birds chirping. One of the other men said "Hey . . ." softly, almost like he wasn't sure that he should be upset. I didn't have a single thought in my head. I just watched as the black-haired woman regained her footing, dropped her racquet, and launched herself at the mustache man. She clawed her hands into position around his wattled neck and began to squeeze. Muffled grunting sounds came from both parties, though they sounded more like sex sounds than fighting. Thick, luxurious black hair began flying every which way as the woman tried to shake the man in hopes of getting better purchase around his scrawny chicken neck, while at the same time the mustache man began to chop at her waist with a flat hand. The blows were controlled and it looked like he knew Karate, except for the fact that he didn't seem to be doing any damage.

Then, for no apparent reason that I ever became aware of, the mustache man's partner turned his racquet, lifted it above his head in both hands, and then smashed the hard edge of the frame into the back of the mustache man's skull. There was a sickening bonk, and the mustache man dropped to the court for the second time in seconds.

Then a woman from the other court, who was probably in her late fifties and had a silky blonde ponytail, kicked the partner squarely in the crotch. He screeched and crumpled. A man next to her, wearing a floppy, powder-blue sunhat and oversized sunglasses, leapt on top of her, knocking her to the ground, and tried to get his finger into her mouth. I thought he was trying to fishhook her. Then two men with about seven sweat bands between them grabbed the hat man by his shoulders, pulled him off, and threw him. He landed on his hands, and I could clearly hear one of his wrists snap. A woman with almost iridescent chestnut hair cut short and held out of her eyes by a white golf visor executed a lovely backhand that crushed the nose of one of the sweatband-bedecked men, causing him to scream shrilly and spray blood onto the green composite court surface.

After that, it was an all-out melee. I won't claim to have seen everything that happened. I do remember the man with the broken wrist bleating pathetically. I saw the woman with the black hair grab a fistful of the blonde ponytail, swing that woman in a nearly complete circle, and slam her into the rock-solid net post. She wrapped around it like Silly Putty, and then fell to the

ground. I saw the man with the floppy hat get bitten on the cheek by another man, after which he was followed around the court by a trail of angry red spatters. I saw a lady older than my mother use a torn headband as a garrote. I heard triumphant roars harmonize with agonized wails.

And in spite of all of the blood and the broken bones, it never occurred to me to call the police. My phone was right there in my pocket, but it's not like I debated the issue and rejected the idea. I just never thought of it until later, long after it would have done any good. In fact, I don't think a single thought or emotion passed through my head during the whole incident. I watched, and at some point, I turned and walked away. I went back down the street, reentered the building, rode up the elevator, sat down at my desk, and went back to work.

I tried to avoid the news for a couple of days. No CNN, no NPR, no local broadcasts, no Facebook or Twitter. It wasn't easy. If the fight had gotten the coverage that I expected it to, I would have seen something anyway, but I never did. No reports of wounded or dead senior citizens, no commentary about increases in crime rates, the intolerability of nursing homes, the waning popularity of tennis. I began to wonder if the entire thing had ever really happened at all.

I lasted almost two more months at that job. When I quit, I gave two weeks' notice and worked every hour of it. On my very last day, one of the Kevins asked me why I hadn't just taken that last day for myself. I thought about it as I finished up my few projects and cleaned out my desk. I never did come up with any kind of answer.

Fury

In my room my stomach growls
But dinner is forgotten.
Hushed words turn into raised voices
Glass shatters,
Doors slam,
Walls rattle,
Silence.

I open my door.
The smell of alcohol lingers.
The imprint of a fist left in the wall;
Glass scattered across the floor.

My mother on her knees,
Streak of tears stained her cheeks,
Lips trembling,
Hands slowly cleaning up,
“It’s okay, baby.
Everything is fine.”

-Cecelia Rogriguez

A Deadly Sin

Awakened by a simple gaze,
deadly burning desires,
uncontrollable passions
light dwindles, her fire rekindles temperature rises,
a gentle electric touch spellbound together
tasting, and exploring,
She seeks you with not only her lips but Her soul,
A hearts craving And a minds simple wants,
A want so strong it can't be denied...
But yet it would be A mistake to call this love.

-Alisza Cremeans



What Could Have Been

by Amy Dossett

Nile

My destiny
is to stand by the
edge of the Nile River
and think heavily on what

destiny should be,
reflect on whether
or not destiny is an accurate
concept to describe the guidelines
by which I exist,

to underline the shadow
that extends past my youth
and into a forbidden desert
so that I don't have to
expend my past
to the
sun.

