PRISM

Prism 2011

A Literary Magazine
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A Literary Magazine

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*denotes contest winner
A SERIES OF PERFECT MOMENTS

Two
Monica Chhay

Toffer Surovec

Their hugs would last for more than a breath. They each used both their arms and would let go slowly, slightly scratching the other’s back, and he would sometimes kiss her on the cheek. They were falling in love. It would be nice if it were simple. Love sometimes is, but with her it was complicated. She was beginning to feel torn. There was the guy she would hug, more hold than hug, for so long her hoodie would steal his scent. Then there was the guy she would kiss; the one she’d been with for a while. The one she thought for so long was the one.

She felt horrible and couldn’t do the easy thing because there was no easy thing to be done. She couldn’t just leave Mitchell and she couldn’t stop her feelings for Michael even though she tried. He knew she tried and would compliment her more, make her feel special. Play with her hair the way she liked, the way Mitchell never could. She shouldn’t let him do things like that, but he just did them. He wanted her and made her feel like he needed her. Part of her hated him for making things complicated. She had no one to confide in. She’d been with Mitch for so long all their friends blended together and she had no one to herself, no one but Mikey. Maybe it was because he was new, and that meant that it would go away. She liked the feeling, though, and wished that Mitchell would make her feel like that again. If he could just still make her feel special, everything would be okay. Things would be simple.

Mikey was cute and could be the sweetest. He smelled good and maybe that’s why she hung onto him for so long. Mitchell smelled good too, but Mikey smelled like a man while Mitch still smelled like the boy from high school. One year, she just noticed him in the halls; he liked her forever before that and everything was perfect. They never fought. She wanted to fight with him though. He wouldn’t take a side that wasn’t hers. Mike would fight with her; he’d disagree and tell her why she was wrong. He could be an asshole, but at least he had an opinion. It was her fault, too; she wouldn’t fight with Mitch either. He was just so sensitive and one disagreement would ruin the entire time they were together. A disagreement with Michael would widen his brown eyes and heighten his voice a little bit. It would make him cuter. It would make the time together better. It was okay that she didn’t agree with everything he said, as long as she had a good reason to. Mikey believed everyone should be passionate about the things they believe in. That was such a change to Mitch’s laid-backness.

Why couldn’t Mike just kiss her and make this simple? Then she could tell Mitch what happened and he would get mad, show some emotion, maybe make her feel special again or break up with her and she could be with Mikey. She gave him plenty of chances. He just wouldn’t take them. He would just smile at her with his smirk and ask her if she was still being followed around by her little dog. He did follow her around like a little dog. Mikey would ask how she could respect him and she didn’t know anymore.

She went to Mikey’s place without telling anyone; it wasn’t the first time but she felt guilty about doing it so much. Three
times now. He answered the door with that smirk and she could feel herself melt a little, even though it was freezing and she was wearing those shorts he liked. She hugged him and he kissed her on the cheek. He smelled like a shower and she thought about how nice it would have been to be in there with him.

"Hey legs, you should have worn pants; it’s cold."

She was glad he noticed and just gave him a shoulder shrug to explain why.

"Here let me help."

He grabbed the throw from the couch, and when she sat down, he rubbed her legs warm with it. It felt nice. Nicer when he got to her thighs. She gave him another chance to kiss her but he didn’t take it.

"Want a cup of coffee to warm you up? I’m having one."

"No, but thank you."

"Hot cocoa then?"

"Yes! please."

"Marshmallows?"

"Yes, melted in and then more added on top please!" She made sure she said this extra cute so she would get what she wanted.

"Made with milk so I can’t use my fancy-single-cup-coffee-machine-thingy, right?"

"If it’s not too much trouble..." She said it sadly to get what she wanted.

"You’re never a problem love."

She pretended that he didn’t call every girl that. Soon the coffee and the cocoa were done. He even put whipped cream on top of it with a cinnamon stick to stir it up. She held hers with both hands close to her body to warm her. He took a sip of his coffee and put it on the end table. He started to play with her hair, but the hair close to her neck, was this his move? She leaned into him a bit, but then thought of Mitchell and pulled back a little. Mikey kissed her anyway. His mouth was warm from the coffee like his hand on her thigh. This was wrong, and at first she didn’t kiss back, but after he bit her lip, she couldn’t help it. They did what lovers do, and his mouth felt hot all over her body. She felt bad about it in a good and bad way. Two hours later she left his house spent and sore.

She had dinner tonight with Mitchell and the families. She would tell him tomorrow. This dinner was special because it was to celebrate the end of final exams. She and Mitchell were strangely silent at dinner-- did he know? Her dad kept smiling at her and her mom looked teary eyed. Maybe it was because this place was a little more fancy than usual.

Then it hit her. This couldn’t be happening.

Mitchell looked her in the eyes, took a deep breath and a knee, "Chloe, your friendship, your love, you have made me live just as much as breathing has. You’ve made these years with you short. A series of perfect moments that could never last long enough. Growing old with you will take no time. Please, will you marry me?"

"Yes."

She felt sick, she felt special; she felt so many things. She couldn’t believe she said yes, but then what else could she do? Mitch did nothing wrong. The next day she went to tell Michael. She showed him the ring and told him she said yes. He slipped it off her finger, put it on his kitchen’s bar and kissed her hard, with passion and with satisfaction. She let it happen again. Then again.

She was living two lives and hating herself for liking it so much. She should feel worse though. She was the one calling Mikey now. It was like he was losing interest, like she was just becoming a side piece. Mikey told her he was afraid to text or call her because she was around Mitch so much more now while planning everything and she believed him. She couldn’t let go of him though, and to spend more time with him she halfway moved in. She kept her shampoo and body wash there so he could wash the scent of him and sex off her. He washed her slow, rinsing then kissing every bit of her. She’d eventually have to kick him out of the shower and wash the sex off herself.

Somewhere she stopped caring about Mitchell, and was mad at him for not figuring her out. How could she stop everything that was in motion? She didn’t want to be a bad person; she didn’t want to ruin Mitch so she didn’t. She said “I do” and went months without Michael, almost a year. She went over one day out of weakness and found her stuff still in the shower. She didn’t know that her stuff spent much of the last year under the bathroom sink while other girls moved halfway in and most of them all the way out. It was easy for Mike to find someone to love and that crushed her. She hated herself for going back to Mike and it not being the love story she wanted, not the scene to justify her cheating. She felt horrible for all the things she’s done to Mitchell. She had to end this and she did it slowly. Seeing him less and less till one day she didn’t need him anymore, and she loved Mitchell as much as she could. He gave her a child and provided for them both. She respected him again. Their marriage was a series of perfect moments, one more baby and then grandkids, travel, and old age. He died without ever knowing about Mike. He died thinking he had the perfect wife and truly found what everyone searches for, and what all the books and songs are about: true, everlasting, unwavering love. She died a better woman because of Michael, surrounded by her children and grandchildren. She died happy, still in love with Mitch, not torn and not one thought about Mikey.

"Made with milk so I can’t use my fancy-single-cup-coffee-machine-thingy, right?"

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Broken Keys
Adriana Garcia

Matters of the Heart
Lizbeth DeLeon

They always end the same
These matters of the heart.
Filling my head up with games
Just to tear me apart.

Well, I’m turning the tables,
Taking hold of the wheel.
No longer disabled
I’ll be cold as steel.

My mission no longer
Requires a prince charming,
But a tonic much stronger
For hearts that need harming

I’ll draw a thick line
Between love and fun,
And when he feels that he’s mine,
I’ll turn and run.

Let Go
Lizbeth DeLeon

My head is spinning
I have no control
Nausea is setting in
And finally taking a toll

Deep inside I feel the rumble
And I can’t find the way out
I want to run from everything
But I’m glued to the ground

I try to ignore the shackles
That bear the name “responsibility”
They wear on my gypsy soul
And leave me without tranquility

I feel their hands molding me
Like a cookie-cutter set
They’ve figured out my future
And I can’t even see tomorrow, yet

I must take the upper hand
Lead the dance I call my life
I refuse to become
Another Stepford wife
"My little one kept me up all night"
Was no way to justify her lack of enthusiasm.
The congregation had all been there before
And wished she would not preach
So early in the morning.
Her sermon offered no revelation,
Only reassurance of their own dreadful state.

It was break time.

Making her way towards the patio,
A minute holster of recycled conversations
And cigarette ash stuck in between
Bookworms and lost ants in constant motion,
The inescapable duties of the mother, daughter, friend
And student followed her.
No matter how hard she tried there is no escaping now.

The emaciated worm-less early bird
Fidgeted frantically while digging into her purse.
Relief overcame her
As she pulled out her box of Virginia Slims.
She took a drag
And at that very moment life seemed easy...

But it was hardly a break.

She may have been resting her feet,
But her mind was still dragging.

"My baby is sick and I’m stuck here”
She let out.
"You know, I asked him to do one thing for us.
Just one.
And he couldn’t do it.”

Now it was the choir’s turn to chime in.
They only sing hymns of blame,
And rightfully so.
They too have been wronged, and
He, whomever he was,
Should be held accountable.

Preacher-woman didn’t need to hear it,
But it was a nice feeling
To be told the world wasn’t right
For shoving all of its weight onto her.

They all exhale.
Then it’s back to beauty school.

No one can blame them
For wanting to make their world
A beautiful place.
However, one can’t help but cringe
At the innate ugliness
They all failed to conceal.
One
The End (Horseshoes and hand-grenades).

My heart has been a point of contention for me, and for reasons beyond its penchant of reminding me of its weakness that would offer me nothing other than a guaranteed short life. The burden was then placed on me to create a remarkable life on a much shorter timetable than most. In these last breaths of mine, I am overcome by a sense of utter failure and despair in regard to this matter, but then I realize my memory will not be the one that sustains, and I wonder how my life appears to those on the outside of the bright light.

Friends like family will be beheld with the responsibility of manipulating my wasted time into a fond memory worth being judged by the masses.

I once had a friend who would pray before every Nine Inch Nails concert that Trent would die on stage after performing the encore. I often wondered if he would kill himself soon after in an attempt to somehow connect to Trent and be forever linked to him in the thoughts of his friends. My first comparison always goes to Kirk and his fans that felt a connection to him through heroin. I’m jealous of artists who can garner dedication that knows no boundary and never questioned my friend on his ritual.

My body explodes with fire and voices erupt around me and I feel my heart jump back into the race and I am disappointed. I once read that the body releases endorphins as it enters the final stages of death and I was quite looking forward to that. I also read that those who are destined to die despite efforts to the contrary by good-natured people are aware of it. My heart has been a point of contention for my health since birth and I read that when I was seven and had been scared shitless of this moment ever since. But twenty years later, robbed of the joy to openly complain of the generation I’m not influencing, I can now attest to that passage being truthful. I may hang on for a few minutes more-long enough to hear some woeful goodbyes and hopefully to rest my eyes on Angela Marie one last time, but I will die here before long and while I won’t succumb to the urge to pray for my vast extension of past sins, I will pray that my brain releases those f-ing endorphins. I am in such great pain.

Two
One last song before the end.

“Good night, Lake Worth!” I scream in the microphone and I shoot Angela Marie a quick smile and she rolls her eyes. There’s no discontent; it’s just our game onstage. I shoot quick smiles to her, pat Rick on his head in tune with his drumming, and pretend to f__g Sara. I’m dating Angela Marie and Sara’s lesbian, so it’s funnier than it sounds. “We are ‘Not One Creative Bone’ and this is our last song. Thank you for coming out…you could be anywhere but you chose to be here.” If Angela Marie rolls her eyes at that one, it means contention.

Rick taps out the tempo and the girls follow suit and two minutes in I begin belting out the vocals.

Angela Marie doesn’t like to finish with this song because she’s aware of the deeper regard I hold for it, and after a two-hour set and my heart fluttering faster than it should be, she knows the hidden potential this song can have on my health. I call her a nutjob as I walk off the stage after every performance of it and she just shakes her head and I can see the tears forming up in her eyes. One day I’ll stop performing it for her.

Being a lonesome song in four verses, each invoking, in turn, the image of lovers in dark places of the relationship who are reaching their pinnacle of desire and begin the downward spiral which serves as the death rattle for both love and the song as the music thumps once, twice more before fading out and leaving me with it a piece of your soul, for it cannot die of natural causes or by accident—love can only be murdered and the murderers forfeit, with it a piece of your soul, for it cannot die. It’s a lie I tell them instead. Love can die, but it takes passion.

pounds faster and faster, ignoring the contrary tempo fueling its passion.

friends. ‘It was cute the first time’, she’s fond of saying, ‘but now I need you to say I love you.’ I choke back the ‘ditto’ every time the conversation rears up out of fear of the repercussions, and I add another item to my ‘to do for Angela Marie’ list.

Sara saunters over and cocks an eyebrow at me, effectively telling me she’s been playing for two plus hours and she’s beginning to lose feeling in various extremities of her body, and she desperately needs a drink—which I will be buying. My heart has calmed, but it’s still beating with more purpose than needed to sustain me and I look towards Angela Marie and smile before lurching into the fourth and final verse.

The burial verse slows down the music considerably as it sinks into the slough and relies upon me to rescue it from dying alongside the former love which we are gathered here today to pay tribute to.

My voice booms over the muddling sounds that surround me and I preach to the congregation waddling through the pit, seeking refuge in my words, praying I pass down verdict that love once held cannot die. It’s a lie I tell them instead. Love can die, but it takes with it a piece of your soul, for it cannot die of natural causes or by accident—love can only be murdered and the murderers forfeit, each, a piece of their soul for every love that dies. The pit surges forward and I lean low, and we are inches from one another and I can feel their collective breath feeding my desire as my heart pounds faster and faster, ignoring the contrary tempo fueling its passion.

Ignoring my weakness, I stand up, shut my eyes, and stretch back as far as my spine will allow and let loose with a scream which serves as the death rattle for both love and the song as the music thumps once, twice more before fading out and leaving me exposed and alone in the spotlight. My heart beating so fast and loud that it has canceled out all other noise and I suddenly feel as though I am alone on the stage. The planet.

I open my eyes and see blackness. My head is filled with the sound emitting from my constantly beating heart and I collapse and feel, for the last time, my head against the wooden stage.
Three
The End (Chairs on the table).

My back is sore and cold and I know I’m back momentarily. I can feel that my eyes are open, but it’s as if someone else is manning the light switch which controls them and they flicker on and off, on and off, on and off.

I am able to make out words and voices, although my sight cannot focus properly and I hear two strangers trying to will my body back into good graces with strong words and good intentions and behind that, and more importantly, the sobbing of my friends. Everything else is silence.

“We have a pulse” says the male stranger. “It’s weak, but better than nothing. Megs?”

“I’m on it, Gordon,” Megs responds. “We need to get him outta here asap before his ticker goes again. Kids in a shit-ton of trouble right now.”

On and off, on and off, on and off. It slows its tempo and I can see sharp edges upon the shapes as a blur of white framed by dirty yellow leans over me and a thin red smile spreads across her face. Angela Marie puts her hand on my face and leans in, but Meg’s voice distracts her and she pulls back.

Megs: “Ma’am, we’re going to need you to step back while we load him up. If he makes it, you can say your goodbyes at the ER.”

I know Megs means wells and understands the truth in what she’s saying, but her intentions are a less than adequate ally in comparison to the raging inferno that resides inside of Angela Marie. “You need me to what, bitch?” Angela Marie explodes over my body. I can see her ghost-like figure hovering above me and can imagine the look of complete disgust and hate Megs is on the receiving end of. It’s a look I had grown to love. In a more manageable situation, Angela Marie would have dropped a more punishing word than bitch and then given Megs detailed instructions in how she could violate herself with any inanimate object she may have been near.

Angela Marie’s breathing becomes labored and her grip upon my hand tightens in concert. I wish I could feel it more than I can. “He will die before you make the ER, Megs” Angela Marie says instead, as her grip increases again, and I think I can feel the warmth of her hands. “And I will say what I have to now. Come at me again like that and Gordon will be taking two corpses in.”

There’s my Angela Marie.

On….off….on….off. My focus is narrowing with the extended delay and I can begin to make out the first hint of features in Angela Marie’s face. Her hazel eyes blur with her makeup, giving her an angelic form and I focus in on her slender red lips. She leans in close and kisses me, but I have to imagine the taste and smell and feel of her lips and her hair as it brushes against my face. The smoke on her breath used to infuriate me.

On…

Off…

On…

Off…

For an instant my vision becomes clear and I see Angela Marie in all her beauty as she gazes down on me and her tears gently fall onto my face. I find my voice for the last time and say: “I love you.”

I see her gasp and feel her hold on my hand tighten further as she covers her mouth with the other one, and, for a second, I think I see her choke back a laugh at my words. It’s not at my words, but rather at her first thought. Words she whispers to me as she presses her face against mine: “I know.”

On…

Off.

*Creative Writing Honors Project, Fall 2010

Weeble  Selena Orta
JOHN
Jesus Villegas

There is a building. Inside the building is an office. The office holds many cubicles. In one of the cubicles, lies John. Every day, John works inside a small cubicle. He files papers away. John is good at filing.

For forty-five years, John has been filing away in his cubicle. For 23 hours straight, John files away all the paper given to him. Nothing gets in the way of John’s filing. Sleep doesn’t stop John. Hunger doesn’t stop John, either. Not even John’s health can get in the way of John’s filing. John is very good at filing.

John is dead. John took a one hour nap and never woke up. His skin is deteriorating. His stench gets stronger. His whole body is decaying. John doesn’t know he is dead. He is too busy filing papers. John is really good at filing.
Tonight, she was going to do something she really wished she did not have to do—and something she had desperately wished she had done for a very long time. She sat, mentally preparing for this act, this thing she must do. The air was cool, with just a small bite of frost. It was going to be a cold night. She must remember to dress warmly on her way out. But for now, she must get dressed not for escape, but for seduction. She went to Marisah, asking the maternal woman for assistance. She plastered the biggest fake smile she could manage and her face on Marisah’s benefit. She could not stand to think what the motherly woman would do or say if she knew what Aikanaro was planning.

“Marisah…” said Aikanaro a little hesitantly, “I must go to Storin’s chambers tonight—my rituals are finished. I have accepted—even embraced—my fate and I would like to look the part. You know,” Aikanaro feigned awkwardness, “like a seductress.” Aikanaro was lying through her teeth, so much so that it was almost painful, but Marisah smiled a little, and led her into a small room to help her dress. At the end of the whole ordeal of pulling and coloring and brushing and pinning and fastening, she was ready. Her face was done beautifully, her lips rouged and her cheeks flushed. Her silvery skin shone a bit brighter in the starlight, but it was her attire that concealed her breasts, in addition to pushing them up to her chin. Her waist was cinched to nearly nothing, and her hips seemed wider than usual. She could barely breathe thanks to Marisah’s merciless tugging, but she knew Storin would like that—he loved to watch her suffer. Her lower half was barely covered by skimpy undergarments that failed to conceal much of anything. “That’s the point dear,” said Marisah merrily when Aikanaro pointed it out. Stockings clung to her legs, which were toned with running after game at home and now running about the grounds. Garters connected her stockings to her corset, and even her slippers seemed to be revealing. She looked like a proper seductress. When Marisah wasn’t looking, Aikanaro quickly slipped the knife into the back laces of her corset, where it would be hidden from view and away from her own skin. She was ready.