-Samantha Poe



Untitled

by Alyssa Devine



Phases of Love

by D'Angelo Abell

Bridges of Winter

the first thing I notice is the whiteness
the blinding brightness
blanketing the space in front of me
like a freshly laundered comforter
spread over a newly-made bed—
the cleanness of a fresh snow landscape

secondly, standing in sharp contrast
to the crystalized flakes
accumulated on the ground
and in the boughs overnight,
I see the dark, damp bark of the trees
The closer I look
the more the darkness distinguishes itself—
mottled flecks of deep grays, swirled into mossy greens.

other colors begin to come into focus:
the shimmering greens of the icicle'd fir trees,
the glassy blue and silver of a stream nearly iced over
the ironized ore making up the limestone footbridge base.

my mind imagines you in this landscape,
cheeks tinged rosy, nose reddening, hair dark against the pale skin of your face.

I blink, and you're gone.

up twelve steps of stone
to the planks lining the bridge's walkway
the sound of the snow under my feet changes
from the subtle crunch of snowflakes
being packed together by my heavy boots
growing more insistent as the gaps between boards
cause the sound to echo momentarily

as I move forward
the crunch combines with a wintery whistle
as the breeze rushes into the small gap between
my gray woolen hat and my ears.

the wind's whisper in my tingling ears
reminds me of the last time I saw you
—the day you were gone.
it was me who whispered then.

-Rachel Brunner



Last Year's Dead Things

by Amy Jakobsen

Memory

The space between us
is slim to none:
a lingering row of
flower petals stroking my pillow
with tiny whispers.

You are that painting that Monet
never painted,
sunset baked in jewels
that happen to be
half-born stars
at dusk.

When I fill my glass with tea,
I dream of you;
divine energy peppered
with passages of Chai,
stirring and brewing,
stretching
and bending
as I breathe.

Autumn leaves rustle
like ancient pages
as the wind
grows stronger;
the fireflies, prettier,
and the dreamcatchers
better at stuffing dark dreams
where they belong.

-Samantha Poe

Happened For A Reason

by Kallie Timmons

I am one of those people who ignorantly believes that bad things are never going to happen to me. I always think about my future and imagine the worst possible series of events that could take place, but those horrifying thoughts stay detached from my life. I watch the awful things that happen to others without ever considering that they could happen to me. Maybe it has something to do with the strength of my faith or the amount of common sense that I feel my parents have instilled in me, either way, I am generally a person with a lot to be grateful for. Significantly bad things do not usually come up in my life. That is why I so deeply believe that my car accident on the night of June 5th, 2016, the only really monumental thing I have had to face thus far, happened to me for a reason. I never thought I would be given the opportunity to teach others through the depth of my own experiences.

First of all, I should probably let you know that I was never a confident driver. I am very safe, but directions and operating a two-ton vehicle are definitely not my specialty. I did not get my license as soon as I turned sixteen primarily because I did not get my permit as soon as I was able to. As I am sure you have figured out by now, I was not all too excited to start driving. Also, I did not have the number of hours required yet, and my parents are generally rule-following individuals. I did end up getting my license on the first go round at the DMV and started off my driving career better than I could have ever expected. One thing I want to make very clear is that I was not a bad driver. I was just nervous to find my way around by myself. In fact, I would say that even now I use my handy dandy GPS to get where I am going a good 75% of the time. On June 5th around 5:00 I pulled into the driveway of my friend Alli's house, picking her up for our kickboxing class at the Sterling YMCA. As expected, I had no idea how to get from Morrison to Sterling, so into my GPS it went. Get ready folks, this is where it all went downhill.

I did not see the stop sign. Everyone, especially me, wanted there to be a better explanation than that. Some say I must have been speeding, which I was not. The judge definitely assumed I had been texting and driving. He made that very

clear during his lecture about the increase of traffic violations because of the use of cellphones by millennials. I was not doing that either, by the way. I just did not see the sign. The first thing I remember was the motorcycle heading into the intersection. I tried to slow down before realizing there was no way I would stop in time. The only option I had left was to speed up and get through the intersection before the motorcycle got there. It was too late. Next, there was only the roaring sound of metal on metal and screaming, so much screaming. The car stopped, even though I still swear I never pressed the brakes. All I could do was apologize. I remember glass and airbags and lots of numbness. Alli was not hurt and neither was I, but somebody else definitely was. Alli knew we had to call the police, but I was completely useless. She kept me moving, kept me breathing. She forced me to get out of the car, and when we finally climbed out there was only more screaming, except it was not coming from either of us.