“There you are, darling,” cooed Marisah, wrapping her in a silky robe, so she was decent enough to be escorted down the hallway to Storin’s room. At the door, Marisah smoothed Aikanaro’s hair a few times, gave her a peck on the cheek, and wished her a loving “good night” before hurrying down the hall. Aikanaro feigned awkwardness, “like a seductress.” Aikanaro was going to be a cold night. She must remember to dress warmly on her way out. But for now, she must get dressed not for escape, but for seduction. She went to Marisah, asking the maternal woman for assistance. She plastered the biggest fake smile she could manage and her face on Marisah’s benefit. She could not stand to think what the motherly woman would do or say if she knew what Aikanaro was planning.

She nervously untied the garment, worried she might give away her intentions. Storin’s eyes lit up at the sight of her in the restrictive corset, the quick shallow breaths it made her take, and he let out a low growl. “You look lovely,” he growled out, and set his hands on her hips. “You look like you hurt,” he muttered as he ripped the garters holding her stockings, and removed everything from her lower half. Aikanaro knew he would not bother to remove the biggest object of her discomfort. She had been counting on it. His fingers dug into her hips, bruising, and he lifted her with a grunt and slammed her down on his lap. A scream of pain erupted from her lips as he forced himself into her unwilling body and thrust madly. He was so focused on his own pleasures that he did not notice Aikanaro’s hands whip around to her back. Storin began to pant loudly and mutter random words incoherently. His eyes rolled back in his head, and Aikanaro saw her chance.

She quickly pulled the knife out of the laces of her corset, cutting a few open, allowing her to breathe in sharply as she sank the four-inch blade into Storin’s neck and slashed. He let out a guttural choking sound as he tried to scream in pain, as he made her do only moments before. His mouth worked uselessly, like a fish out of water. His eyes wide with panic as blood bloomed from his neck onto Aikanaro’s hands and the luxurious sheets. Aikanaro let out a soft cackle as she lowered her lips to Storin’s ear.

“Remember when you had a knife to my skin? Remember what you asked me?” She slammed the knife with brute force into his chest, using both hands, and leaned in close so she could feel Storin’s life leave him, “Doesn’t it hurt so good?”

Storin only gazed at her, confused and angry. “Have fun in the Hells,” chirped Aikanaro happily, and Storin lived only long enough to see Aikanaro stealing from his desk drawers before everything sank into a cold, wretched blackness.
I’m looking high and low
For that which is more elusive
Than Big Foot or the Loch Ness.
Truth is a club much too exclusive
It doesn’t matter who you know;
You’re gonna be stuck cold outside
In a line miles away from the door
Waiting where everyone about lies.

We make falsehoods seem so necessary
As if lies are what make the world turn;
Its logic that makes my head spin;
Vertigo makes the truth harder to discern.

If all you have ever known of people
Is their half truths and false diction,
Then you haven’t really ever known anyone
But characters in their work of fiction.

The only thing that’s real in their creation
Is the pain it will almost always cause,
Pain that reaches your very soul
Made worse when others give their applause.
So I search from top to bottom shelf
In this library of fables and tall tales
Looking for even a paragraph of truth.
I’m losing hope that I can ever prevail.
Life of Lies
Victoria Salinas

Tangled in the lies.
See the huge old web.
See the maze getting bigger
Lies and lies all I see.

Searching for the hole
Need an escape.
Getting into this
Was a big mistake.

Lying never helps,
But stopping never occurred.
This web of lies
Is far from truth.

Dust this mess away.
Clean all the troubles gone.
Lies never help
Especially when they’re here stay.

Tangled up to the neck.
So deep there is no way.
Freedom of truth
May be the only way.

No More Time
Orelia Lozano

Weak knees, gray hair,
And crow’s feet. The outcome of the
Years.

Things left undone, unspoken goodbyes,
And innumerable regrets. Things we don’t
Realize till we’re about to die.

False Good & True Evil
Abrar Alkandari

I raise my hands to pray
but you state I raise them with the intent to slay
we are the blind
because we accredit a sharp sword is duller then a sharp mind
I am the Unholy while you hold all Glory
I fast day by day
from food I stay away
You’re kind enough to feed me...with bullets and bombs
and help us stay away...from our moms
you insist that I’m the terrorist
They ask me, “Why do women wear the veil?”
“...And cover themselves from the eyes of most males?”
Accused of being oppressed
because I don’t reveal my chest
I’m suppressed as you are blessed
We cherish and highly respect marriage
but this idea you disparage
we endeavor life with chastity
yet you shout, “Blasphemy!”
Preaching to me, “to date is great.”

Even though it tends to end with hate
and increased divorce rates
We are tart while you are America’s sweetheart
the better of two good is all we expect
while the lesser of two evil is what you accept
we seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave
as we learn & follow footsteps of the most Brave
while the others lament through life by rants and rave
due to being modern technology’s slave
But, of course, you are the Elite while we are beneath your Feet
Tetris Cube

Ayut Sainju
My Grandmother’s Daring Escape

Rene Castillo
Winner: Essay

How life affects you not only comes from a person’s own roots, it can also come from an awe-inspiring tale of an elder family member to truly help a person see how he is placed in this world. For me, it was my grandmother, Esther Lyubov Zarya, who showed me what bravery and dedication truly is, how to show honor upon my family, and to never give up on my dreams because anything is possible if I put my mind to it.

My grandmother was born in 1932 in Moscow, Russia when it was still the Soviet Union. When my grandma was 15 years old, her parents wanted to escape the Soviet Union for a better life without the fear of communism, and the one place on Earth where that was possible was the United States. She and her family knew the risks, but they were willing to risk it all to live a better life, so my grandma, her two sisters, and one brother, and her parents left at nightfall to the Finnish border. During that time, the Soviet Army would check house by house to make sure everyone is at home when it is curfew time. When they inspected my grandmother’s home, however, they realized that they had left and decided to hunt down my grandmother and her family. They had no idea that they were being chased until they reached the town of Tver’ which is north of Moscow. They were staying at an Inn when my grandma’s brother Ivan noticed that on the bulletin board of the inn there was a wanted poster for my grandma’s entire family! Ivan warned the family about the dangers of this and that it wasn’t a good idea to stay at the inn since the secret police was out inspecting the residents of the inn; so instead, they decided to keep on traveling on to the Finnish border.

Leaving Tver’ was not an easy task for them. It was about midnight and they were short on food and water; hunger settled into them like a snake slithering into its skin, and to make matters worse, a horrible blizzard blanketed the land in white. It was difficult to move in the raging blizzard, since it not only limited their vision, but dropped the temperature to a freezing 40 below! The environment literally became frozen solid. This made their water supply freeze, making it hard for them to stay hydrated, and the winter madness started to settle in mentally. God must have been watching them that night because they found a cave not too far ahead and stayed inside the cave until the morning sun came.

Once morning came, they ventured forth to the town of Novgorod. Concerned not with the wanted posters, the family decided to stay in the town to rest and eat. When the family was about to leave the town, my grandma’s parents wanted her to go to the grocery store to get a few supplies, but as she exited the grocery store, her parents and siblings were caught and arrested by the Soviet Army! My grandmother, shocked with fear and concern, began to run towards them, but her father saw her and gave her a look that said “Stay! Do NOT come to us.” My grandma stilled; she didn’t know what to do but to watch to see what would happen. The general who caught them yelled out loud, “THIS is what happens when you try to escape our Mother Russia! Due to this family’s treason, all of them shall be sentenced to death!” My grandmother gasped in shock and tears of sorrow fell down her cheeks like the Niagara Falls of Canada. My grandma had a flashback when they were still at home right before they had left to the Finnish border and her mother said to her, “If anything were to happen to us, carry on without us Esther. I don’t want you to be condemned with our fate. I want you to have a better life instead of living in this hell hole.” She took out 500 Russian dollars and gave it to my grandma, “Please don’t be reckless. . .I love you with all of my heart.” My grandma snapped back into the present and ran off into the distance away from the commotion. She stopped though and turned back toward her family. . .this is the last time she’ll ever see her family. She looked at them with tears in her eyes while the army took them away. She turned back around, and with money and supplies, she traveled to the Finnish border alone.

When my grandma made it to Helsinki, Finland, she took a plane all the way to Venice, Italy, then Madrid, Spain, then Quebec, Canada and finally to the United States. When my grandma came to the United States, she was alone in a whole new part of the world; she didn’t know what to do. She was only 15 years old with no family, no knowledge of the country and didn’t even know a single word in English. She struggled for years until finally, when she turned 20 years old, she knew how to speak English and understood how the United States worked.

When my parents became pregnant with me, they traveled back to Novgorod Russia to see whatever happened to my grandma’s family. My grandma received tragic news...all of them were executed for treason. It stabbed my grandma in her heart, but at the same time she knew she made her family proud, including me. She showed me what a true hero really is, and when she told me this story, I became even more proud to be Russian. Not only that, but now when I come across a hard time, I will do whatever it takes to make it through. My grandma planted a seed of dedication, bravery, and commitment inside of me, making me carry on through all of the problems and negative points in my life. If my grandma can go through the hardships of leaving Communist Russia and making something of her life here in the United States, then I have the ability to do whatever I put my mind to.
Another Love
Poem
Lizbeth DeLeon

Roses are red
Violets are blue
I’m tired of writing love poems for you.

Special Order
Toffer Surovec

She wasn’t the cutest girl there but she was the best looking one. She liked the attention it got her. It made her like
the uniforms everyone hated and like the job everyone despised. She bagged people’s burger meals with a smile and
even a little bounce to make the boy on fries smile.

She didn’t like the boy but she liked the smiles. She never got those smiles when she wasn’t at work. Her face was
pretty and her body was okay but nothing like all the other girls out there in the world who cared enough to turn make
up and clothes into an art.

She was a simple girl who just watched her weight a little and put stickers on her name tag.

Crest®
ShaMarian Robinson

My smile is a gift from me.
Just open your eyes & see.
My smile is wide & very bright.
I owe that to Crest® 3D White!

Another Love
Poem
Lizbeth DeLeon

Roses are red
Violets are blue
I’m tired of writing love poems for you.

Taken
Toffer Surovec

I found a girl to love but I didn’t get her name. I took her
smile and nothing else, except for the glances I gave back
to her. There was a growing frustration in her face as I did
nothing. There was something there and we both felt it;
she refused to make the first move. I’m glad she didn’t. I
wouldn’t have known what to do, I’m not ready yet. I don’t
hope to run into her again because she’ll remember me as a
coward. I’m not a coward I’m just taken.

Windy Rain
Christle Jolivette
So I’ve decided to get really hot for this summer. True, I say that every summer, but this time I’m determined. To prove my determination, I have decided on an intensely difficult vegan diet. The following are the logs pertaining to my progress:

**Monday May 3, 2010**
- Breakfast: Water, Plain toast
- Lunch: Water, Salad
- Dinner: Spaghetti with meatballs (Okay, I slipped up, but we’ll just call this one a freebie)

**Tuesday May 4, 2010**
- Breakfast: Water (I was in a hurry)
- Lunch: Coke (Vegans drink coke, ok!), French fries
- Dinner: Quesadillas (I know it’s a dairy, but at least it’s not a COW! Ok!)

I quit. I was born a meat eater. I think I may even be a strict carnivore. Whatever. I’ll just buy a one piece; I can be hot next year.
As feathers fall
Leaves atop the trees
Far beyond the ocean
They turn from grey to green
A baby is born, abandoned from the shelter of his heart
He dwells within a structure…
Yet knows his real home is too far for him to crawl

A wind whispers promising to hold the child
To hold him in the dark
It can be a promise,
Or it can be a dream…

He loves the places where he walks
The meadows of the ocean
and the trees of the winds
The places of the fireflies
and the places of his dreams

A place within his mind
Through the dancing shadows of his head
Past the sayings from those who lie
And past the whispers of the shadow of the dead

He discovers a hope buried deep within his feet
He builds a new oasis
to form a golden keep
A Piece of Candy

E. Tsang

A handful of candy, I’ll just take one for now.
The pain won’t fade completely
But at least my head will clear for a while.
The ache itself eases its way in.
The burn makes my bones feel odd
And fills my thoughts of gloom.
The candy will make it go away
And fill my head with a comforting face.

It’ll be a while before I can fall asleep
But I don’t want to drift away while it’s here.
It builds up quickly to break me down.
Standing up weakens every bone
And burns every aching pound.
Soon my head will float
It’ll be a while before the pain begins to fade
But I know the candy will make it better.

A YEAR WITHOUT YOU

Lissette Lozano

I cried myself to sleep tonight when I realized it’s been a year
without you.

I never thought that I would say this, but it’s been so hard without
you. I have marked in my calendar the day that I will be free to see
the person who always knows how to make me smile. My little
brother, it’s been a rough year without you.

My life has been in a frozen zone where I don’t know what to do. I
have let myself go to places I hoped no one would ever have to go-
-obstacles and the heart break that you warned me about. Brother,
it’s been a hard year without you.

Your letters are the only things that give me the power to overcome
my fears. You say that everything will be fine and to hold on. I’m
amazed at how differently you think about life. You explain how a
simple act can change a life and how, with the snap of a finger, you
can lose it all. Baby brother, it’s been a long year without you.

I Hate You

Marcie Johnson

I hate you! That’s all I can say.
Anger and frustration approach me as I think of that day.
You lied.
I cried.
I’m sorry, you replied.
The day you cheated, the day my soul died.
Jesus Villegas

Short Fiction

As a first generation Hispanic college student, it might be easy to dismiss my life as predictable. You think this is going to be a story about how this Hispanic kid grew up in a Chicoan town and had to work his way up while struggling to find his identity between his Hispanic culture and the modern capitalist lifestyle that defines our post 9/11 world. You think that this story is going to talk about the hardships of growing up in a world filled with racial discrimination, and raise by the Catholic mother devoted only to her family and the distant alcoholic father who only cares about reputation.

Granted, those are good stories. But that is not my story. My story, however, does begin in Mexico- Matamoros, Mexico to be exact. Dating to a time before my existence, my mother, Teresa Cerino, met my father, Jesus Villegas, and fell in love like lovebirds in a rom-com. Guy meets Girl. Girl meets Guy. Guy and Girl fall in love despite the protest of their family. Conflict ensued. Guy and Girl’s family get over it. Guy and Girl get married. Husband and Wife move to America to provide a better future for their unborn children.

And so Teresa Villegas gave birth to Jesus Emmanuel Villegas de Cerino in Brownsville, Tx, on February 26, 1989.

That would be me, by the way.

Soon enough, the three of us came to Houston, Texas and for the first few years, we lived with my father’s friends. Yes, those were hard times indeed and Mother will later tell me how food and money was so scarce that they purposely starved themselves just so that there was enough food for me. I showed my appreciation by spilling the food, pooping, and screaming at 2 o’clock in the morning.

But still, I was never a troubled child. I never caused trouble with the younger toddlers and I always stayed close to my parents. Yes, I was a good boy. Too good perhaps.

You see, I never got in trouble with children my age because I never wanted to play with them. I would much rather hang with my parents and their friends and hear them talk about grown-up stuff. It was a tendency that worried my doctor and so he suggested to Mother that I go to a psychiatrist to find out what was “wrong” with me. In the doctor’s defense, his theory isn’t baseless. My mother tells me that a good chunk of relatives on both sides displayed unusual behavior or characteristics that were hardly considered “sociable.”

There was only enough money to either provide food for our table or to see a psychiatrist. The choice was an easy but painful one for my parents. And with that, I grow into a life filled with social awkwardness, unaware of the mental condition that may or may not exist.

My parents made the right choice.

Now I hate to point out the obvious, but I don’t remember much from my “younger” years. However, I do remember crawling as a baby while Mother was cooking. I remember trying to go on an adventure and walked to the corner of the street before my mother ran and caught me in time. Perhaps, the best memory I have is the time Mother took me to the local Laundromat.

By this time, we moved into the small neighborhood in Houston, known as Denver Harbor. Now, Denver Harbor back then was not known for their “hospitality”. Father once told me how a group of men threaten to harm us on our way from the grocery store, if we didn’t give them our change.

Yes, Denver Harbor was not a safe place but when you need to clean your clothes and had no washing machine, what could you do? So I took my favorite ninja turtle toy and went to the Laundromat. For a small toddler like me, going to the Laundromat was like going to Disney World- it was the happiest place on Earth! I escaped from my mother when I was given the chance and I went exploring this huge and gigantic environment.

I remember slowly walking down an aisle full of giant whirling robots and peering through their windows as clothes that have been unclean for three weeks spin into a whirlwind of rainbow colors. Then, off to the corner of the store to watch a group of teenagers control cartoons inside the small tv. And who could forget those magical boxes that popped out your favorite candy, food, or drinks for the price of two quarters?

Eventually, my wandering led me to the front of the store where I found two girls in their early twenties, sitting next to each other and enjoying the other’s presence. The girl to the left was an expressive young blonde wearing a pink t-shirt and blue jeans. The other? A brunette wearing dark clothing and one can tell that she was the more reserved of the two.

Such a strange couple, I thought. The girl on the left looks nothing like the girl on the right, so what could they possibly have in common? This sudden interest is perhaps what drew me closer to them. Closer. Closer. Even Closer, until I was standing right in front of the two girls. I look at them and they look at me.

I don’t remember what they said, but their reactions were like all the other people when they come face to face with an unsupervised toddler.

What an adorable baby! Isn’t he cute?

Where are his mom and dad?

Suddenly, the brunette began to whisper something into the blonde’s ear, and I watch as the blonde gleefully pulls out a pink handkerchief from her pocket. With her other hand, she motions for the ninja turtle action figure in my fingers. Well, when a stranger takes out a handkerchief and ask you to give her one of your personal belongings, how could you say no? I had a feeling there was something more behind this odd couple.

As soon as I lend her my toy, she placed the handkerchief on top of it and makes these weird swishing gestures with her arms. I watch as she encloses my cloaked figure with inside her hands and slowly pulls out the handkerchief and opens her fingers.

“My ninja turtle toy? Gone.”

“Wow! How did she do that?” I thought to myself. I grab her arm and inspect every inch of her hand to find any trace of my toy. No such luck.

It was at that moment that I realized my favorite toy was gone, but before I could begin to sob hysterically, the brunette places the handkerchief inside her hand and motions me to look at her.

Like the blonde, she does all sorts of weird gestures and pulls out the handkerchief from her fist. She opens her hand to reveal my prized possession.

As I hug the toy I cherished the most, I couldn’t believe my luck. Here I am, standing in front of these two magicians performing one of the most amazing magic tricks I have ever seen! I placed my toy in the blonde’s hands, a gesture to encourage them to perform the trick one. More. Time.

And so, like before, the blonde covers my toy with the pink handkerchief, makes the weird gestures again and pulls out the handkerchief. Like before, the toy was gone.

I then turn to look at the brunette. Like all people, I want to know the secrets behind this magic trick and so I carefully watch her hands as she places the handkerchief inside.

“This is it!” I say to myself. “I’m about to find out how this awesome trick works! Gee, I can’t wait until I try it on my friends!”

However, any notions of impressing my friends came to a halt when I hear Mother scream my name. In what seem like a flash, Mother picked me up, apologizes to the two magicians and left the Laundromat.

It was a sad day for me. Not only did I not figure out how the magic trick works, I never did get back my ninja turtle toy.
Animalesk  Reneé Johnbaptiste  Winner, Design
Some people swore that the house was haunted. It was the eyesore on an otherwise unremarkable suburban street and its reason for being abandoned became lost in the passing of time. Largely ignored and only entering conversations during the annual winter block party when the men of the street agreed that something should be done and one day they’d get around to it. For ten years we drank beers and made plans and all the while the destitute slowly moved in and made the house a home.

Their presence came as shock at first, but over time, they faded into the background along with the house and after a while we forgot they existed within our community. They became poltergeists haunting the fringes of the street and our peripheral vision.

Mary Little was twenty-four and fresh out of college with a communications degree when her family moved in; she was cursed with a heart that seemed intent on being contrary to her surname. Her husband, Gordon, was a supervisor at the factory and Mary started volunteering at the community center shortly after catching sight of our local haunts. At her first block party, she questioned our capacity for goodwill and stated her intentions for helping them. She urged us to become involved, but we were a simple people and set within our ways, and it wouldn’t be long before Mary became another ghost we quickly turned away from when catching sight of her.

Mary went to work the next morning and soon discovered the old adage of sleeping dogs to be truthful as their desire for assistance mirrored our desire to assist, and despite Mary thinking poorly of us, we weren’t so bad off in our indifference. This didn’t rest so easy in Mary’s craw and resulted in a doubling of effort and a search for outside assistance.

Since we populated the community center and were feeling pretty accomplished that our do-nothing attitude had prevailed, Mary was forced to look further and decided upon involving the police. This thought likely had good intentions while still inside Mary’s head although she was likely operating on emotion and didn’t fully think through the consequences.

In time, the police raided the house and arrested our ghosts for trespassing on account of the owner (whom they found three states away) not being aware of the squatters and demanding their removal. Mary was devastated. She became reclusive after the exposure of the rafters in the house.

Demolition was halted due to Mary’s body, which they carted off while we watched, and the next night was the block party. We stood around in our familiar manner, but couldn’t muster more than a glance at either the house or Gordon Little’s home. With nothing left to serve as a distraction, we were left with only ourselves to look at and judge. Nothing was ever the same again after that.
Whatever Happened to Jonathan Gardner?
Toffer Surovec
Winner, Short Fiction
Part One
Chapter One

He remembered the night he decided he would lose his mind. His parents had been with his great aunt sorting out her life. That's what they did with her life since her husband died. He never met her husband, but he heard good things. Her husband did everything for her and when he died she was helpless. A helpless old woman, but she still had her mind then. Everyone he knew did. He was younger and didn't know that the bad things ran down both sides of his family. He found out that night though, and decided it would happen to him. He swallowed a milligram of lorazepam to help fight the anxiety he always had and tried to think clearly. In his mind it wasn't a possibility, but a fact that one day he would lose all his memories. It wasn’t uncommon to forget about memories, to let them get dark around the edges, if you didn’t think about them regularly. There was something about losing them that scared him. He had lost so many of his memories already by then-- all of his childhood. It was as if he was only a child for a few days, a teenager a few months, and in his twenties for only a few minutes even though he was four years into them. He wondered if this disproportionate interpretation of time was an early sign of the bad things. He wondered why he kept calling them the bad things when they had names; Dementia and Alzheimer's. He found his answer and was scared by the irrationality of it. He was afraid by having the words Dementia or Alzheimer's in his mind would rot away the space where they were stored in his mind. As if the words themselves were poison and had some kind of power. He took a few deep breaths and a few more milligrams of lorazepam. One day he would find himself with a mind that lost names, faces, places, smells, loves, hates, everything-- except for language and the ability to control himself. He could never lose those. If he did he would have to kill himself, since pride, shame and guilt are things in the heart, not in the mind. He knew even if he forgot everything in his twilight years, he would remember that decision and hoped he would stand by it. He never wanted to be a burden.

He was a burden though, twenty-four and still living with his parents. He had no degree-- only a high school diploma. He took time off to find himself and didn’t like what he found. Most people would have turned to drugs, but drugs were always too social for him. He turned to bad relationships and suicide. He was better by the night when they had names; Dementia and Alzheimer's. He found his answer and made it through. Those things he wrote big in the books. He chronicled the chaos in his blood and in her head. To him, she was his only companion and his only world. He was a scared kid. A kid who thought he was going to lose the bad things. It gave him something to analyze other than himself, even though he was part of the equation.

Jonathan wouldn’t be a serial killer, even though he thought he might. He had a detachment from his emotions and he thought it would turn him into one. He was just a kid, afraid of what he would become, what he might have, when he would die, how he affected people... He was just a scared kid. A kid who thought he was going to lose the only the only thing important to him, his mind. He started writing down everything, not stories or anything, but writing everything down to remember it. He’d fill up composition books with his daily notes and file them away for reading when he lost his mind. He knew that it wouldn’t make everything come back to him, but he hoped some things would make it through. Those things he wrote big in the books. He chronicled everything and he became amazed at the things he missed before. He even missed some of his emotions. He didn’t have a distance from them. Sometimes they were just too complex for him to experience all at once without feeling somewhat numb to them. He became less afraid of being a serial killer, but he was still just as afraid of the other things and he felt how afraid he was when writing them. His hand would shake slightly and at first he thought it was a symptom of something, but tests showed nothing and he figured out it was him just being afraid. This didn’t stop the fears though.

First his journals filled his shelves then a foot locker his mother bought him to keep them secure, but it was really to keep the tattered things out of sight. His mother was the type who didn’t understand that framing a poster, then hanging it up ruined the point of having a poster. She liked everything framed, squared off, and in its place. She had things wrong with her too, but would never admit to them even though it clearly bled into her child. She was a nice lovely woman, even though a bit loud. She loved her Jonathan, but thought all his problems came from his father’s side and not hers. Even though her mother was medicated for some of the same problems Jonathan had. Denial is easy, easier than thinking you tainted your only child’s genes with bad code. She thought about it that way sometimes until coping mechanisms kicked in and the house was clean and the toilets scrubbed. She made him a nice orderly house to combat the chaos in his blood and in her head.

She did everything for her son. Worked long hours to give him the time alone with himself he needed. It scared her to leave him alone after the last attempt, but she had too or he would never get better. He would just crawl back inside of himself and break down again. She didn’t understand why he needed time alone, but that's because she was made the other way. She was social and was a good networker. She’d always have more friends than her son at any age and that made her feel sad for him. She’d never think anyway else about it, that’s why she would never understand Jonathan.

Jonathan’s father was distant and never played with him as a child. He was a lot like Jonathan and required time alone. Unlike Jonathan though, he had a short fuse and a loud voice that always seemed to swell, Jonathan would barely open his mouth. His mother could also remember every time his father said he loved him. Those didn’t make more than a dozen memories. Jonathan never let those memories get dark around the edges.

Jonathan was an introvert. He could fake being an extrovert well. It gave people a false sense of him; he was so good at it. It came natural to him. If he’d been born somewhere else he might very well have become an actor. He thought about that sometimes, but would dismiss it. He liked where he lived too much and already felt too old for something like that. He liked his room and he rarely left it. If it wasn’t for school or the few times he wouldn’t pass on a night with his friends, his room is where you would find Jonathan. It was his world. He still imagined things. He would put himself into situations he wanted to be in. Daydream about being better than he was, but well in reason of what he could be-- most of the time anyway.

“He was just a scared kid. A kid who thought he was going to lose the bad things. It gave him something to analyze other than himself, even though he was part of the equation.”

"Yes, Jonathan was only twenty-four, but he felt like his life was already over.”

Toff
Most people know a Jonathan. The smart kid in class. Quiet. Fidgety. Spaced out, but highly focused on something always. An over-explainer. Non-fiction book reader. A kid that believed in Santa Claus a little bit too long and stopped believing in God a little too soon. A kid that never really looked at the grades he made because he knew he passed, but didn’t want to know by how much or how little. A little ashamed of his intelligence and really ashamed of how much he never applied himself. Funny.

Yeah, most people know a Jonathan until high school is over.

He thought about high school a lot. He thought about it a lot because of Dawn. She was always a relief to him. He grew up with night terrors and so did she. They would talk on the phone all night until they fell asleep. They knew each other since middle school, when the calls started. It never got romantic even though both of them wanted it to. He was always too afraid and she wouldn’t be the first one to make a move. He would remember the times he swore that the world begged him to kiss her and in his room, in his day dreams, he would. They would marry and have children and everything would be perfect. Dawn was gone from his life though. She went off to college and forgot about Jonathan. Not completely, she could never do that, but her mind forced a lot of memories of him out of her. If it didn’t she would have always been stuck on him and never grow into the person she was now. He hurt her so much by never kissing her and what seemed perfect to both of them, what seemed like the best idea never happened. It would never happen, but in his mind, in his daydreams it did happen.

He felt like he was searching for who he could have been in these daydreams; the person who took more chances, the person who did something and made something with his life. Yes, Jonathan was only twenty-four, but he felt like his life was already over. He felt like he lost the one girl he was supposed to be with. He felt like he lost all the things he was supposed to be and that made living hard.

See, living is a choice. Everyday Jonathan didn’t kill himself he was choosing to live. It was getting harder to make that choice. Even on the medication it was hard. There would be sad people if he died. He knew that it would even crush some, but he’d never have to deal with those consequences. He could die young or die old, broken and without his mind. These new bad things he learned about where pushing him closer to suicide and he could feel it. He didn’t want to lose his mind. He felt past his prime. He took a milligram of lorazepam and when he felt it kick in he took another to make sure the thoughts would go away. Of course they never really did.

He needed to get out. He called Robbie-Bobby and pretended to be an extrovert.

Robbie-Bobby was born Robert and raised as Bobby. Then freshman year he started to refer to himself as Robbie thus, Robbie-Bobby was born out of mockery.

“Robbie-Bobby!”
“What’s up John?”
“You working today?”
“No, I’m off. Why? Want to do something?”
“Pool.”
“Beer and billiards?”
“Hell yeah, I’ll buy the first round.”
“Anyone else?”
“No, let’s keep it small.”
“Meet you there in fifteen?”
“Done.”

Jonathan loved that about his age and gender. A phone call that lasted less than a minute could set up something that would be two hours of fun. For a moment he thought about how hard it was to set up things with Dawn or any of the other girls he was just friends with,
this moment only took a few seconds since that’s all it took for him to process all the memories and thoughts. He took off his hoodie and put on a shirt then put his hoodie back on. He could get away with just wearing a hoodie when he was eighteen and in better shape, but now with beer and the medicine he couldn’t.

The pool hall had the normal pool hall set up. Bar in the front, tables in the back and smoke everywhere. It was early, but not early enough for the bartender Mike to play a game or two with them. The regulars were already there drinking cheap beer and needed constant attention. ‘They’d be there for hours drinking. Alcoholism must be a hell of a monster to fight Jonathan thought about without a hint of irony. He did drink most days and some days too much, but he didn’t drink to get drunk, he drank to cope with things and he thought that made him different. It didn’t.

Mike greeted John and Robbie-Bobby. He’d seen Robbie-Bobby around, but seeing John was a treat to Mike. He was the only one that made him laugh after his last big break up. He’d only seriously dated three women and when he told John this, John held up three fingers and said, ‘You know which one she is?’ Mike looked at him confused till Jonathan dropped two fingers and flipped him off with a smirk.

Mike rang up two beers as water and didn’t start a ticket for the table they were playing on. Jonathan and Robbie-Bobby both have served tables and tended bar and tipped more than the two beers and free table would cost. Mike knew, this but he didn’t do it for a bigger tip he did it because he liked them. Mike was older and was the owner’s son. He’d been working there since John and Robbie-Bobby where in high school and would come in after classes. They and one girl that used to be around them all the time were the only people Mike has ever served alcohol to underage. He felt responsible for their good taste in beer.

At the table John racked and Robbie-Bobby broke. John always let people go before him. He was a strong player and didn’t like the stress of running the table for so long, so early in the game.

They sipped their beers and took a few shots in silence. “John, What’s wrong?”

“Nothing... Just needed to get out you know?”

“I know what that’s like. Most people know what that’s like, but you don’t know what that’s like.”

Jonathan rolled his eyes and sunk a ball.

“You remember the last time we played pool Jonathan?”

“Yeah.”

“Two days later you tried to kill yourself. Is that in your head again?”

“It always will be.”

“Is that why you needed to get out?”

“No...” John shook his head, “I just miss all the people I could have been.”

Robbie-Bobby didn’t say anything.

“You know, I had so many choices of what I could have been, and they’re all missing now. I’ve waited too long for them.”

“You’re only twenty-four. Stop acting like you’re on your last breath already.”

“Two days later you tried to kill yourself. Is that in your head again?”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing... Just needed to get out you know?”

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“You know, I had so many choices of what I could have been, and they’re all missing now. I’ve waited too long for them.”

“You’re only twenty-four. Stop acting like you’re on your last breath already, do something with your life.”

“What’s wrong?”

“You could start some kind of revolution.”

Jonathan smiled and wrote that big in his composition book.

Chapter Two

What kind of revolution? Just some kind of revolution; where he was pushing for something better. Something that would reach the complexity of beauty through the simplicity of evolution, him and a single idea that would grow into something beautiful. He could think clearly. Life became an art of choices, some days an unconscious one. His past dogma was erased. He pushed out thoughts of heartbreak, Dawn and even of all the things he could have been. The bad things stayed in his head, but now they pushed him. If he wouldn’t remember the things he did, he’d make sure other people did for generations. He would change lives. It was a simple thought in his head. Not a heavy one like it should have been. Being great was just a step in his mind—a to-do list to tick off. He just needed the idea. He needed to know what his revolution would be.

He thought Martin Luther King, Jr., and thought civil rights. He thought Gandhi, and thought independence for India. He thought Jonathan Gardener, and went blank. Jonathan Gardener he thought again, he then thought of gardeners not his family, then of trees, tomatoes, apples then wanted pie. His mind jumped from thought to thought until his mind was numb and stayed clear of everything. Until the thought of not thinking crept into his mind and ruined his brief moment of peace. He thought being dead must be like that and he thought it beautiful. Pie. He and Dawn used to make pies together. He put his hand in his pocket and rubbed the small pill container on his key chain, and pushed away the bad thoughts without needing to take any medicine. He smiled and started to dream about his revolution. It would be outstanding. He would be championed as a hero. He would change the world; make it a better place for people. What kind of people though? They’re so many people that struggle, so many places for improvements. Where to start? He thought about the things he was good at and could only think of serving tables. Then a dark memory came and led to an idea.

Maybe his revolution would be the homeless. He always felt sorry for them, but one day he felt more than sorry. He was working as a server and a homeless man came in and the manager allowed him to stay warm and drink water at the bar since that’s all the homeless man asked for. You could tell the man had been homeless for some time, he looked kind, but clearly the man was not sane. This was before Jonathan himself was medicated and he had a much harsher view of the mentally ill. The homeless man carried a doll with him. He overheard the man tell the bartender about the doll. He referred to it as his only friend for the past three winters; a donation from the kindest soul he ever met, a child. The child had won it from one of those claw machines that are sometimes in supermarkets. The child was proud of him. How winning it and the homeless man could tell that the kid loved the doll instantly. The child had gambled his money and won what he wanted. The child was kind though, and when he saw the man outside of the supermarket begging, the child gave him the doll since he had nothing else to give.

“The most beautiful thing that’s ever happened to me.” said the homeless man.

No one doubted it. It was clear that the homeless man treasured the doll. It was the only thing of any value to him. This is why Jonathan felt it left after he swiped fifty dollars from the bar counter. Jonathan thought it must have been a hard decision and to the homeless man it was. The bartender was angry though and just threw the doll in the trash. John had hated himself for not fishing it out of the bin. It was a treasure after all. This memory made Jonathan feel ashamed, if he offered the man some cash then maybe the man wouldn’t have stolen the money and would have been able to keep his only friend. He never looked at the bartender the same way again after that night. They were supposed to move in together and become roommates. Both had saved up money, but Jonathan was able to wiggle out of it thankfully.

He wrote that memory down in his book. He was ashamed of it yes, but it still was a memory that made him who he was and he wanted to remember it. He didn’t write it big, but he did write about it in long paragraphs. There are character defining moments in life and like the times he didn’t kiss Dawn this was a moment he passed up a chance the world gave him to be a better man.

He looked for the chances to be better every day now. Like a lot of things though, they never came around while he was looking for them. Girls, for example, never seem to be around when he was looking for one and this is exactly why one came around while Jonathan was looking for anything else, but a girl. Her name wasn’t important yet, but her body was. He first saw it from behind and it was beautiful to him. It had the right curves and moved the way he liked. He felt love but dismissed it as lust, which was probably right. He saw he when he walked into the pool hall, she was talking to Mike. It was a few days after Christmas and a couple before New Year’s Eve. He thought she might be Mike’s new girl, so he just nodded at Mike and grabbed a table you could see the bar from. It was early and if the girl left he knew Mike would want to play a game with him. The traffic was horrible getting there and caused John some anxiety, but it was better being in a house still full of relatives and holiday cheer. He looked up and made eye contact with the girl, they both smiled and he thought about how beautiful she was. Mike looked back at John with a smile too.

Mike yelled, “Go get my cue, the office is unlocked. I’ll be right there.Jonathan had never been in the office before. He’d been in the back room to help get ice for the bar a few times, but the office was always off limits. He went in and grabbed Mike’s cue and when he came back the girl was gone. Mike was already racking up.

“So, is that a new girl?”

“Cousin.”