Pastor James Hans from Rock Falls, IL, is still a name that I do not really have a face for. His face had disappeared amidst all the blood. He was laying on the ground in a pool of his own blood when it suddenly hit me that he had not been wearing a helmet. Probably the most vivid memory that has stuck with me is that of his scream. It was more pain than I had ever heard, and I do not wish that sound on anyone. Loud is not the right word, but the sound coming from his throat was physically piercing. He was going to die. I had killed him.

For some reason, maybe because I have such a good relationship with my dad, the thought of taking away another person's father hit me like a train. Someone asked for a shirt to use to stop the bleeding. I offered mine, but someone stopped me from taking it off. Someone carried me from the spot where I had collapsed to a safer place. Someone held me and insisted that I was not a terrible person despite my insistence that I was. A terrible person was the man who had been driving drunk and killed her son. Someone told me I was not going to go to jail. There were so many someones, unknown people I would still give anything to thank. By this time, people were everywhere. Unbeknownst to me, this was a fairly busy intersection. (I would later find out that I was not the first person who had failed to see this stop sign.) Alli was on the phone with the police and then our parents. We had been in an accident. Yes, we were okay. No, everyone else was not okay. Yes, the police were on their way. The screaming stopped. I was a killer. This was that thing so awful it had never even crossed my mind.

The police were at the scene in what felt like seconds, but all I can remember is how annoying they were, buzzing around like bees. They wanted things from me, information and answers, but I had nothing left to give them. What is your name? Is he dead? I am sorry, we cannot tell you that. How do you spell your name? What kind of question is that? That man is dying. Are your parents coming? They are on their way, but is he dead? Are you in pain? Are you kidding me? He was gone in the ambulance in the blink of an eye, but the blood stayed there even after they moved him. With the arrival of my parents came another round of apologies. I was just so sorry. After being checked out by the EMTs, Alli and I were both cleared to go home, but it was suggested that my

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parents take me to the hospital because of the level of shock I was experiencing. That car ride was filled with more shock because it was now my turn to ask the questions. This could not possibly be real life. Things like this did not happen to me. When we arrived at the emergency room, there was a man standing outside the entrance. Somehow he knew who I was, and it was not long until we found out his best friend had just been in a motorcycle accident. I had killed his best friend and taken away the husband of the woman who soon joined us. Except... Pastor James Hans was not dead. I collapsed. I was not a killer. He was in critical condition, but he was not going to die. There was no guarantee that he would ever talk or eat normally again because of the severely broken jaw, and his lung was punctured, and he had several other broken bones. But by the grace of God, he was alive. As my shock began to wear off, the doctors found several bruises from the seat belt and steering wheel on me. Even though I was warned about the pain I would feel in the upcoming days, I never felt anything worth mentioning. The pain only existed in the guilt I carried. The miracles just kept coming as I met the family, friends, and congregation members of the man whose life I had almost taken away. Over and over again, I was told that this was not my fault. They were wrong. This was an accident, but it was my fault. Samuel Hans was the biggest gift I could have ever asked for. I had caused nothing but pain to his father, and in return, he gave me nothing but forgiveness. Over the next few days, we received updates through text message. The surgeries kept racking up, and the guilt only got worse. With the guilt came anxiety. I could not close my eyes because the flashbacks were too vivid, and sleep became almost impossible. I had summer commitments that I had to continue with, but it did not feel like I deserved happiness. My family refused to allow ourselves to be happy when another family had been left with so much grief. To the rest of the world, my car accident was like a terrible storm. It came with strong winds and crackling lighting. It caused lots of destruction and left many scared or in awe of the violence, but then it was gone. It was not like that for me. However, I never stopped being thankful that we were all alive. All of the paramedics said that Alli should not have made it out in good condition. The motorcycle had quite literally gone through the passenger door of my car, and the hole it left just inches away from where Alli was sitting left me in disbelief. Pastor James Hans was healing, but he did not have an easy road in front of him. The fact that I got to immediately return to my healthy life while he went through operation after operation is a thought I will never be able to shake. Eventually, I went to court and paid the fine for my ticket. Our lawyer advised us to cease communication with the Hans family for the time being because there was no way to know what legal action they would be forced to take. That was the first time I became aware of the impact this accident could have on my family. It suddenly hit me that we could lose everything my parents had worked for their entire lives. From then on, all we could do was play the waiting game to see what insurance would cover.