Mike’s answers weren’t usually short and John thought this meant she was off limits and tried to quickly change the topic, but before he could Mike offered him a beer.
“On the house.”
“On the house?” It’s never been on the house, it’s always been a “free water.”
“Yeah.”
“The old man catch you?”
“No.”
John looked confused and Mike smiled, “My dad is opening another pool hall.”
“Cool...”
Mike held up his arms and spent around, “All of this is my Christmas present.”
“What?”
“Yup.”
“He gave you his first pool hall?”
“Yeah, it’s still his on paper, but this is mine to run.”
“Congratulations.”
“Thank you. You know what, screw the beer let me make us a real drink.” Mike motioned for John to follow him, “I think you should brush up on how to make drinks again.”
“Why?”
“You’re still certified to serve alcohol right?”
“I don’t know, three or five years right? I should still be good. Why?”
“Well, I’m going to need a new morning bartender. You like Old Fashions?”
“Yeah, I love them, but I can’t be your bartender, school starts back up soon.”

“Come on, screw school and just take night classes. I did, they’re easier to pass and they have nice girls in them.”

“Mike, you’re not going to be able to talk me into this.”
“How about just some days?”
“Maybe some days.”
“See, already talked you into it.”
Mike finished off the drinks and they were good, strong, too strong for eleven-thirty in the morning.
Mike smirked and said, “So I caught you checking out my cousin.”
“In my defense I didn’t think she was family. I just thought she was your girlfriend.”

“I love how you define off limits, Johnny boy.” He laughed and continued, “She’s got a job here and she’s single. Said you were cute.”
“She did not.”
Mike said sarcastically with a laugh, “She did get a job here, I hired her.”
“So she’s really single?”
“Yeah.”
“You wouldn’t mind?”
“I’m not attached to her to be honest. My mom wanted me to give her the job. I’ve only ever seen her at Christmases.” Mike stopped and suddenly became very serious. He took a drink and looked deep into John’s eyes and said, “But if I have to come in on my day off to cover for her because you broke her heart, I’ll f__g kill you.”

Mike broke and ran the table for a bit. He used every bit of skill, concentration and control but still lost. Jonathan wasn’t the better player he just always had the better luck. Luck was always something Jonathan always seemed to have. Some say luck is just chances that are taken by people brave or stupid enough to take them. Jonathan didn’t believe that though. He didn’t think of himself as brave or stupid. Lucky though, he thought he was sometimes. He came from a family that always had food and kept him in new clothes and that was lucky. He felt bad that he had so little suffering in his life and tried so hard and thought so many times about ending his own life over what most would think as petty heartache. Everyone has their own levels of pain though. Life is a bitch that way. It sets you up to expect things and with Jonathan it set him up to believe things would just be handed to him. Life stopped handing him things and that’s when the depression really started.

He never remembers himself as a happy kid, then again he doesn’t remember much of his childhood at all. Thinking about it leaves a dark, empty emotional after taste in his mouth. It also leaves him feeling sad, lonely, helpless and afraid. Still, some remember him as a happy kid, it was an act mostly. Not to say he was never happy. Children always seem to find happiness, even if it’s in the nooks and crannies of developing mental illness. He had happy times; he’s seen some of the videos. They were only videos though, he was missing the memories. That’s what the mind does though. It’ll take big pieces of sadness and push them out for you to survive. Jonathan felt bad about pushing so much of his childhood out. He was born into so much, but none of it was what a child really needed. He had things, just not the right things.
The Pianist
Monica Chhay

Winner, Painting
Miss Wonderful
Jerry Sparks
Winner, Essay

Miss Wonderful was the girl you never asked in elementary school. Remember Charlie Brown and the little red hair girl? What you can’t have is what you want most. Other classes had beautiful girls, but the little red haired girl was the one with whom you wanted another chance.

Whatever their particular reason, they showed up at a classmate’s New Year’s Eve party. Word of mouth, without e-mail, cell phones or Fed-Ex, the message got out.

Two girls had asked for a ride to the party. Just a ride, that’s all, but even I knew enough to know that when you take two girls anywhere you need help.

My short list of help got down to Alvin, 14 at the time. At 19, I wasn’t sure this would fly. The trick was to get the idea by his mom and the girls. Amazingly, his mother said he could go, and he came along to escort the second girl, age 22. Alvin looked like Donald O’Connor and the girls never questioned that he was less than 22, let alone 14. Even though this was a party and everyone would be free to go where he or she wanted, we had companions for the ride home.

After the mistletoe, they soon found other people. Alvin’s “escort” found an older guy, and I was free to find Miss Wonderful.

I had seen her only once since graduation. Delicate, as I remembered, like a flower. A long way from home, I yelled from the fourth floor at the football game.

She was friendly. She hadn’t seen a familiar face and waved with a hint of urgency.

I hurried down the steps, all eight sections of them. I got to the street level just as her ride pulled away. Yup, she knew it was me, but I didn’t even have a phone number.

College football games are a big place. All I could do was wave goodbye. Telephones were not in your pocket in those days and long distance was a budget breaker, so probably wouldn’t see Miss Wonderful again. Then someone mentioned the invitation about New Year’s Eve, a long time ago.

I saw her after midnight. She never dated in school, but now she had several guys waiting to give her a New Year’s kiss, so I waited to have a moment alone with her. Finally, an opening came. I talked and she listened. As we talked, some guys who were late came by.

They made their way to her and stopped to plant a kiss. Well, that was ok. Tender and shy, she needed experience. I patiently waited until Miss Available became, well, available.

Nearly one a.m. and guys finally stopped coming by and we had a moment. I looked at her without speaking. She came closer and just as I was about to lower my head, she closed her eyes and stepped forward.

There was a small problem, no, not the button missing near her collar. Quickly, I thought about it and had to make a decision. More experience might have helped. Maybe an actual date instead of group dates; maybe should’ve asked questions in health class.

In any event I didn’t close my eyes fast enough and that was when I saw the faint trail of drool running down the side of her mouth and the only thing I could think was that it wasn’t hers.

I kissed her forehead, said goodnight, and went to the kitchen. Alvin, being Catholic, was experienced, more than Baptists. One look and without a word, he poured a drink, my first.

Our friend closed the party. Alvin found the girls and I never saw Miss Wonderful again.
Long Morning
Andrew Hylton

I’m sitting in the back of class
Bored to the verge of tears
Waiting for some excitement,
Too early to pull out the beers.

Things aren’t going my way,
I’m spiraling out of control.
My mistakes are piling up.
The stress is taking its toll.

I should be paying attention,
Taking notes while trying to learn.
Maybe put forth some real effort
Because you only get what you earn.

Just can’t make myself listen.
I’ve no drive to be better at all.
Born without any want too
Unless I use my trusty Aldderall.

I do not yet have the answer.
All I can do is keep on going,
Taking things one breath at a time.
Try and put wings on this Boeing.

I Had an Idea
Jackie Villarreal
SCENE 1

[A well-off suburban neighborhood is seen, all houses two-storied with well-maintained lawns and pools in every yard. An alarm clock is heard, and the screen focuses on one house with a beat-up car in the driveway behind two very nice and clean cars. Closes in on a window in the second floor, and a twenty-three year old man with brown hair and stubble is lying on the floor of the room. His girlfriend is lying on the bed, and both of them are wearing only their underwear. There is a bag of weed and some papers on the floor next to Bailey's head. A tall man in his late forties barges in and turns off the alarm. He kicks Bailey in the side and waits for him to roll over onto his back before yelling.]

FRANK: Get up you lazy bastard! Get to work! Oh, wait. You don't have a job! [Grabs Bailey's arm and hauls him up to his feet.] That is why you don't live here anymore! And who the hell sets their alarm for two in the afternoon?

[Before him, the girlfriend rises and walks from the room in her underwear. She waves at Frank as she passes by him, but he ignores her as much as he can.]

FRANK: Well, dude, your mother and I decided that since we bought the furniture, we could sell it, too. You were lucky to keep all of your clothes and junk. I bet I could get a lot for that guitar.

BAILEY: Don't you touch Claire! [He holds guitar tightly in his arms and strokes it with the side of his face.] Don't worry, baby. I won't let that mean man touch you, no.

[His girlfriend is lying on the bed, and both of them are wearing only their underwear. There is a bag of weed and some papers on the floor next to Bailey's head. A tall man in his late forties barges in and turns off the alarm. He kicks Bailey in the side and waits for him to roll over onto his back before yelling.]

FRANK: What do you mean "we"? Mom had no idea!

BAILEY: Who says so? That's just the man trying to keep me down!

FRANK: He's moving out, Mary. [Mary smiles and touches a gold necklace that hangs around her neck.]

MARY: Oh. Well, you have fun, Son. Find a place and...stay there awhile. And take her with you.

[Suddenly grabs her earlobes, then gasps and runs out of the room]

BAILEY: Why are you kicking me out, man?

FRANK: One, you are twenty-three years old since last Tuesday. Two: You have never had a job in your life! Th-

BAILEY: I did, too!

FRANK: Snow-Cone World doesn't count. You only worked there for three days.

BAILEY: Is it my fault the manager didn't like me?

FRANK: You shoveled a snow cone down the front of his pants in front of his wife and kids. [Bailey laughs, remembering. Frank glares at him.] Three: You need to grow up and get a real life.

BAILEY: I have a life. [He looks at the floor and sees the weed. He picks it up and puts it on top of the boxes while his father talks.]

FRANK: Weed, Megan, and cartoons do not suffice for the life of a twenty-three-year old.

BAILEY: Who says so? That's just the man trying to keep me down!

Megan walks in, wrapped in a pink robe that says Mrs. Frank Mayes.

MEGAN: Yeah, screw the man, man. [She removes robe and Frank turns away from her as she puts on a pair of Bailey's boxers and one of his shirts.]
BAILEY: Conformist! And those are my favorite boxers! Why can’t you ever wear your own clothes, Megan?

MEGAN: Yours smell like you. Mine don’t.

BAILEY: You sniff my dirty boxers?

[MEGAN shrugs awkwardly]

MEGAN: Sometimes.

FRANK: Bailey, you have to start thinking with your head and not with your wiener.

[Megan giggles.]

BAILEY: What do you mean?

FRANK: Ask your brother. He’s three years younger than you and three times smarter.

[Mary runs into room again and grabs robe. She digs in the pockets and finds a pair of diamond earrings. She holds them out to Megan.]

MARY: You tried to steal these! I want you out!

MEGAN: That’s your robe.

[Mary looks at robe and throws it down in disgust.]

MARY: Out!

SCENE 2

[Screen goes to a trashy apartment complex. Bailey is knocking on a door with Megan standing behind him, guarding his stuff. The door opens and a man of about twenty with a long, unmade mohawk. He looks Bailey and Megan up and down and then scowls.]

BAILEY: Hey, baby brother.

SKYLAR: Dad kicked you out, then.

BAILEY: Yeah. I was hoping you would let me move in with you.

[BAILEY: Skylar?]

SKYLAR: I’m thinking.

MEGAN: He’s your brother!

SKYLAR: [to Bailey] Who is this?

MEGAN: I’m his girlfriend! I’ve met you before!

SKYLAR: How old is she, thirteen or something? What, you can’t get girlfriends your own age?

MEGAN: I’m sixteen! I can drive! I-

SKYLAR: Haven’t you tried to break up with her three times already?

BAILEY: Yeah, she never leaves. Watch, Leave, Megan. I don’t want you.

MEGAN: Don’t be ridiculous, baby.

BAILEY: See! She doesn’t get it. Megan! Get out of my life! You’re a conforming, insecure, underage whore.

MEGAN: You don’t mean that. You’re just upset because you have to live with that freak.

BAILEY: Get the f__ out of here, Megan.

SKYLAR: You can’t be here. The last thing he needs is your preteen bullshit.

MEGAN: You’re younger than him! HE can’t even drive!

SKYLAR: Details, details.

BAILEY: I can drive, I just...have to pay those tickets. I’ll get a job.

SKYLAR: You have to, or you can’t live here.

BAILEY: Yeah, I thought so.

SKYLAR: [to Megan] What are you still doing here? GIT!

MEGAN: Are you seriously going to let this happen, Bailey? For real?

BAILEY: For real. [pause] GIT!

MEGAN: I don’t know what’s going on here, but I’m going to figure it out. And you will beg for me to come back.

SKYLAR: He’s breaking up with you, you stupid juvenile! What’s wrong with you? Is this above your grade-level?

MEGAN: You’ll see me again, soon.

BAILEY: I know.

SKYLAR: [to Megan] You’re the dumbest person I’ve ever met.

[Screen goes to a trashy apartment complex. Bailey is running through his apartment, cramming a beanie on his head that says “PunchDrunk Studios”, and glancing at his watch every two seconds. Bailey is rolled into a tight ball under a blanket on the couch. Skylar punches him awake.]

SKYLAR: Where is my alarm clock? It’s almost ten! I had to be at work an hour ago!
BAILEY: I needed it. [He holds the covers open to reveal the clock nestled against his stomach.]

SKYLAR: FOR WHAT! [He grabs the clock and checks the alarm.]

BAILEY: Calm down, dude. It's too early for this.

SKYLAR: Some of us have jobs. Maybe if you got one you'd wake up at a normal f___g time!

BAILEY: F___ normal.

SKYLAR: Oh, get over yourself. You think every other f__-off with long hair and a guitar doesn't think he's the most creative person out there?

BAILEY: You're just like Dad.

SCENE 4

[Skylar enters the front room of PunchDrunk Studios.]

MIKE: It's about f____g time. You think you can get here any time you want and just-

SKYLAR: Shut up, Mike. This is the first time I've ever gotten here late. You leave early all the time.

MIKE: You're not the boss around here, Skylar. Remember that.

SKYLAR: One of these days your uncle is going to come here and realize you don't know how to do any of this. You can't even play any instruments. Have you ever even tried?

MIKE: Don't give me that shit today. We've got a big name coming in soon, and I really want to impress this guy.

SKYLAR: With what? Your amazing lack of ability?

[Skylar notices a strange yellowish spot on Mike's shirt right over his left nipple.]

MIKE: I know more than you think. What?

SKYLAR: What?

MIKE: [Suspicious pause] I have a friend helping me out. I know what I'm doing now.

SKYLAR: How much could you have learned since Wednesday?

MIKE: I know enough. Look, Johnen Vasquez needs our equipment today-

SKYLAR: Johnen Vasquez? Holy shit! [Dreamily] I love his work.

MIKE: And he said he wants to lay down the audio himself. I'll be there if he has any questions, of course.

SKYLAR: What questions could he have that you know the answer to?

MIKE: That's what you're here for, buddy. You'll be in here, trimming up the tracks for that going-nowhere local band, ready to answer any of my questions. Think you can handle it?

SKYLAR: Do you really expect me to do that?

MIKE: Skylar, the last thing anyone needs in this failing economy is to lose their job.

[Skylar dutifully sits at the desk and grabs a huge pair of headphones. He puts them around his neck and swivels to face the computer.]

SCENE 5

[Skylar is still at the computer, working, and doesn't notice Mike suddenly storms into the front room from the studio. He swings open the front door just before Johnen reaches it and attacks him with an overenthusiastic handshake.]

MIKE: Hello! I'm Mike. It's so nice to finally meet you, sir.

[His snakelike grin/demeanor and early morning armpit sweat don't impress Johnen.]

JOHNEN:  Hi. Don't call me sir.

[The nipple stain doesn't impress him either. Johnen sees Skylar at the desk and his concerned expression clears. He leans his head over the counter creepily and stares at Skylar, who eventually jumps and hastily removes the headphones.]

SKYLAR: Hey, what's up? I'm Skylar. [Skylar offers hand, which Johnen shakes.]

JOHNEN: Nice place you got, here.

MIKE: Thanks.

JOHNEN: [To his crew] Alright, guys. You know what to do. [Johnen's crew nods and walks through the door into the studio. Skylar begins looking for the contract information. Johnen leans on the edge of the desk, not interested in Mike. After an awkward silence Mike starts to speak, but Johnen cuts him off.] Skylar?

SKYLAR: [Turns around, blankly] Yeah?

JOHNEN: Can we save the paperwork for later? Or have your guy over here do it. [Gestures to Mike without looking at him.] I'll introduce you to everybody so we can get started.

MIKE: He's the secretary. You're working with me today.

JOHNEN: [To Skylar] Aren't you going to work the board for me? [Skeptically] All right. I guess I can handle the complicated shit. I'll call you when we're ready.

MIKE: Why doesn't anyone take me seriously?

SKYLAR: [Stands close to Mike and whispers] You're lactating.

MIKE: It's a...lemon juice...I dripped- [Trails off awkwardly and puts a jacket on before walking into the studio.]
Red and Green Beauty

Shaun Peralta

Tall and slender.
Beautiful and lovely.
Clothes of green
And hair of red.

Gentle, green eyes.
Soft, pale skin.
Strong, brave, and courageous.
Red and green beauty.

With lovely passion
Struck in my heart.
Red and green
With a yellow star at top.

She resembles a dragon
So graceful but strong
So beautiful and lovely.
Such red and green beauty.

Reflection of Love

Tricia Hardy

Feelings are collected and stuffed into a plastic bag
Where they are suffocated and have no chance to ever reemerge.
The burden is released from my back as I soar above the past.
So strange how these dreams rapidly changed to nightmares.
I fell asleep in a pool of tears in which I awoke to my pathetic reflection.
This love is war.
We’ve taken each other prisoner.

No Matter What

Krista Ovalle

When I love you, I say we.
When I hate you, I say me.
BUT...
When you question, I say never.
AND...
When I question, you say forever.

I Think Not!

Chris Kennedy

Oh how I hate days like today,
feeling the pain coming from this open wound.
Can two months really be enough time to start healing?
I think not!

I still think of that dreadful night,
coming over with suspicious feelings,
to find another guy keeping you warm.
Will I ever forget that image?
I think not!

We went our separate ways
To give you the space you needed,
wanting to let you find your true identity.
Do you attempt to show me you still care?
I think not!

Even though the wound still hurts,
I think of you daily.
Will I ever be able to forget you?
I think not!

Coffee Shop

Jennifer Moore

Winner, Poetry

I walked out of that coffee shop
On September the 4th.
My only thought now
Is to head to the north.
I never want to see his face again.
How was I to know
That I slept with his twin?
It was his brother’s fault.
I know he knew better.
Now attached to my shirt
Is a scarlet letter.
Everyone’s mad at me
Like I’m the one to blame.
Now off to the courts
To change my last name.

34
Time  Ruben Hernandez
Winner, Best of Show
Up  Irvin Ortiz
In this dark vacant dilapidated house where the infestation of rodents and insects keep us company, lies a small hollow room where spiders spin their webs indiscriminately around the vast empty space. A snow of dust scatter among the floor, and dampness and the feeling of tragedy engulf the senses of anybody who walks into this room. The only inhabitants of this house are a sweet elderly lady lying in her small yet comfortable bed next to the only window in this room and me, a “young” man who is sitting next to her in a rotting wooden rocking chair. As I watch this aged woman known as Angela ponder as she gazes at the rainy weather from her window, I notice each and every detail of her frail face. Her face as pale as talc, her rumple skin covered in melanoma, her silvery strands of untamed hair. Most important of all, her dark glowing eyes that radiate Angela’s warm, charitable personality that stands in contrast to this desolate place.

“Daddy,” Angela speaks as she continues to look out the window. “Do you know what today is?”

“It’s Tuesday, March 31.” I reply. “Also, known as your birthday.”

My name is Jonah, and Angela is my daughter. She just turned twelve.

“Daddy, what are we going to do today?”

“Whatever you want, Angie. Whatever you want.”

Angela is no ordinary girl. For reasons only known to God, Angela was given a very special gift. She is the Fountain of Youth, brought forth as a human being. With her hands she can heal wounds, restore youth, and can even hold Death at bay.

“As much as I want to avoid it, I know Angie’s right. It’s no more living if I keep it for myself. What purpose does it serve anymore? It’s time to let go.”

Angela only stares at me for a few seconds, before she deconstructs herself with the raindrops patterning outside her window. I want to change the subject. I want to go back to discussing her birthday, but no words can come out. I inch myself closer and hug her, as she begins to cry.

Angie was ten when our lives change forever. It started on a Friday night, and her mom and I were getting into an argument about our finances and the stress that comes along with raising a girl like Angie, who began to feel sick more often. I remember leaving the house in a fit of rage and driving myself to the local bar. I wash all of my pains and troubles with alcohol. Not a day goes by where I don’t regret that decision.

They say that the car accident was fatal. That neither me nor the family driving were supposed to survive. My daughter was supposed to bury me. But Angie loved me. She loved me so much that she couldn’t stand losing me. So she did the only thing she knew she could do. She saved me. She saved me and she saved that the family that I selfishly endangered. And that’s when it happens. In front of our own eyes, she grew older and older until her youthful appearance gave way to her present state. Only then did we realize the consequences of Angie’s gift.

Her gift came at the expense of herself. Every broken bone she mends, every wrinkle she vanishes, every life reborn came at the expense of her own. Her health broke down easily and she aged more rapidly every time she uses her gift. And Angie healed me and the other family at the expense of the opportunity to experience her first boyfriend, graduating, a career, a husband, family. She gave it all away so that she can fix my stupidity.

Nothing was ever the same after that. I was condemned for the egotistical person that I am, and people began to pity poor Angie. In time, they grew to distrust her and it wasn’t long before the pressure of dealing with Angie and my guilt forced Angie’s mom to leave us. And now, we sit in this lonely home, with only each other to keep us company.

I regret the choices I made that led up to this, but I thank God everyday that Angie loves me so much, that she doesn’t hate me for taking away the life she could have. My sweet, caring Angie. After a quiet moment, Angie says, “Dad, I really want to help Elizabeth.”

“Angie, you know why we can’t help her.”

“Dad, what’s the point of having this gift if I keep it for myself? My time here is nearly over. You know that and I know that.”

“Angie, we both know that there’s a chance you might not.”

“Dad, what’s the point of living if I can’t use it to help others? If I have to go, then let me go out by using my gifts the way God intended me to. Please?”

As much as I want to avoid it, I know Angie’s right. It’s because of her that I have a second chance in life. Angie was all about helping those in need and who am I to rob Angie of that joy she gets from helping others? I kiss her on her forehead and reply

“Fine. Just know that no matter what happens, I’m proud of the woman you have become. I’m going to call her parent’s right now and see if we can come over.”

I try to walk as briskly, careful to put on a brave face for sweet Angie. As I head out the door, Angela calls out.

“Daddy, I love you.”

“I love you too, Angie. I love you too.”
Erase Her
Leonela Gonzalez
Winner, Poetry

I
Didn’t understand
The full capacity of a blank page
Before that day.

She
Was an unfinished outline
Of a pattern abandoned children
Claim and later trace for their own.

He...
Well, he left.

She spent years
Attempting to draft
An invisible man,
Hoping truth would render itself softly.

But how does one illustrate what they’ve never seen?

Her imagination
Couldn’t fill the pages either.
She had no story to tell
But refused to plagiarize.
His absence left lasting indiscernible imprints
In the form of scars.
When asked about them,
She acknowledged their existence
But only picked at them when she was alone.
She wondered if he did the same.

She blamed herself.

When blame turned into hate,
She awoke in front of a mirror
And saw that the imprints
Were his attempts to scratch her out.
When blame turned into hate,
She built up the strength
To believe she was permanent ink
And was not erasable.

So she turned to her sketches,
Rubbing each and every
Unreliable portrait of him out,
Unsuccessfully.
The imprints remain.

That day,
Sketched the storyboard her lips
Would never spew.

I witnessed the reunion of my mother
And the invisible man I never knew as my grandfather.

He didn’t recognize her.
They said he had been ill for a very long time.

Each dot on her outline had finally been connected.
The Line was strikingly visible and inescapable,
But redefined.

How long had she known
That the pages were not blank,
But rather ripped out of the spine
That belonged to her?

I have been left with all of my pages intact.
Blank,
And brand new,
So that I could map out every detail.
She gave me no pattern to trace.

He didn’t know her yesterday
He doesn’t know her today
And the doctors say he won’t know her tomorrow.

Even though doctors
Blame the absence of mind
On the disease,
The eraser,

The lump in her throat,
And the tears thrusting themselves out
Will never let her believe
It wasn’t He who
Erased her.

Drawing Pencil
Irvin Ortiz
Winner, Sculpture
Chapter One:

Rain fell like a waterfall from the sky as fog blanketed the windows of the St. Augustine Orphanage. To some, this place must’ve seemed like a prison. But the building itself resembled a church more than it did a home for unwanted children. The high ceilings, gothic archways, and stained glass windows bore resemblances to those imagined only in the darkest recesses of mankind’s worst nightmares. And the thick wooden doors with their pewter ring doorknocks would’ve seemed more at home in a horror novel than they would here.

Ezekiel Delacroix ascended the stone stairs with an air of caution before slowly approaching the double doors. The ring he touched was so cold that the metal stuck to his skin even as he lifted it.

Knock…
Knock…
Knock…

He stepped back half expecting the door to open on its own. However, several minutes passed before he heard the door unlocked. The woman that stood in the doorway was tall and gangly with high cheekbones and bland features. Her dark brown hair was pinned up in a tight bun and the expression she wore on her face was one of indifference as she stared at him from behind small rounded spectacles.

"Mr. Delacroix I presume?"
Her voice was firm, her tone clipped but clear.

“And you must be Ms. Beasley,” Ezekiel said, lowering his head politely.

“I am,” she replied, “I assume you’ve come for the girl?” Ezekiel nodded, “Yes, Madame.”

“This way,” she declared, motioning for him to follow as she turned on her heels.

Ezekiel noted several things as they walked the short distance between the front door and the parlor. The first was a staircase with black iron railing; the flat surface looked far too slippery, not at all safe for a child’s feet to use. The second was that all the rooms they passed were dark and empty. And lastly, there were no laughing children or noisy toys to be heard, just the bitter wail of strong winds outside.
“If you don’t mind me asking, Ms. Beasley,” Ezekiel murmured, “where are all of the children?”

“They are upstairs asleep,” she replied coldly, “as I would be now if not for you.”

“My apologies,” Ezekiel said, ignoring the British woman’s impolite comment.

The parlor she led him into was a large room filled with antiques and old, uncomfortable looking furniture. The dark walls and dark fabrics were cast in shadows by the pale light of the fireplace.

All in all, the décor seemed depressive. There were no children’s books among the shelves, merely thick spined encyclopedias, atlases, and one very old bible that sat by itself on the otherwise barren coffee table. Above the fireplace on the mantle sat a single miniature grandfather clock, its hands pointing diagonally in different directions. Ezekiel felt a chill in the air as he turned his attention to the tiny figure sitting alone on the thinly cushioned settee.

The little girl couldn’t have been more than four or five, small even for her age. Her porcelain skin, pale lightning blue eyes, high cheekbones, and delicate features reminded him of a doll. Although she was naturally thin, the tattered wool sweater could not hide the fact that she was also malnourished. He could also tell she was shy by the way she kept her eyes downcast, as if she were deliberately looking at the floor instead of trying to hide her dismay at the presence of a stranger.

“Here she is,” Ms. Beasley said matter-of-factly as she closed the distance between herself and the child. “Though I don’t see why you would want her. She is homely at best and…if I may be so bold…quite odd.”

With a swipe of her hand, she pulled the cap from the girls head and a cascade of medium golden blonde hair tumbling with both silver blonde and frost blonde highlights fell in feathered waves all the way to her bottom. Ezekiel stared at the child for a moment and then shook his head.

“Homely…odd…these are the words you’d use to describe her?”

Ms. Beasley nodded and said quite frankly, “Yes.”

“Then you are quite obviously a fool who knows nothing about true beauty.”

Ezekiel pretended not to notice the look of utter shock on the older woman’s face as he walked up to the girl and held out his hand. “Come along, Viviana. It’s late and I’m sure neither one of us wishes to remain here any longer.”

At first he wasn’t sure if she was going to listen to him. Any other child would’ve probably coward in fear or run from the room after being approached by a strange man she didn’t know. But this child was not like other children. Ezekiel knew that the moment she placed her tiny hand in his much larger one.

“Where are we going?” she asked as he led her away from the parlor and over to the front door.

Her voice was soft and sweet. It reminded him of tinkling silver bells.

“In the kitchen,” answered a feminine voice.

“A woman no taller than five-foot two was waiting for them. She was a slender, attractive woman with pale blue eyes and wavy dark auburn hair that was almost long enough to brush her shoulders. Her hair was styled in such a way that it feathered around her face, highlighting her high cheekbones and fairylke features, and she was dressed in a tailored knee length burgundy business skirt with a matching jacket that made her look exceptionally professional and very elegant.

Ezekiel placed a hand on Viviana’s upper back and gently nudged her forward.

“Viviana, meet my wife. Genevieve, this is Viviana.”

Genevieve frowned, “She’s so…thin.”

“She needs to eat more,” Ezekiel agreed.

The black wood and ivory keys must have been recently polished because they sparkled even in the pale light provided by the blazing fireplace that reflected off the authentic crystal chandelier above. Beige walls with ivory trimming surrounded champagne colored furniture and a winter white carpet. There was also an antique coffee table made of dark cherry wood and the shelves were littered with both fiction and nonfiction novels written by some of the world’s most famous authors.

“Genevieve,” Ezekiel called.

“In the kitchen,” answered a feminine voice.

The blood red brick that made up the mansion had faded with age, but the house itself still looked positively medieval with its gothic archways and spirals, large windows, and wrap around stone terrace. To Viviana, it resembled something straight out of a dark fairytale.

“Where are we?” she asked timidly as they ascended the stairs one at a time.

“This place has had many names over the past few centuries,” Ezekiel explained as he unlocked the door and led her inside. “But we just call it home.”

The interior of the house was very different from the outside. For one thing, it was much more modern. There was a grand piano in the parlor.

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“She needs to eat more,” Ezekiel agreed.
“Supper is ready,” Genevieve informed him. “It’s on the table.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” Ezekiel asked with a smile as he looked from his wife to the little girl. “Let’s eat, shall we?”

Genevieve made no attempt to approach Viviana or talk to her as she escorted them up the steps that led from the kitchen into the dining room. There was a large crystal chandelier dangling over a long dark cherry wood table which had been covered with a white cloth to keep spills and stains to a minimum. The delicious aroma of spices permeating the room teased Viviana’s nose, making her stomach growl. Besides the large roast beef serving as the centerpiece of the meal, several large bowls had been laid out on the table, and they were filled to the brim with carrots, green beans, broccoli, mashed potatoes, and gravy.

There were eight chairs altogether. Ezekiel pulled one out for his wife and she sat down. Then he lifted Viviana up and placed her in the chair directly across from Grace’s before taking his own seat between them at the head of the table.

Viviana didn’t eat the food right away. She poked and stared at it for several minutes while Ezekiel and Genevieve ate. Neither one of them said much of anything. And any time Genevieve glanced her way, Viviana pretended not to notice. Genevieve didn’t seem to like her very much at all, so she kept her gaze lowered, trying not to bring attention to herself. She wasn’t trying to be rude; she just didn’t want to do anything that might upset Ezekiel’s wife.

Ezekiel was the first to break the silence.

“This is very good Genevieve.”

“Thank you,” Genevieve replied, taking a sip of red wine from her glass. “I spoke with Mr. Thibodaux, the principal of the local elementary school. Viviana will begin attending classes in the fall.”

Viviana frowned, “School?”

Ezekiel smiled, “Yes, school.”

“But I already know how to read and write,” Viviana told him.

“There is more to school than reading, writing, and arithmetic,” Genevieve chimed in, adjusting her oval framed eyeglasses as she spoke. “Being around children your own age will improve your social skills and the extra curricular activities will help develop your creativity.”

“You’ll enjoy it,” Ezekiel assured her, “trust me.”

Viviana wasn’t convinced. Until now Ms. Beasley had been in charge of her schooling, and with that schooling had come discipline, something Viviana knew all too well. And after years of being teased and bullied by the other children at the orphanage, she had no desire to be around others her own age. Still, she wasn’t about to argue. Doing so might anger Ezekiel or his wife, and make them want to take her back to the orphanage and that was the last thing she wanted.

* * *

“Bath time,” Ezekiel declared.

Viviana didn’t even put up a fight. Instead, she followed him up the grand staircase and down the left wing of the chateau into a large bathroom with a sandy colored tile floor and a pacific blue granite countertop. Off white walls and a blue Victorian style curtain greeted her as she approached the large sauna tub. This had to be the biggest bathroom she’d ever seen!

“There’s the soap,” Ezekiel said, pointing to a large pink bar. “And those are the shampoos and conditioners.” Several bottles lined the back of the tub, each of them smelling of a different fruit or spice.

“We weren’t sure which one you would like best, so we got you one of each,” he explained.

“Thank you,” Viviana murmured as she continued to stare at the tub.

“Now, remember to wash behind your ears,” Ezekiel told her. “Then get ready for bed when you’re finished, alright?”

Viviana noticed a small stack of clothes sitting on the counter as he turned and left the room. She waited for the door to close then stripped out of her old garments and tossed them in the laundry bin in the farthest corner of the room. Because there were steps leading up into the egg shaped tub, she had no trouble getting in, and the warm water felt wonderful against her already clammy skin.

When she was finished, her hair smelled of strawberries and crème while her skin carried the mildest hint of cinnamon. It was a pleasant change. Back at the orphanage there hadn’t been hot water, not for the orphans at least, and scented soaps were a luxury Ms. Beasley had kept solely to herself.

New clothes had been even rarer. Viviana looked around to make sure she was alone before she picked up the undergarments and nightgown that had been left out for her. The panties and socks matched the long sleeved nightgown which was a simple but elegant pale pink with white lace trimming on the hem, neckline, and wrists.

Wearing the nightgown made her feel like a princess. Viviana looked into the mirror and a smile spread across her face. She even looked like a princess! Without the dirt under her nails or the tattered clothes, she no longer resembled the ratty little orphan no one wanted. Viviana ran the soft bristled brush through her hair several times before brushing her teeth thoroughly. After she was done, she made sure the cap was on the toothpaste and turned off the bathroom light as she closed the door.

* * *

“She hates me, doesn’t she?” Genevieve asked dismally, looking up when her husband entered the room.

“Actually,” Ezekiel replied as he began to undress. “She thinks you hate her.”

The expression on Genevieve’s face was one of surprise and disdain. “What? Why would she think that?”

“You do have a tendency to intimidate people,” Ezekiel admitted as he pulled on a pair of grey sweatpants. “And first impressions are very important, especially when it comes to children. You have to make them feel welcome and wanted or they’ll believe you don’t like them.”

“But I do want her!” Genevieve protested, “I just…”

Ezekiel chuckled as he placed a hand under his wife’s chin and tilted her head so she’d meet his gaze. “You’re nervous. All first time mothers are.”

“I don’t know what to do,” she sighed.

“You could start by coming with me to saying goodnight,” Ezekiel suggested, motioning towards their partially opened bedroom door.

Genevieve hesitated for a moment before she pulled back the burgundy quilt and slid out of bed.
Mike from Maintenance

Jennifer Moore

He works day in and out
Doing things before you think to ask
Such a sweet and funny man
Doesn’t deserve such a gruesome task

When you inform him of the mess
You’ll never see him flinch
He’s already got his mop bucket
Mopping every single inch

When he sees me clocking in
He takes time to say hello
We talk for a few minutes
His generosity can really show

He tells me of the things
That he’s cleaned since he arrived
If I’d been told to clean those things,
I’m not certain I would’ve survived.

He’s mistreated and disrespected
By people who feel superior
Why can’t those people realize
There’s more to him than the exterior?

He doesn’t look like much
Just an old man who cleans our Wal-Mart
No one thinks about the fact
That he takes his job straight to heart

Next time that you see him
Treat him with more respect
Because without him there working
Our store would be a wreck
Bitter Truth
Tricia Hardy

Monsters are waiting underneath my bed tonight. How do I sleep if I’m already dreaming? How do I step out the door- Face a world in which you no longer subsist?

You now progress into the mystery upon which we all will eventually stumble. Happiness fades like the last glimmer of color As the sun sets deeper and deeper into the bosom of the Earth.

I’m broken and still piecing it all together.
And the whiskey doesn’t help.
Why have I resorted to this dreadful routine-
Drowning in emotion thinking about tomorrow.
Don’t want to wake to find you still gone.

A Lady, A Swan, and A Guy On A Park Bench
Ayut Sainju

I’m broken and still piecing it all together.
And the whiskey doesn’t help.
Why have I resorted to this dreadful routine-
Drowning in emotion thinking about tomorrow.
Don’t want to wake to find you still gone.

Wasted
Orelia Lozano

When you pass out drunk on the floor,
Your bottle is mine to keep.
But I won’t choose to drink; no.
I’ll never be that weak.

You live each day wondering How you’re going to get more beer. And I’m scared you won’t live long enough To make it through this year.

The time has passed and you won’t change, I feel like I don’t know you. Go ahead, and drink your life away, But I won’t be here for you.
"The easy thing to do would be to stand here and cry. Everyone keeps saying how he wouldn’t want us crying, but how else do you show that you’ll miss someone? I was the last one to see him alive and the one to watch him die. When I saw him, I was past hope, past lying to myself, and I knew he was not going to make it."

Two days and a haircut earlier this man felt more like a boy. He watched the family gather at the old man’s house. The nervous laughter that happens at times like this offended the boy even though he understood it. He wouldn’t be a part of it though. There he was sitting alone in a room in his grandfather’s chair. The old man was clean and never carried a scent with him so the recliner still smelt like leather.