As time went on, I decided the best option was to seek counseling.

My anxiety was taking over my life, and the panic attacks were not getting any better. Just riding in a car was hard, and I would often be hit with harsh memories that made it difficult to pay attention in class or focus for too long. I did not want to acknowledge my issues because they were nothing compared to the problems I had caused for another person. I finally decided I was not doing anyone any good by ignoring my anxiety. Admittedly, I had never previously considered the severity of such a condition. Just talking to a person with an objective point of view helped me so much. My counselor was the only reason I was ever able to start driving again. It did not come easily though. The first time I was able to drive three blocks from my house to the post office I remember just sitting in the parking lot with tears streaming down my face. I had the hardest time trusting myself to stop at stop signs, so for several months, I would not drive anywhere that I was unsure about the exact placement of stop signs. Even as driving became normal again, the waiting never got better. It felt like a nightmare that could never end. It was like that recurring dream where you are about to fall off a cliff, but you wake up before it ever happens. I was never able to wake up.

Finally, about a month ago, I woke up. Through a friend of a friend, my mom heard that Pastor James Hans was fully healed. Not only that, but the insurance company was able to cover the full cost of his medical bills. My car accident will stay with me forever, and no matter how strange it sounds, I am eternally grateful for it. Soon after I began seeing my counselor, she asked me how I was able to handle the severity of the situation with so much strength. In my opinion, I was not being strong, I was being thankful- thankful that this terrible thing had happened to me instead of someone else. I have an amazing support system at home, and I could not have gotten through this without them. I also took this as an opportunity to be an example for others. This accident was my chance to enlighten others to the dangers of driving. Maybe they will never listen to me, but I feel like it is my responsibility to try. I was one of those people that never imagined the weight of the world being put onto my shoulders, until one day a weight heavier than I had ever considered came crashing into my life. I am indescribably thankful that I overcame it.



Rey from Star Wars

by Abby Castillo

SHAME

Days past needing a shave

 Salt and pepper whiskers on newly gaunt cheeks

 Head bowed, chin tucked in a frayed coat collar

 Dirty ball cap brim pulled low, eyes downcast

 Keenly avoiding eye contact

The door bottom 'shushes' across the door mat

 Softly closing the door, keeping the latch quiet as it clicks in place

 Wiping wet boots and staying hunched in the entry

Bringing with clean sharp winter air, stained

 Stale cigarette smoke

 Grimy greasy needing washed clothing

 Bitter burnt cocaine, fading

Taste the bile rise

 Clutch the terry cloth used to wipe tears

 Hear silence surrounding a broken promise

"I messed up," he offers.

-Cindy Skyles-Hacker

A Sabled Silver

As my father gained his age
His hair did turn a sabled silver
Like as night does gain its stars
Did threads of sterling weft and wain
Between, among the strength of black
His hair like Hades, ebon curls
My eyes unquick did never catch
The last of blackness take its flight
Late in life, into his sixties,---
One midday's glance showed naught of black
All silver gray November noon
His youthful darkness sadly spent

-Tom Padilla



Water Under the Bridge

by Glenn Bodish

Untitled

To the man I've never forgiven,
You follow me down the dark streets of my mind,
You play with my thoughts and live in my dreams,
A ghost town replaces my once beating and vibrant heart
Shattered bits lodged in these dark Empty corridors between my ribs
Ripping and wrenching my soul
The wind howls through me like a raging storm,
But yet you can't see my wounds because they only bleed on the inside
Scars like velvet running through my entirety,
Do you gain pleasure from my immense pain?
Does making me feel worthless and weak make you stronger?
Do you feel richer?
Like a thief of the night,
You robbed me of my sense of safety and security...
You robbed me of myself.