This all would be easier if the boy were a believer. Then he wouldn’t have to let go; he would just have to wait to see his grand-dad again. He had hope though. Lots of it. The old man was a lion and this wouldn’t be his last roar. Still, the boy wrote kind words in his little book. The same kind of book his grandfather kept in his shirt pocket.

Always have pen and paper.

It was one of the old man’s rules, part of his way of life. He was a self-made man. A millionaire now who started off his working life walking an hour to his job at a restaurant. Walking a little faster at night when his shift ended; his hand on his knife at all times.

The boy felt the knife in his pocket and felt proud of himself. The old man taught him a lot over the past few years. They weren’t distant while the boy was growing up, but they didn’t have what they have now. The old man saw that the boy was turning into a man. It was a slow change, but still he was becoming a man even though he could drink legally a year ago and a girl had already made him a man in high school.

God, why couldn’t he believe? He had faith when he was young. He had faith through the death of his mother, through the molestation, through what people would call rougher times. Why couldn’t he have it now? The boy couldn’t think about this now. He started to cry and no one noticed because he never made a sound while crying. It was just a few leaks around the eyes. He kept on with the kind words in the little book. He wished more would come to him like magic even though he wished he wouldn’t have to use them. He knew he wouldn’t have to use them.

He couldn’t decide if he was selfish or chicken shit for not going in to see the old man yet. He kept writing. He mouthed the words to himself, "The easy thing to do would be to stand here and cry. Everyone keeps saying how he wouldn’t want us crying but how else do you show that you’ll miss someone?" He cried a little more and kept writing.

The boy’s pen was interrupted by a cousin’s voice, "Jack. He wants to see you."

Jack walked into his grandfather’s room and stopped lying to himself.

The old man nodded and said, "Well, I guess it’s time for me to go then."

"I really wish you didn’t have to."

"I do, too, son, but I have to."

"I know."

Tell everyone I love them. Tell your grandmother she’s still my life. Keep her going to the doctor. She doesn’t need to rush to see me."

"I will."

"I know you will. You think you’re weak, but that’s where your strength is."

The boy cried harder and made a sound.

"I’m damn proud of the man I met in you."

"A lot of that is you, grand-dad."

"That’s how I’ll stay alive."

His grand-dad nodded off to sleep for a few last breaths. The boy felt all the parts of the old man that would stay alive inside of him and they weren’t enough.

"I love you." said the man, no longer a boy.
One Amazing Sunset
Thadd Price

Grandpa and I were sitting on the porch on that warm summer's eve, just relaxing and people watching. The kids were still playing, some of the adults were strolling down the street, the birds were frolicking, and the crickets were chirping. Night was approaching slowly but no one seemed to notice.

“Sonny, have I ever told you the story from when I was your age?”
“No, Grandpa. Do tell.”

“When I was your age,” he said, reminiscing to get the story just right, “my father and I would sit out every evening like we are doing right now, and he told me to take my time and study very thoroughly the women I was dating.”

“Why, Grandpa?” I asked.

“Because when you study every aspect of them, you know what kind of person they are. Look at your grandma and me; we’ve been together for almost forty-five years now, and we’ve never been happier. But, now a days,” he said, “any little misunderstanding and they want a divorce. What kind of world are we in now?” he asked, pausing as if for effect. “See,” he continued, “you youngsters have no sense of hard work. Back in the old days, we walked everywhere, and we stayed outside all day long; our parents had to practically drag us back inside. My friend Larry Bumpkin and I would walk four miles one way to the general store for some bubble gum. Now this current generation is so lazy they barely walk to the mailbox to get the mail. They stay inside playing video games in the air conditioning whereas we made up our own games. That was the most fun I can recall. You should take a lesson from us “old” folks; it would really ‘blow your mind’ as you kids would say!”

“You are funny but wise, Grandpa. Thanks for the advice.”

As the daylight faded, it left the most amazing sunset. “Wow! How awesome; this has got to be the most amazing sight I ever saw,” I told my Grandpa. When I looked over to catch his reaction, what happened next surprised me. He closed his eyes ever so softly, took a deep breath, and slowly faded away with the sun. “Grandpa. . .Gr…Grandpa?”

He was gone. I whispered, “Thank you for the wonderful evening and the story. I will always love you, Grandpa!” Then I opened the old rusty door that squeaked in protest and went in to tell my parents.
You Don’t Know Anything
(A Story in a Unique Second Person Perspective)
Shaun Peralta
Winner, Short Fiction

The Room
You see yourself in a mirror, gazing at your own reflection. You realize that you are in a place that is not familiar to you. You have a feeling that someone is watching you, but you don’t know who. You don’t know why. You decide to walk around the room and gauge the surroundings. Thinking that someone has kidnapped you, you suddenly feel very panicked. Your eyes become wide and they dilate somewhat due to the sudden, sensational rush that is negative excitement. Frantically, your head turns and looks at everything in the room. You see a shelf, filled with different kinds of books. You see large text books, small novels, even a few comics and graphic novels from foreign nations. You also spot a desk. On the desk you see a cup that held writing utensils in it, and several books. You see large text books, small novels, even a few comics and graphic novels from foreign nations. You also spot a desk. On the desk you see a cup that held writing utensils in it, and several sheets of paper with some writing on it. The desk doesn’t have any drawers. You see a bed, raggedy and old with white sheets. Very light yellow tinges upon the sheets tell you that someone else has been there before. You’re scared, you don’t know why this person has kidnapped you. You don’t know where you are. You decide to sit down upon the bed, despite what it has been tainted with. Your eyes continue to scan the area, and you stop at one very peculiar space. It was the bottom corner by the door. If you were to open the door, that certain area would be covered up. Eyes lingering on that very corner, you make out what it is that draws you to look at it. Faint, crimson stains decorate the place that catches your interest. You stare and stare, trying to make out what it is. Getting up, your curiosity leads to you walk forward and touch the place with your cold, trembling hands. You hesitate, hearing footsteps continuously walking. They’re getting louder. And louder. Nearer, and still nearer. The illusion created by a panicked mind. The volume of the footsteps becomes louder and louder. You can’t take it anymore. You become frantic and your eyes feel like they are about to bulge out. Wide eyes. Wide dilated eyes. Wide dilated eyes of a frantic person. The footsteps stop, and you let out a sigh of great relief. Then, the door opens and a girl steps in. She’s wearing only a long shirt. You can see that the tank top stops at her mid-thigh. She grins at you, her eyes wide and black. You’re scared. But there’s one thing. The girl is much smaller than you. You can overpower her. Will you do it?

The Struggle
You can overpower her. You are much larger than her. You can do this. Will you do it? You attempt to tackle her, running at her with full force and your upper body spearheading the assault. You run, and you feel running into someone. You’ve knocked her over. You have done it. After tackling her down, you keep running. You run as far as your legs will allow you to go. You have escaped her. You have done it. You’re breathing hard, you’re running as fast as you can. You are escaping this hellhole. You run around the condemned place until you see something down the hall. As you see a door coming closer and closer, your hopes rise and fly. The door. Closer and closer. Your hopes. Higher and higher. Bigger and bigger. You keep running, you breathe hard, the sounds of your panting undulating within the hallway you are running in. Then, suddenly, you only see a blur of white come in front of you before you are looking up at the girl from the ground. You only feel incredulous pain upon your head before blacking out.

Within your unconscious being, you’re feeling a sort of tingle. You see very faint, very vague images of a white figure. You cannot make out what or who it is. The you that is in your mind tries to get closer to the figure, but, before you can reach out and touch her, your own eyes begin to seer and burn. Your eyes are really open, and light is flooding into them. They burn with excruciating pain. You squat and bring your hands up to rub them, writhing and crying due to the stinging pain. After comforting yourself by rubbing your eyes, you look around and survey where you are. You’re back in that room. That really unfamiliar room. But before even wondering what had happened, you ponder about that figure in your mind. Just who was that vague, white figure? Your mind races with the thoughts of who or what this white figure is. You decide to set that aside, choosing that it isn’t of importance quite yet. You ponder on your whereabouts now. You decide to deal with the situation you are in right now.

Your mind sets in, this girl, this kidnapper will not let you out. She’s gonna keep you here until she’s finished with you. What does she want from you? Why is she doing this? Does she hate you? Is she gonna keep you here until she’s finished with you. What does she want from you? Why is she doing this? Does she hate you? Is it some sort of sick love? Even more, what is the deal with that white figure?

The Epiphany
You breathe hard, your frantic nature returning. The room slowly begins to swirl around, and your eyes widen to the point where they seem like they will bulge out. This room. The room is distorting itself. Your mind is tricking you, you wonder. Trickery, playing games with you. You can’t stand it. You wish you can just put yourself out of your misery. But you can’t. Something is keeping you alive. For some reason, you can’t bring yourself to actually kill yourself. Your mind. Your body. This room. That girl. That white figure. Your mind begins to race as it continues to distort and contort in perplexing ways. You breathe hard, failing to your knees. You clutch your head in agony and insanity. You open your mouth to let out a loud scream, but you don’t hear anything. Your mind is playing with you again. Your mind races and your eyes widen. And then, suddenly, that white figure begins to fill your mind. Dozens of images. Images of that white figure. Those images continue to fill and race. The images vanish as fast as they came. So fast, you can’t tell the transition between appearing and disappearing. They vanish one by one, removing the clutter that is in your mind. Suddenly, it gets to that last image, where it’s the white figures...
face. A young, pale, feminine face stares at you. The lips of that face curl, the ends slowly pointing upward in a kind smile. You gasp, and then everything stops.

Your breathing slowly begins to calm. Your eyes no longer feel like they're bulging out. Your head isn't throbbing anymore. Your hands come down from your head. Standing up and closing your eyes, you sit back down upon that tainted bed. You look down in between your parted legs, at the ground. Your mind is calm at the moment. Calm as still water. For now, all you can do is wonder why you're here. Another thought flashes through your mind. That white figure. You've broken her identity down once more. You understand that the white figure must be a person. A girl with a normal, feminine face. A boy with a feminine face. That that still doesn't remove the fact that you don't know who it is to you. Why is it plaguing your mind? Why is it filling up your mind? You sigh and wonder about these questions, repeating them over and over in your head. Repetitively, the question fills your mind. You shake your head, clearing yourself of that thought.

You ponder, but your train of thought stops as you hear the familiar sounds of footsteps. After the escape attempt you tried a while ago, you have decided that there won't be anymore of that. You don't really know what you are going to do when confronted with that girl. You just decide to wait and face her. The door opens, and you turn your head quickly to it. That same girl from before looks at you. You can see her more clearly now, since you are more sane than you previously were. Pale complex, black hair. Red eyes that peer straight past whatever she stared at. Her slender figure stepped forward and those red eyes fell upon you. You feel a light tingle in your head, your reaction to the girl staring at you is to smile. Why are you smiling? Isn't this the girl the one that is keeping you here against your will. Who is she? And why are you smiling at her. Your eyes stare at her face, examining her. Her face remained without emotion for a moment. Moments passed. Moments of constant staring at each other. The girl then slowly smiles at you.

"Eeh."

You widen your eyes and slowly stand up. That smile. That calming smile. You stare at her lush lips curling upward into that peaceful, generous smile. That smile, the same smile you saw in your mind earlier. That SAME smile. The girl stares at you, wondering why you’re standing up. You look at her completely, examining her. You see that she has no arms. No, that isn’t right. Her arms are tucked behind her back. You look lower, and you see her legs mostly exposed. The shirt she wore rustled as she stepped forward. She says something, but you don’t hear it. You’re too busy sorting yourself out. Your eyes waver and shake as you step away from the girl, eventually pressing your back firmly against the wall. The girl stops her advance and she blinks. Just staring at you. Her smile faded and she only turned around and walked out, closing the door behind her. You pant slowly, and you walk forward. Your eyes are wide again, but not so wide to where they feel like they’re slowly popping out of your eye-sockets. You gulp and then look back to that desk. You see the paper The paper has some sort of language written on it. You don’t understand it, so you don’t pay attention to it. Suddenly, your vision blacks out and your mind begins to distort once more.

Mind races. Images flash. You can barely make out the significance of the image before seeing another. You see that white figure again. That white girl who just left this room. You see some sort of line written in a sort of language that you don’t understand. A language of numbers. You snap back to reality, realizing something. You look at the piece of paper from before. You recognize the letters, now. You blink, widening your eyes. You step toward the desk, reaching out for the paper. The closer you get to the desk, another image enters your mind. In a few steps, you see a girl seated in a chair. Then you see that they’re typing on some sort of computer. Several steps in and you see that they’re inputting something onto a large screen. It’s the code in that numerical language again. The code looks familiar, and it's becoming more apparent what it is as they continue to type it. By the time you've reached your desk, you visualize the girl pressing “Enter” and it shows a different scene where you see a child in a bed with several wire-like objects coming out of a helmet upon its head. When all of these awkward scenes are done, you’re seated in front of the desk. You begin writing. As you write, that girl is flashing through your mind. That girl in white. You see her smiling. You see her holding hands with someone. You see her playful and happy. You see her comforting those who are distressed and crying. That girl. Who is that girl? What makes her so important? You continue to write, too attached to pay attention to anything else. You notice the desk become darker, but some sections at the side still lit by the light. You blink and slowly turn around. Without any explanation or hesitation, you’re grabbed by the head and thrown to the corner by the door. You look up and breathe hard. You pant and pant. Eyes scanning at the person, you recognize them. It's that girl again. She’s walking toward you and smiling. She kneels down and slowly reaches out. You’re suddenly calm, and you feel relaxed. You’re so calm, you too tranquil to pay attention to things. You feel a soft sensation in your stomach, your gut becoming somewhat lose. You’re losing all tension. You feel another sensation in your chest, as if all pressure is leaving it. Your eyes narrow and look up to the girl. She’s smiling at you with that kind and generous grin. She stands up slowly, and you look straight forward. Your eyes fall upon her hands and shirt.

You see something.

It’s slightly rectangular with an almost wicked tip at the top of the rectangle, pointing downward. You see crimson on her shirt, dripping scarlet. You blink and look down, widening your eyes as your own gutted and horrendously punctured torso. Soaked blankets of crimson continue pouring out. You can see your organs somewhat. You widen your eyes and then look up to the girl. She’s just staring down at you, saying something. You can’t hear, though. You breathe hard again. Panting and panting. Suddenly, you just stop breathing and everything becomes black. Your mind, your vision, everything begins to simply stop working. They stop working in a similar way. Everything becomes black and void of anything.

Your eyes open and you’re in a room. You stand up and then look around. You see yourself in a mirror, gazing at your own reflection. You realize that you are in a place that is not familiar to you. You have a feeling that someone is watching you, but you don’t know who. You don’t know why. You don’t know anything.

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The Wave 
Yahsmin Sanchez
Cold, Concrete and Obsolete

Krista Ovalle

After our last I Love You,
I will forget your color, just as night forgets day.
I’ll smile when I think of you, even if I’m sad.

You escaped my grasp, lifeless stare.
I whisper unheard words but after this, my silence will learn to speak volume.

Without yours lies I will become untied
left to find the remnants of my sanity.
With a patched heart I will laugh again, heart above my head.
I’ll leave the pain to the ink and write these words till their brink.

I’ll let you be the silhouette of what I’ve never had.
Sick, crazy, flickering dream, desolate upon barren fields.
I know traces still remain of what I used to be.

I cannot walk around this random street in an unimportant city.
I’m sorry but this,

this is our last I Love You.

Trampa De Amor

Lizbeth DeLeon

Desde que te conoci
No te dejo de pensar
Andas libre por mi mente
Y jamas haz de parar

Hoy los dias me los paso
En las nubes junto a ti
Y entre mas me lo imagino
Mas te quiero para mi

Sueño con tus besos tiernos
Y tus labios endulzados
Y por mas que te me opongas
Te tendre un dia aqui a mi lado

Por eso yo te pido
Que no pongas resistencia
Pues mi amor te atrapara
Asi que dale tu obediencia

Empty Space

Edber Olvera

Looking at this world I feel out of place
So sick and tired, I’m breaking out of this cage
Away from this place so voluntarily
Filled with madness and hate.
So unfortunate: we may never escape
Fate.
The price we pay for misplaced Hate.
We look at a world we have changed
Into nothing but empty space.
The Trill, An Excerpt
Heather Kutschenreuter

Such skill should be impossible. Niccolo Paganini plays the violin as though love is nothing else. The sounds, the emotion crying around us is as everyone says: magical. “What do you make of this?” I ask the shadow beside me, for man is not an accurate enough description and creature seems much too harsh.

“I do not like it nor dislike it,” comes the classic Abner response. A shadow hardly has an opinion on anything, I’ve found. “What of his appearance?” I try again. Even from this distance – the far end of the concert hall, hidden behind the aristocrats – Paganini is quite visible. His hollowed face looks little more than a skeleton, and I am certain the rumors of his missing teeth are true. A gruesome looking man, yet so desired. “How odd he still has admirers at the end of the night.”

“A famous man will always have admirers,” Abner says. I wish to slap my forehead as maybe that will separate me from his stupidity. “You are correct, however. A man in contract with a devil has the right of all sin, including lust. Especially lust.” I perk up at this, but he is too intent on something far off (I doubt it’s the violinist) to notice. “Yet you ask for none of these things.”

“Tempting men is not what interests me.” I lift my chin just a bit, enough to portray the same strength my mother was always capable of. “I am beyond such petty things.”

“All good deeds done on the path to Hell fall on deaf ears, Zoë,” he reminds me. “You forfeited your right to repent when you signed the contract.” So I might as well enjoy what has been given, he is saying. Useless words, nothing more. Once the concert is over, while the aristocrats fawn over Paganini and the commoners wait outside to hear the reviews, Abner and I head out into the darkness. Paganini, we know, has been spending his nights over on the lower east side of Paris, not too far a journey by carriage. When we arrive, Abner the shadow, the fearsome devil, shrouds us in darkness and scales the wall to the window where we’ve seen Paganini on previous nights like this, practicing, drinking, falling more into sin. We know this room well, along with the broken mechanism in the window that grants us easy entry.

I take to observing the silly little trinkets he has littered throughout, things not worth owning. He should understand, more than anyone, how unimportant these things are. Abner, on the other hand, takes to the darkest corner of the room and sits in a chair there to play a discarded violin. Tartini’s Sonata in G Minor begins, yet it isn’t long before he stops and lowers the instrument. It is the only warning I receive before the lock on the door clicks out of place and in steps our hopeful hero.
CHAPTER ONE

“Rock, paper, scissors it?” Gary asked.
“Sure thing, bro.”
“On three. One, two, three...damn it!”
“Paper wins it every time, bro. Applecheese for lunch, bitch.”
Luke jumped out of his chair with both arms raised in victory and continued the pose down the cubicle hallway towards the elevator, stopping in random intervals to scream “Applecheese!” into the cubicles of his office mates.

Victor’s cubicle was second to last from the lift and consequently a waypoint for the lunch bound duo. He hurriedly repacked his homemade sandwich and chips into their sack and slid them into a drawer.

Laura was eight cubbies down. Vincent had to move fast. He pushed the mouse and woke the computer up and went searching for his headphones. They were his only chance to escape the nonsensical banter of the two. Now where did he put them? Skinny center drawer? No. Big empty one? Negative. “Shit.”
“Try looking under your lunch-sack, in the right hand middle drawer, that’s where I toss all my useless shit into,” Mia said from the cubicle across the hall.

Victor pushed off his desk and rolled into view of his ‘door’ and stared at her. “These things are f____ing black holes.”
“Applecheese!”

Mia rolled to her door and looked, “Charley. Three down. Just use mine.” She tossed her headphones to Victor and remained in the doorway. She had rejected both Gary and Luke in a spectacular public display of dressing down a few years back and they had stopped all communication with her. Somehow they considered that a punishment.

Victor pulled on the headphones and risked a glance at the lift. Sixteen and going up. Three more floors. He stared hard at the down button, wishing he could telekinetically push it.

“Don’t forget to plug them in,” Mia advised with a wink.
“Right.” Victor responded and pulled back up to his desk and pushed the brass tip into the computer. He had once forgotten this important detail and was caught bopping to a nonexistent tune by Luke and Gary. It took six months for those jokes to run their course. He could smell the cheap, douchey cologne and brought up the last spreadsheet he had opened and pretended to analyze.

“Applecheese...” Luke trailed off at the sight of Mia. She was sitting prim and proper and had undone the top two buttons of her blouse. “I’m starving. Ger. You?”

“Yeah, man yeah...big time starving,” came Gary’s vapid response.

Victor had been witness to Mia’s routine before and knew the willpower he had to exude. The sheer agony of those two overheated window-lickers had to be suffering through was unheard music to his ears.

“Morning, boys,” Mia said, suggesting nothing.
“Think I’m going to try the wings again today. What about you?” was Luke’s second attempt in detracting any attention towards Mia. He pushed the down button.

“Chicken sounds good, bro. Maybe a breast.”

Victor’s head hit the monitor and he choked back a laugh.

“Okay in there, Vicky?” Luke asked and poked his head in.

The lift dinged and Victor had survived another day of asinine verbal torture and felt mildly relieved. He waited until he heard the lift doors click shut and scooted back to his doorway and handed Mia her headphones. She hadn’t yet buttoned up.

“If it wasn’t for their constant drooling over my cleavage, I would swear they were queer,” she said more to herself. “Don’t you think?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Victor said to her chest. “Who knows, maybe they’re thinking of you as the slam to each other’s backdoor?” He snapped his head up and met her gaze as she snapped out of her spacewalk to stare at him. “Sorry,” he stammered. “Just, you know...”

“Oh my God, Victor,” she laughed. “I will now have that image stuck in my head until I can get some good wine in me tonight. Even then, I may need a good hot shower to fully cleanse my mind. Heavens, Victor.” She rolled herself out of sight and continued to feign shocked horror.

Victor looked at his lap and sighed. He was going to be doing some damage control of his own tonight.

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Victor exited the train station and began the five block walk to his flat. He enjoyed the walk and the few moments it allowed him to be free from any responsibility. Once home, he would begin his evening routine of feeding his cat, watering the periwinkles, and deciding on which frozen meal he wished to delight upon while he watched his Tuesday night stories. Being Tuesday, his stories would wrap up around nine and he could then afford an hour to simply relax. Maybe begin on that latest bestseller he picked up a few months back that he hadn’t quite managed to start. It was all the talk at work after its release and has been collecting dust on his headboard since the night he bought it, and he was quite looking forward to digging in and catching up with Mia.

The thought of Mia brought a smile to his face and he breathed in a deep breath of cool air and started to whistle a, as up to then, forgotten tune from some childhood Saturday morning cartoon. After their brief exchange this afternoon, Victor was again thinking of a possible connection: maybe not love, but, perhaps, a good time. If it lead to a more complicated situation? Well, he certainly wouldn’t oppose the idea, but he also didn’t want to flatter himself by thinking he was worthy of a woman like Mia for a lifetime.

“They attacked my homeland! Read about it in The Sentinel.”

The Asian man who ran the newsstand on Victor’s block cried out as he approached. Vincent had always enjoyed the man, and on occasion bought a paper or rag from him for the train ride into town. Never on his way home, though. Nobody read the papers much anymore, and certainly not anyone in his circle of acquaintance—they were much too caught up in the nightly stories and bestsellers to pay attention to the issues at large, and Vincent’s personality had always lead him to be a follower.

“Mr. Victor, North Lunia broke the Treaty of 1954 and fired several missile into the border towns of my homeland, South Lunia.” The Asian, whom Victor always just called Bruce in his head, stepped in front of him holding the paper out for him to take.

“You’re from South Lunia?” Victor asked with a touch of excitement in his voice. He was friendly with a few of the black kids at his school in his youth, but had not really known, much less conversed with, anyone of a different culture in some twenty years.

“Yes. I was born there, but before the war, my father moved as he approached. Vincent had always enjoyed the man, and on occasion bought a paper or rag from him for the train ride into town. Never on his way home, though. Nobody read the papers much anymore, and certainly not anyone in his circle of acquaintance—they were much too caught up in the nightly stories and bestsellers to pay attention to the issues at large, and Vincent’s personality had always lead him to be a follower.

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Victor exited the train station and began the five block walk to his flat. He enjoyed the walk and the few moments it allowed him to be free from any responsibility. Once home, he would begin his evening routine of feeding his cat, watering the periwinkles, and deciding on which frozen meal he wished to delight upon while he watched his Tuesday night stories. Being Tuesday, his stories would wrap up around nine and he could then afford an hour to simply relax. Maybe begin on that latest bestseller he picked up a few months back that he hadn’t quite managed to start. It was all the talk at work after its release and has been collecting dust on his headboard since the night he bought it, and he was quite looking forward to digging in and catching up with Mia.

The thought of Mia brought a smile to his face and he breathed in a deep breath of cool air and started to whistle a, as up to then, forgotten tune from some childhood Saturday morning cartoon. After their brief exchange this afternoon, Victor was again thinking of a possible connection: maybe not love, but, perhaps, a good time. If it lead to a more complicated situation? Well, he certainly wouldn’t oppose the idea, but he also didn’t want to flatter himself by thinking he was worthy of a woman like Mia for a lifetime.

“They attacked my homeland! Read about it in The Sentinel.”

The Asian man who ran the newsstand on Victor’s block cried out as he approached. Vincent had always enjoyed the man, and on occasion bought a paper or rag from him for the train ride into town. Never on his way home, though. Nobody read the papers much anymore, and certainly not anyone in his circle of acquaintance—they were much too caught up in the nightly stories and bestsellers to pay attention to the issues at large, and Vincent’s personality had always lead him to be a follower.

“Mr. Victor, North Lunia broke the Treaty of 1954 and fired several missile into the border towns of my homeland, South Lunia.” The Asian, whom Victor always just called Bruce in his head, stepped in front of him holding the paper out for him to take.

“You’re from South Lunia?” Victor asked with a touch of excitement in his voice. He was friendly with a few of the black kids at his school in his youth, but had not really known, much less conversed with, anyone of a different culture in some twenty years.

“Yes. I was born there, but before the war, my father moved...”
village was ravaged by the North. They spared no one and now, me, my wife, and children are the sole survivors of my father's name." He pointed out a passage in the article, "And now, they must have some really high expectations from you with a name like Victor America. Really...lofty goals, yeah?"

Victor shrugged in accordance.

"Come on now, don't be a cunt. I know who you are: the grandson of Mom and Pop America. Should take you in for shits and giggles, yeah? The boy's downtown would get a kick outta that, wouldn't they?" He tapped the tip of the badge against his chin and thought for a second. "Or maybe not. Nobody gives a shit about the losers, and your parents are barely mentioned in my university studies. Guess you get to live in an anonymous state, huh? People may recognize the name, but not care enough to inquire about it, huh?"

Another shrug.

"And you seem to have more of your parents about you, than Mom and Pop. Their apple tree was apparently planted atop a steep f__ing hill, huh?"

Victor looked past the UPFC. He was beyond tired. The self-absorbing grin of the thoroughly satisfied UPFC was on the verge of jumping the chubby borders of his face as he finally relented. "Okay. Okay, I'm just f__ing with you, yeah? Let's finish this up and get you back on your way." He flipped the badge over and flashed the barcode and read in single letters.

A pulsating yellow light emitting from the scanner caught Victor's eye and he noticed the cops' face had returned to its original solemn state.

After a few moments, the UPFC handed back Victor's badge and said, "Well...Mr. America, the Governing Bodies of Unified Governments has...instilled in me to wish you well on this..." He lifted his eyes and looked suspiciously at the heavy clouds above and then glanced back at the scanner and sighed, "On this beautiful day, and also suggests that I offer my sincere apologies in the event I said anything unfortunate about yourself or your historical family."

Victor briefly raised an inquisitive eyebrow, not understanding this sudden change in tenor, but, still, waiting for the actual apology. The cop just stared and Victor shrugged again, "Okay. Accepted."

"Outstanding, Mr. America," the cop began with a forced over-"appraisal," "now, if you have no further questions, I would like to remind you to heed the warning concerning your future manners of standing." He stopped again and stared, needing a reply before being allowed to move on Victor figured (a truthful thing, and one that the UPFC very much wanted right now to do).

"Right, yeah...I'll heed the warning," Victor stumbled, searching for the cop's name badge and finding it: 1st Rank Beat Officer Miller. He would have to put in a call to Eddie.

"Very good, sir. Good day to you." He didn't wait for a reply (since he was not instructed to wait for a valediction) and quickly turned on his heel and power walked as fast as he could away from Victor and his newfound aura of fear.

Chapter 2

It was the story his mother told him to counteract the revisionists spoofs afforded to the winners.

They had first met while waiting for a train in Chicago. Sophia Rose Tess was on summer holiday before starting university in Germany and knew only a smattering of English, and Gerald Alexander Courtland was an English graduate student with six years of German under him.

She had enrolled as a sociology major, but it was a childhood love of architecture that brought her stateside. He canceled plans and helped her navigate through the color coded lines of the L and was invited to join her as she explored the Oak Park neighborhood. They spoke in German.

"Frank Lloyd Wright enthusiast, are you?" he asked as they took the remaining two seats on the Green Line train. "Yes," she said quickly, her smile growing. "My mother visited Fallingwater when she was a child and I don't ever remember not having a picture of that house hanging somewhere, no matter where we lived. For the longest time I believed that snapshot was how all Americans lived: in harmony with nature..." She trailed off and smiled an apology, but he just shrugged it off (knowing full well how all Americans lived: in harmony with nature..."

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Winter Hunter

Jeff Ficklin

Winner, Poetry

I saw her face once from afar, a legend told only in stories of old,
An uncontrollable inferno in the cold winter darkness.
Only the mountain winds know her name;
Only the oaks know her face;
Only the wolves know her scent;

My prey, the Earth guides me to you.
Winter Goddess, Queen of Frost, Siren of the Northern Winds
Many names, one form, one desire.
I am the hunter, worn and tired but ever searching.
Her fires are all I desire, all I need, all I dream.

The mountain winds whisper her name to me.
The oaks paint her face for me.
The wolves lead me through the darkness.
She, of many names, daughter of the ancients spirits of Earth
Her embers lure me closer to her beauty that shames the majestic peaks.

May her blazing aura consume me whole.
Her fire whispers to me the answers I desire.
My clothes burn to ash as her embrace envelopes me.
For only the briefest moment I became one with her.
Winter Goddess, I was your Winter Hunter.

Soon, the falling snow will erase that I ever existed

The Ice Will Be All We Know

Jeff Ficklin

The spring’s rivers flow by
An Eagle soars the blue skies
Life anew but soon all will be erased
The spell of perpetual winter is about to embrace
Winter’s grasp freezes all
A harsh judgment that awaits us all
The sun fades from life eternally
Light fades away, light has perished
The black sky will be our deaths
The winds scream in agony
The music of nature winds down
Soon, all souls will be frozen
The world is in pain
The spirit of the Earth is aflame
The ice will be all we know
Brittle fingers cling for the last taste of life
Hope will be only a fairytale

If only for the brief moment of time any are still here to remember,
Mother Earth will rid us all, even herself
A mass genocide to all
The Eagle falls from the sky
No mercy for any is found
The touch of cold death will be swift
As its boney claws choke our throats
So complete even death will forget its role
The Earth has failed
The Earth is a frozen corpse
Fire will consume you and all your lies whole
All we do is have to cover the hole
A new world is here for us to share
No more need for your negligent care
A shining dawn is on the way
An end to the world’s decay
The land reeks of decay
The end of humanity can no longer be delayed
We must make way to a new beginning
To bring an end to the false sinning
Our world is not for your destruction
We join as one to lead ourselves to a new construction

(Chorus)
Risen will be our loyalty and pride
Purge
We are the bringers of the fires that spell your demise
Eradication
Your sacrifice, our world
Elimination

Our fires will sweep the Earth clean
Incineration is the only answer to be seen
Your ashes will bring new life
Heathen pride will no longer be under strife
Glory will belong to the strong and wise
False idols will be uncovered in their lies

The true Eden has been under our feet
But you were too busy sucking on your God’s teat
Completely ignorant to the truths standing in your face
But soon your wretched ideals will be gone without a trace
You believed eternity would be your gift
But the truth to that idea will be swift

So many have claimed to know the answer
But it has only been the cancer
Millions upon millions have been destroyed under His grace
But He has never had a rightful place

Fire will consume you and all your lies whole
All we do is have to cover the hole
A new world is here for us to share
No more need for your negligent care
A shining dawn is on the way
An end to the world’s decay
To Awaken the Wolf
Carol Deal

She’s his worst nightmare...

Rowan Moray came to Silverton Colorado in search of her missing fiancé. Instead, she finds Caleb Romasanta, the leader of the local loupes garoux pack, and her only hope for survival when a serial killer targets her as his next victim...

He’s her only hope...

Caleb Romasanta already has his hands full running a construction company and leading his pack. The last thing he needs is a feisty female snooping around town. But when a killer sets his sights on Rowan, Caleb will do whatever it takes to protect her...

Victims of circumstance...

Caleb and Rowan have a lot on their plate, especially with a killer on the loose. Unfortunately, things are about to get even worse. Someone is trying to overthrow Caleb and take control of his pack. The question is...who?

Chapter One

The stars shimmered like diamond shavings scattered across an ink black sky while the full moon hovered like a glowing crystal orb high above the thick trunked aspen and pine trees. The cool crisp night air carried with it the scent of various breeds of flower and freshly cut grass as bright streams of pale gold moonlight danced off the still water of a lake below a small but steep hill.

Rowan couldn’t help noticing the beautiful surroundings as her Silver Lexus zipped over the faded black asphalt of an otherwise unoccupied highway. With little more than pale moonlight and a pair of headlights to guide her, she continued driving until she reached the small town of Silverton Colorado, the last place her fiancé had called her from before his mysterious disappearance a week earlier.

Though she tried to convince herself otherwise, Rowan knew deep down that something wasn’t right. It wasn’t like Dominic not to call. And the fact that he hadn’t bothered to contact her could only mean one thing. He was in trouble.

Knowing she wouldn’t be able to navigate her way through the nearby wilderness without help, Rowan parked her car in the parking lot at the local tavern and headed inside to ask for directions to the cabin Dominic had been renting.

She was still trying to figure out why he had come to Silverton in the first place when the hairs on the back of her neck started to prickle. Awareness washed over her a moment too late as the tavern door closed behind her.

The entire room fell silent as countless people turned to look at her. Rowan tried not to let their scrutinizing eyes and less than friendly expressions bother her as she walked briskly up to the bar, studying the tavern and its occupants along the way.

Polished dark wood floors and honey brown walls surrounded a dimly lit, less than smoky room. Square cherry wood tables with matching chairs dotted the open space to her far left while an older man strummed his guitar on a rather spacious stage against the back wall. To her right, stools lined the black granite countertop of a long bar where several patrons sat sipping everything from beer to vodka.

Rowan kept her guard up, perfectly conscious of the fact that she was in the presence of strangers. Most small town residents didn’t take too kindly to out-of-towners because they didn’t trust outsiders, and that’s exactly what Rowan was. Still, there was something else about these people. Rowan couldn’t quite put her finger on it, but she could sense something different about them, something more than your average wariness toward an unfamiliar person. They looked at her like they wanted to maul her!

A shiver ran down Rowan’s spine as she cleared her throat.

“Excuse me sir?”

The bartender was an older man in his late fifties or early sixties with light brown hair, blue eyes, and a baby face. He wasn’t very tall, five-foot eight at the most, but his eyes twinkled and when he smiled, Rowan caught the slightest hint of dimples beneath his thin oval framed eyeglasses.

“May I help you?” he asked kindly.

“Yes,” Rowan said, “At least, I hope so. I’m looking for someone. His name’s Dominic Stone. He came out here about two weeks ago and I was wondering if you’d seen him, and if so, is there any possible way you might be able to tell me where to find him?”

“I’m afraid the name doesn’t ring any bells,” the bartender said regretfully. “What does he look like?”

“He’s tall with green eyes and medium caramel brown hair,” Rowan told him.

The bartender thought for a moment, then shook his head. “Sorry, but I haven’t seen him.”

“Are you sure?” Rowan persisted, “He drives a charcoal grey Nissan Pickup and wears a leather sports jacket.”

Again, the man behind the bar shook his head. “I’m really sorry, but I haven’t seen anyone who fits that description.”

Rowan released a frustrated sigh of defeat.

“Then can you at least give me directions to the cabin he was staying in? It’s somewhere in Pagosa Springs near...Sunlight Peak, I think. Hold on...” Rowan checked the miniature notepad she’d been carrying in her pocket with all the information written on it to be sure. “Yeah, it’s Sunlight Peak.”

“I sure can,” the bartender declared enthusiastically.

He took the notepad and wrote down the directions so she wouldn’t forget them and handed it back to her. “You may want to talk to Bianca and Elijah while you’re up there.”

Rowan frowned, “Who?”

“Bianca Mandeneru and Elijah Halifax,” the man explained, “He owns all the cabins up near Sunlight Peak and she rents out the ones on Windom Peak. They might know where your fiancé is.”

“Thanks,” Rowan said.

She started to turn around and head for the door, but his words made her stop. “Wait, how did you know he was my fiancé? Something flickered in the bartender’s eyes, concern, fear maybe? Rowan wasn’t sure, but whatever it was, it disappeared in the blink of an eye.