-Alisza Cremeans

The Blinding Light

by Dena Johnson

My thumbs tirelessly race each other down the feed of my Facebook, both competing to be the first to reach the bottom of the page. As I observe their race, I see flashes of faces. They come and go through my screen at light-speed. I see streaks of orange as the United States President flies by my screen, spewing the latest political drama and finding another victim to point his flaming finger at. Cute pictures of my unidentifiable “friends” whiz by, but not without a blue thumb being sent with them. Suddenly, my shallow curiosity is awoken by a video that flows across my screen, and my thumb does not hesitate to click on it. I feel myself release a quiet sigh of relief, for the video is about two minutes long. This impeccably timed video is the perfect diversion to satisfy the end of a long car ride with Mom. I have nothing against her presence, but things happen at such a fast rate on the internet that I cannot afford to fall behind. In addition, there has been a lack of social interaction between us for almost the entire drive. Whenever she does talk to me, she always bombards me with questions about the modern drama-filled social life my friends and I associate with, or the rapidly approaching life decisions I need to be making. All of my answers are too excessive to explain, and I do not have the kind of time to go about doing it. Plus, I am not much of a communicator, which is due to both my personality and the important video in my hands. Upon the conclusion of my interior monologue, I press play and teleport to a world where two dangerously clever opponents go head-to-head in an incredibly humorous pun battle.

Second 1: I feel my eyeballs shoot a direct laser to the radiating blue light of my phone screen. Once my eyes are glued, four abstract walls shoot up from the car floor and surround me. An ominous fog gently settles in my brain. I am a character in some twisted game; a foreign force is controlling me. The word to be used for the first pun, which is “thirsty,” is given. An unexpected smile emerges from my face, and I experience an overwhelming feeling of instant happiness.

The Works

Second 5: the nameless face says, “Were you going to come over on Wednesday or ‘Thirsty’?” I snicker to myself, completely amused and filled with something that felt like joy. This light feeling does not feel right. The immaturity of this video seems too simple to be overcome by such bizarre emotion, but my attention is too deeply invested to reconsider my choice of entertainment. Who really cares, anyway?

Second 12: I hear a faint voice call my name, and I do not recognize it from the video. The voice is so distant and small that the sound barely registers in my brain. I hear it call again, and I realize it is Mom’s voice. What could she possibly want? I knew the possibilities of her newest question were endless, so I mentally answer some of them: Yes, Mom, I know I have to start college applications soon. Yes, Mom, I know you think I spend too much time with everyone else but you. Yes, Mom, I know you think my phone is some absurd addictive issue. I sigh out of irritation and try to untangle myself from the messy web I have found myself in. I attempt to remove my eyes from the hypnotizing light, but they are reluctant to budge. I try again, and my eyes begin to burn as if they were getting pulled towards a hot surface. Just when I think they are being fused to the hissing depths of the earth’s core, I yank myself back into reality.

Second 29: The walls instantly dive back into the floors of our car, and the fog slowly starts to disperse. “Yes?” I respond to the face of an impatient mother. Accompanying the expression of impatience is disappointment and irritation. Upon witnessing “the look,” I feel an intense pang of anger. “You know I have a problem with that thing,” Mom says as if my phone was a rodent. “Don’t you?” I feel the blood boil in my veins. The remaining fog grips my self-control; I know I am on the brink of eruption. “Yes, I am aware,” I hiss. Mom, mocking my tone, says, “Then why don’t you do something about it?” Her words cut at me like knives. She is pushing me into a corner and brutally attacking me. With an erratic impulse to fight back, I answer, “I don’t do anything about it because I don’t want to. This is my life, and I should be able to act just like any other normal teenager and look at my phone every once in awhile.” I see the frustration and sorrow wash ashore in Mom’s eyes like a coming tide. I hear the vast ocean in her eyes sing a crying song. The ocean calls out to me, but I look away.

Second 73: As I turn my head, my eyes catch a glimpse of the light from my phone screen. A sudden unearthly force pulls at my eyes and persuades me to fall back under its power. The force jerks my eyes to a fixed position on my phone, and I seep back into the tangled web of sorcery. The abstract walls shoot up from the floors of our car and surround me. With sly greetings, the ominous fog nests itself back in my brain. The two men in the video move on to their next word: “garrulous.” I hear a distant sound once again. It is muffled by the thick walls and fog containing me. The noise is going on longer than the first time, which makes me curious. However, the brightness of my phone is too mesmerising to look away from. I focus my attention on the man who says, “I wanna go to the zoo and see the ‘garrilas.’” All of the endorphins in my brain are instantly energized by the pun. The release of happiness and laughter from

within me is so excessive that it almost seems superficial. What am I missing?

Second 97: My eyes begin to tire from staring into such a blinding light. My neck and back start to twist and tighten, which radiates pain all the way down my spine. I feel old. What has this blinding blue light done to me? My mind rigorously traces through the video to find the point where I went wrong. This is not right. I know it. These walls are cold, and this hindering fog is tyrannical. These people I am watching have no idea who I am. They do not love me. They do not depend on me. They do not share priceless memories with me. I laugh with them, but they do not laugh with me. They care about their viewers, but not who those viewers are. It angers me to realize how satisfied these nameless faces on this tiny screen make me. I release the air I have been holding for what seems to have been minutes. Yes, it is true: I am addicted to my phone. I am addicted to the light of my screen like an expressionless bug to a light source. I am addicted to the shallow entertainment inside my tiny phone. I am addicted, and I have no idea how to get out. I lament the fact that I let such a tiny box create such a huge barrier between and the vast world surrounding me. It dawns on me that I have sealed myself from real people who love me with no boundaries but the ones I put in front of them. I hear the distant sounds of my mother again, but they echo with sorrow.

Second 119: I squirm and twist in attempts to free myself from this phone's sinister control, but I am stuck. I shake the phone and pull it away from my face. I finally locate the power button and strike it with a frantic thumb. The walls obliterate. The fog dissipates. I look up with unsteady hands and call, "Mom?" My heart drops. All I can see is darkness, and she is gone.



Untitled

by Eden Buyno

A Mystic's Vision

When I gaze through quartz,
I see ethereal waves of
black and white,

celebrated
through the art of
children drawing their
visions on asphalt with chalk.

When I gaze through the spirits
of Bohemian-like crystal children,
I see lilac dreams and rainbow hopes,

shamans stargazing
by a lake dipped beneath the
shimmering moon spices
as midnight draws her last breath.

When I gaze through sidewalk cracks,
I see unspoken melodies
waiting to be whispered,

drips of water falling gracefully
off of tired lips before they speak
of winter mornings and the fingerprint
nature of snowflakes.

When I gaze through the raindrops
waiting to hit the ground as song,
I see unicorns in a child's sleep,

pillow tears marked by
the sound of a mystic's lyre
becoming the reason to ascend
into the worlds beyond.

-Samantha Poe



*Icelandic Horse near North
Fjords Iceland*

by Val Sleger

Radio Silence

by Arabella Chamberlain

It seems archaic to think of a girl idly waiting by the phone for a love interest to call, yet here I am, heart skipping a beat every time my phone buzzes. I wait like a schoolgirl, afraid to make the first move. It's like a game of chicken, who would break the silence first? I struggle to articulate my thoughts, so I keep telling myself to just let you start the conversation. But internally, I'm screaming. My mind races wondering if I'm simply letting you slip through my fingers.

I keep waiting for the moment my allure fades, when you look at me, and are no longer enamored by the fascinating shell I hide in. My mask removed, and left naked is a girl, hurt and confused, wondering if she'll ever be able to put the pieces back together again. I'm scared. Afraid that the moment I fall is the moment you'll run. We sway in a lilting dance, tiptoeing around my feelings and I'm stuck in limerence, feeling my affection is unrequited.

My inner romantic worries whether the "one" exists at times like these. Is it all just fantasy spun to us as children to perpetuate the idea of an unattainable "happily ever after"? Yet I'm falling slowly, slipping into your abyss that I don't know that I'll be able to get out of. Your charm draws me in, and your flaws keep me hooked. I'm falling for the lonely astronaut you play so well. I shudder at your touch and ache for your smile.

The most unnerving thing about you is the moment when I catch you looking at me with those eyes, like black holes, sucking me in. You look me up and down like I'm some exotic creature you don't quite understand and I wonder if there will come a time when you no longer look at me like that. Is it all my imagination?

I long to see you again, but I'm scared of what I might do. I sleepwalk above the clouds, straining to touch the stars, oblivious to the heights below, and waiting for the moment I fall. I tell myself I'm okay with that, but I can't lie to myself and say I don't want more. But you're bad for me. You're really bad for me. I eagerly wait by the phone, anticipating our next conversation, but you have to break the silence. The communications delay is getting too long and all I hear is radio silence.

Blue

It's the eyes that gaze into yours.
It's the sky, a sheer curtain overhead while you laugh and smile,
their weight up against you.

It's the soft cotton pillow case gripped close to hide your face.
It's the pain in your chest after a night of yelling and you have been left alone.

It's the eyes again as they beg forgiveness,
Pleading for you to never let go.
It's the soft tone of the apology that you accept more times than you care to count.

It's their color.
The color that beacons you,
like the gentle moth to the misleading light.
It's the veins you trace on their pale skin while you drift asleep.

It's their color.
The color of their laugh,
The color of their eyes,
The color of the kisses you share,
The color of their hellos,
The color of their goodbyes,
The color of their love for you.

It's their color,
Not yours.

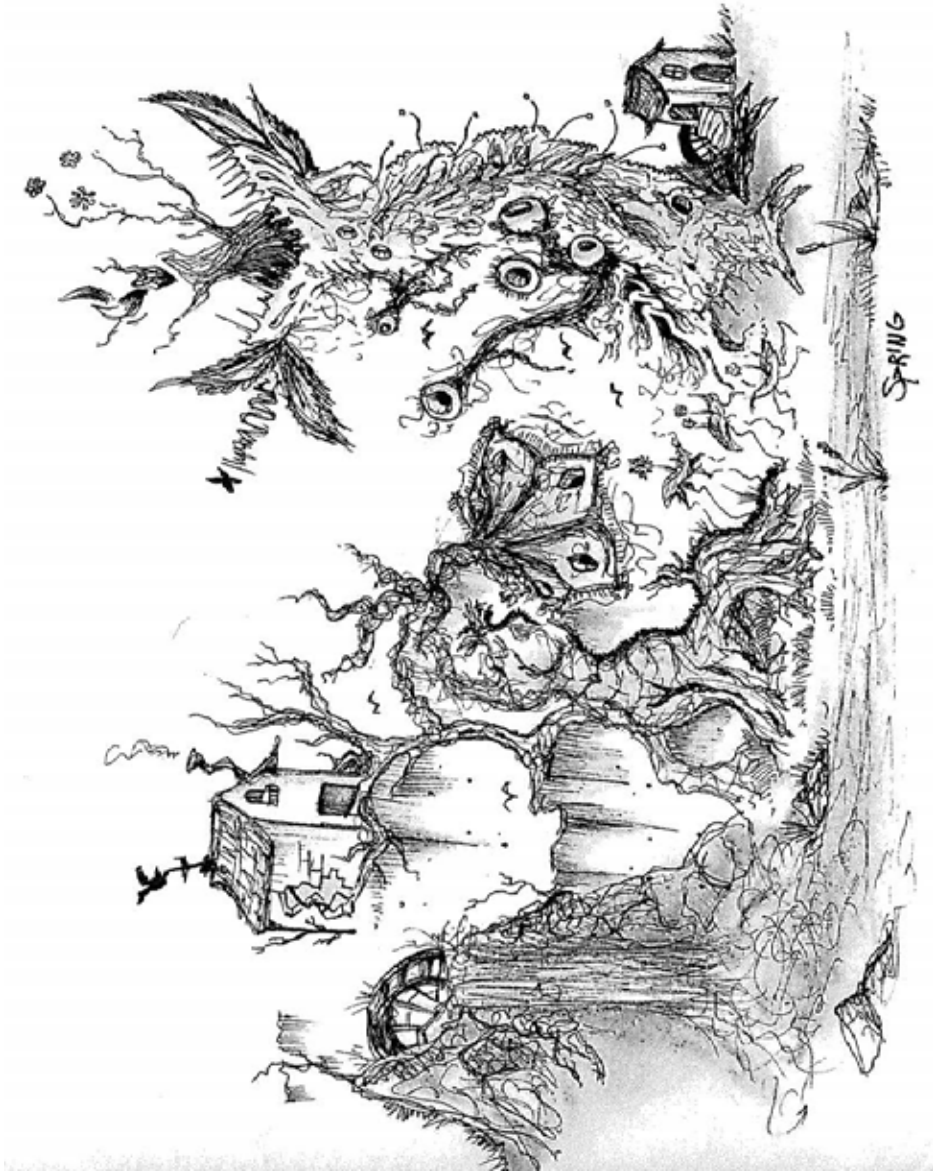
It's their color,
The only thing they left behind.
It's the color of the door that they close behind them for the last time.
It's the color you are left with deep in your heart.
It's all that's left.

-Emmaline Linton



Telepathic Synchronicity

by Samantha Poe



Untitled

by Eden Buyno

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