“I Lucky guess,” he answered, offering her a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes this time. “Your last names are different which probably means you aren’t related. And besides, pretty young women like you don’t usually drop everything and drive across god only knows how many states just to drop in for some idle conversation, so I had to assume he was more than just a friend.”

Rowan stared at the older man for a few prolonged seconds before shaking her head. “Well, thanks for the directions.”

“No problem,” he replied, shrugging as if giving her directions had been no big deal. “Then, as she started to walk away, he added, “Oh, and if I happen to see your fiancé, I’ll let him know you’re looking for him.”

“I’d really appreciate it,” Rowan replied, giving him a curt nod before she turned and left the tavern.

Caleb arrived at the Silverton Brewery just in time to see a silver Lexus pulling out of the parking lot. A frown slid across his face when he noticed the out-of-state license plates. Suspicion nipped at the heels of his subconscious as he quickly memorized the information and wrote it down on a piece of paper before tucking it in the glove box for later assessment.

He was ready to leave it at that, only a black Mercedes caught his attention and, unlike the owner of the Lexus, the driver of the Mercedes didn’t have his lights on. Caleb watched the expensive looking car slip silently off the main road and a thought crossed his mind. Was the Mercedes following the Lexus?

Just like he’d done with the first car, he wrote down the license plate number of the Mercedes and added it to the contents of his already over packed glove box. Then, mimicking the second...
car, he turned off his truck lights and started down the main road, turning on the same dirt road that the other two cars had already taken.

It took Rowan over an hour to reach the main lodge. She could see the cabins as she climbed out of her car. There were about nine or ten of them situated around a spacious lake with a wooden pier. Most were two-stories, probably meant for families or larger groups. However, there were a few one-stories near the tree line, giving hikers and hunters easy access to the mountain trails and forest paths in the surrounding area.

Still wondering which one was Dominic’s, Rowan turned her attention back to the main lodge which wasn’t really a lodge at all. The “lodge” was actually a two-story Victorian style home comprised of red brick with a large white wooden porch and two huge pine trees, one on each side of an empty dirt driveway.

There was no doubt in Rowan’s mind that the house was a beautiful sight to behold during the day, but at night, with darkness surrounding it on all side, the residence looked just as ominous as anything out of a Stephen King novel.

Rowan knocked on the front door and waited. No one answered, so she knocked again. When that didn’t work, she moved over to the large window beside the door and peered past the parted drapes. Unfortunately, all of the lights were off. Rowan slumped her shoulders as she released a heavy sigh. The homeowner, Elijah Halifax, or whatever the hell his name was, just wasn’t there.

Okay, so there’s been a slight change in plans, she told herself as she ran her fingers through her hair. I’ll just stay at a hotel tonight and come back in the morning, no big deal.

“Can I help you with something?”

Rowan jumped at the sound of the voice behind her and turned to a man standing at the bottom of the porch stairs. He was in his late twenties, about six-foot one, with short feathery dark mahogany brown hair and the most stunning pair of whiskey gold eyes she’d ever seen.

“Can I help you?” he asked again.

Rowan continued to stare at him, mesmerized. Faded blue jeans clung to his narrow hips while a black t-shirt showed off his broad shoulders and a muscular build most men would kill to obtain. This, along with his sharp facial features, had Rowan convinced she was looking at the most handsome man she had ever seen in her entire life.

Rowan blinked, forcing herself out of her gorgeous hunk-induced haze. “I’m looking for Elijah Halifax or Bianca Mandenuer. You wouldn’t happen to know where they are, would you? I really need to speak to them.”

“I’m afraid they’re not home right now,” the man said, “Is there something I can help you with?”

“And who exactly are you?” Rowan asked warily.

“Caleb Romasanta,” he replied, “I’m a close friend of Elijah’s. And you?”

“Rowan Moray,” she explained, “I’m here looking for my fiancé, Dominic. You haven’t seen him have you?”

Rowan described Dominic to Caleb hoping he might have seen him, but like the bartender, Caleb claimed he hadn’t seen anyone who looked like Dominic.

“Are you sure he was renting a cabin here?” Caleb asked.

“I have all the information right here,” Rowan assured him, pulling out what looked like a receipt. “Dominic wanted to make sure I had it before he left.”

Caleb took the long slip of paper and examined the information on it which came complete with a confirmation number.

“Tell you what,” he offered, “I’m not sure when Elijah or Bianca will be back, so why don’t I hold on to this for you until they return.”

Caleb took the long slip of paper and examined the information on it which came complete with a confirmation number.

“Tell you what,” he offered, “I’m not sure when Elijah or Bianca will be back, so why don’t I hold on to this for you until they return.”

He started to fold up the receipt so he could put it in his pocket, but Rowan caught him by the arm. Caleb immediately narrowed his eyes at her, and for a moment, Rowan actually thought he might do something. Obviously, he wasn’t used to people questioning his authority when it came to anything. Still, Rowan refused to be intimidated.

“Why don’t I just make you a quick copy,” she suggested, slowly releasing his arm. “That way you’ll still pass all the information along to Elijah and I can keep the original for my records.”

Caleb shrugged as he handed back the receipt. “Suit yourself. Meanwhile, you can stay here in one of the cabins until you find your fiancé. Free of charge of course. How does that sound?”

“Really? You can do that?” Rowan frowned. “But, wait, shouldn’t you at least ask Mr. Halifax’s permission first. These are his cabins and I don’t think—”

“I’ll let you in on a little secret, Ms. Moray,” Caleb grinned, “These may be Elijah’s cabins….but I own the land he built them on. Besides, I don’t think Elijah will mind. He’s a pretty good sport which is more than I can say for most people. Still, if anyone gives you any trouble, just let him know, or come to me and I’ll deal with it personally.”

Rowan wasn’t really sure what to think about Caleb. One minute, he acted like he was a predator ready to pounce, and the next, he was offering her a place to stay. Talk about mixed signals, she thought dryly as she followed him down the dirt path that led to the cabins.

The cabin Caleb chose for her was a quaint little one story at the very edge of the lake that had been recently renovated both inside and out with an ivory painted wrap around porch and white roses lining the stone walkway.

“The electricity, hot water, and gas should already be on,” he informed her as he unlocked the front door.

Rowan stared at the interior of the cabin. Beige walls with ivory trimming surrounded champagne colored furniture and a winter white carpet in the living room. There was also an antique red brick fireplace with a mantle made of dark cherry wood to match the coffee table and the shelves which were already littered with both fiction and nonfiction novels that had belonged to previous guests who must have left them behind either by accident or on purpose hoping that someone else might find them more entertaining.

“Everything seems to be working just fine,” Caleb announced.

Rowan turned to see him standing in the open kitchen which was comprised of granite countertops, a white tiled floor, a small island with matching chairs, all stainless steel appliances, a matching stove, and a fridge that came complete with a built in icemaker and water dispenser.

“Stove seems to be working right,” he noted as he turned off the oven and tested the sink. “Hot water’s definitely on.”

Despite having just met him, Rowan couldn’t help but stare at Caleb as he worked his way around the cabin checking to make sure everything was on and operating correctly. He definitely had a cute ass. She’d give him that much.

“Here you go,” he said as he handed her the key to the cabin in exchange for the handwritten receipt she’d prepared for him.

“Keep it with you at all times and remember to lock the door as soon as I leave.”

“Paranoid are we?” Rowan asked, setting the key down on the kitchen counter as she accompanied him to the door.

“Cautious,” Caleb replied, stepping out onto the front porch before he turned to look at her. “Silverton may be a small town Ms. Moray, but that doesn’t make it any less dangerous than a big city.”

“What do you mean?” Rowan asked, “Is something going on in Silverton?”

“Two women have gone missing over the past month,” Caleb explained sadly, “We haven’t found them yet, but it doesn’t look good. The body of a man turned up about a week ago.”

The look on Rowan’s face must’ve given away her thoughts because Caleb immediately shook his head. “It wasn’t your fiancé,” he assured her. “The guy we found was a local. My guess is the guy got drunk, drove up to Weminuche, and passed out in the woods. A buddy of mine up at the police station said they found wolf tracks at the scene, but there weren’t any signs of an animal attack.”

Rowan’s eyes widened. “You have wolves up here?”

Caleb nodded, “Yeah, a whole pack actually, but they’re usually harmless, unless someone intrudes on their territory or threatens the safety of their pups.”
“Anyway,” Caleb continued, “According to the DNA tests and the doctor who did the autopsy, it was his liver giving out that killed him. The wolves were probably just curious as to why he was there.”

Rowan shivered, “What a horrible story.”

“Still,” Caleb added, “it would probably be better if you stayed out of the woods. You never know what you might run into out there.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Rowan assured him.

“Well, I’ll make sure Elijah gets the information,” Caleb promised, “Take care of yourself Ms. Moray. And don’t hesitate to call if you need anything. I’m sure Elijah will want to speak with you as soon as he gets back. He’ll most likely wait until morning though but I must warn you, he’s an early riser.”

“That’s fine,” Rowan replied, “Thank you very much for all your help Mr. Romasanta. Goodnight.”

“Good night.”

Rowan closed the door and made sure it was locked before heading to the bedroom to unpack. After countless hours in a car, she was in desperate need of a shower, and a home cooked meal. The bedroom was just as elegant as the rest of the house. There was a burgundy quilt with silver designs and matching pillows on the king-sized canopy bed, matching drapes on the large window overlooking the lake, a winter white rug identical to the one in the living room, and a huge walk-in closet. The large bathroom was just as spacious with ivory walls, sand colored floor tiles, vanilla scented candles, and a large Jacuzzi tub.

As soon as she was finished packing, Rowan prepared a bubble bath and stripped out of her clothes, releasing a soft sigh of satisfaction as she slid down into the hot water. Oh yeah, Rowan thought as she rested her head against the side of the tub and covered her tired eyes with a wet washcloth, I definitely needed this.

Caleb dropped the handwritten copy of Rowan’s receipt on top of Elijah’s desk. The woman was smarter than he’d hoped. Not that obtaining the original would be a problem. He just had to wait for her to leave the cabin so he could sneak in and take it.

“Am I to assume we have a new guest?” Elijah asked, though he already knew the answer.

“Stone’s fiancé, Rowan Moray,” Caleb confirmed, “She’s staying in White Rose, the cabin closest to the woods.”

“Do you want me to keep an eye on her?” Elijah asked, “Make sure she doesn’t go looking for something we really don’t want her to find?”

“You just focus on getting rid of Stone’s cabin rental records,” Caleb replied sternly. “I’ll deal with the woman.”

“You should kill her and save yourself the trouble of having to do it later,” Bianca scowled from her spot on the sofa. “Mark my words Caleb, she’ll give us all nothing but grief if you let her live.”

“I will not condone or take part in the killing of an innocent person,” Caleb said sharply, turning to meet her gaze.

Bianca looked down almost immediately, acknowledging that Caleb was in deed the stronger wolf. Still, that didn’t keep her from taking a stab at him whenever the opportunity to do so presented itself. “Your father would’ve killed her.”

“I’m not my father,” Caleb growled. “And what do you know about him anyway? You weren’t even a member of this pack when he was in charge. Besides, this whole mess is your fault. If you had been more careful about where and when you changed, Stone would’ve never found out about us.”

Bianca could be a real pain in the ass sometimes, but Caleb tried not to hold it against her. She’d been through a lot over the past several years, and though the physical bruises and scars had healed quickly, the emotional abuse and neglect she’d suffered at the hands of her original pack’s Alpha was still there. Caleb could see it hidden deep within her beautiful honey brown eyes. Still, despite her horrific past, Bianca had risen above it all. At five-foot five and fifty years old, she was a stunning sight to behold with her professionally styled short dishwater blonde hair that was layered with sun kissed highlights and pale gray lowlights, high cheekbones, soft flawlessly fair skin, and a slender figure that seemed to drive the other males in his pack crazy any time she entered a room.

“I didn’t know he was there,” Bianca snapped defensively. “If I’d known he was going hiking that day, I would’ve never turned out in the open.”

“What’s done is done,” Caleb said, “Still, nobody lays a hand on Rowan unless I say otherwise, got that?”

Elijah nodded, “Understood. And I’ll make sure the rest of the pack knows not to approach her.”

“I still say we should off the bitch,” Bianca muttered, folding her arms over her chest as she looked away.

“Bianca,” Elijah hissed from behind his desk.

“What?” she demanded tartly. “I’m just saying...”

Caleb ignored their bickering and turned his attention to more important things. He knew Elijah would pass the word along to the rest of the pack and Bianca, though she could be more than a little drastic when it came to keeping the existence of their kind a secret, wouldn’t go near Rowan unless Caleb gave her the go-ahead. At least, he didn’t think she would, unless Rowan did something really stupid.

Caleb took a moment to think about it and groaned.

Who was he kidding? Rowan Moray was probably the most determined human he’d ever met, not to mention the most stubborn. There was no doubt in his mind that she would eventually find out the truth, one way or another. The question was...what was he going to do about it when she did? * * *
The Day I Lost the Control I Never Had
Marcie Johnson

It was seven in the morning, the sun was shining bright, and I had a feeling that nothing could ruin my day. I looked out the window into the distant clouds feeling like I had conquered everything in the world, including them. I had a husband who loved me, a child whom I adored, and a career that was on the rise. I had decided long time ago that I, and only I, had control over my life. That nothing could happen to me that was not under my control. I even believed that death itself was on my time. The gentle touch of my husband’s hands on my waist pulled me away from my floating in the clouds. He gently whispered in my ear that he loved me and told me to have a good day. I returned the favor and then headed to my closet to get ready for work. I stared in the mirror at my beauty and elegance, amazed at how a woman who people expected to be nothing was standing in designer from head to toe. I kissed my daughter goodbye and headed out for another day’s work as one of the top Real Estate agents in LA. It was going to be a smooth day; I only had one appointment lined up today and some minor paperwork at the office. I would be able to leave the office early and probably prepare a romantic dinner for my hubby.

It was now twelve o’clock and what I thought was a minute amount of paperwork had turned out to be a big pile of headaches, due to my incompetent employees. I had half a mind to fire them all on the spot, but, instead, I quickly reassigned them other assignments. Mama was babysitting tonight and I was not going to let papers get in the way of a romantic evening alone with my husband. I was out of the office by two o’clock. A truck that resembled my husband’s, but I thought nothing of it and began to show my client the house. It was now 3:25 p.m. and I noticed that the truck was still parked across the street. I thought to myself that it couldn’t be Steve because he’s still at work. That, however, wasn’t enough comfort for the woman in me; I called his cell phone to see if I could get an answer. The phone rang and rang until it finally went to voicemail. I left a short, sweet message and hung up. As I drove home, I pushed the negative thoughts out of my head. There was no way he would cheat on me; we had been together for 5 years and I knew he loved me. I pushed into the house and began to prepare for the evening. It was 4:25 p.m. and I had exactly two hours before Steve would be here. I quickly called in an order at our favorite restaurant and dashed up stairs to get ready. Tonight was going to be great.

It was now 6:00 p.m. and flowers were laid out all over the place. The food was neatly set up in the formal dining room, and I was wearing a dress that was sure to send chills down his spine when he walked in. Time passed and Steve hadn’t made it home nor had he returned my call. Being that there was nothing left to do and I was beginning to grow bored with just sitting on the couch looking at the door, I started going through the mail. I came across a certified letter addressed confidentially to Steve Harrison. I opened the letter despite the words in big red letters that said clearly not to open if you were not Steve. I was his wife; I opened anything with his name on it. As I read the letter inside, my heart dropped to bottom of my chest and suddenly every muscle in my body felt numb. Tears began to roll down my face as if he loved me and I was all the woman he would ever need. He pulled me into him and kissed my lips; my heart was ripped apart with every second that my lips were pressed against his lips of infidelity. We sat at the table and I remained quiet for the first ten minutes as he talked about random happenings throughout his day. Then his phone rang and he looked down at the phone and sent the person to voicemail. I asked who it was and he said it was no one important. He looked at me from across the table and told me he loved me and no one was more important than I was to him. I just looked at him with a blank stare, thinking to myself, if what he’s saying is true, how could he do this to me. He asked me what was wrong with me. I didn’t respond; instead, tears began rolling down my cheeks. I thought I had control of it all. That nothing could happen to me unless I allowed it to. I could never have been more wrong in my life. My complete life had just been taken away from me by the person I loved the most. When he leaned in to hug me and go for a kiss, I pulled the envelope in between my lips and his. I wanted him to kiss the death that he had bought upon himself and his loving wife. He grabbed the envelope and nonchalantly put it on the table. Suddenly, all my sadness turned to rage. “Read the letter, Steve!” I yelled with everything in me. He fell into the chair next to me and stared at the wall. No I’m sorry, or I love you, please forgive me. Instead, a painful, deadly silence filled the room. He pulled me into him and kissed my lips; my heart was ripped apart with every second that my lips were pressed against his lips of infidelity. We sat at the table and I remained quiet for the first ten minutes as he talked about random happenings throughout his day. Then his phone rang and he looked down at the phone and sent the person to voicemail. I asked who it was and he said it was no one important. He looked at me from across the table and told me he loved me and no one was more important than I was to him. I just looked at him with a blank stare, thinking to myself, if what he’s saying is true, how could he do this to me. He asked me what was wrong with me. I didn’t respond; instead, tears began rolling down my cheeks. I thought I had control of it all. That nothing could happen to me unless I allowed it to. I could never have been more wrong in my life. My complete life had just been taken away from me by the person I loved the most. When he leaned in to hug me and go for a kiss, I pulled the envelope in between my lips and his. I wanted him to kiss the death that he had bought upon himself and his loving wife. He grabbed the envelope and nonchalantly put it on the table. Suddenly, all my sadness turned to rage. “Read the letter, Steve!” I yelled with everything in me. He looked at me as if I were crazy and began to read. The look in eyes slowly started to change into a look of melancholy and regret. He fell into the chair next to me and stared at the wall. No I’m sorry, or I love you, please forgive me. Instead, a painful, deadly silence filled the room as we both sat unable to speak a word. I looked out the window as the sun began to set and the clouds began to darken. I no longer conquered them; as a matter of fact, it seemed like their darkness had now conquered me. I was no longer in control. As the sun set and darkness filled the sky with not even a twinkle of a light from the smallest star, I realized I never was in control.
Final Hour
Derek Hutchins

My body aches from the waist up, and I can't feel my legs. I can just barely make out the surroundings outside of my shattered canopy—the remains of what had been my aircraft, charred by small but thriving flames. Beyond that, I can only see gusts of sand and small blurred hints of structures within them. Buildings? I can clearly see that I am still in the seat of my cockpit... what's left of it. I strain to turn my head to the sudden sounds of inaudible yelling, or screaming, from the two approaching blurry figures. I can't tell what it is they're holding or saying, but I'll find out soon enough.

Nightmares of Lost Hope
Ray Roane

The wind echoes up through the streets.
The air crawls
Straight down to my feet.
A body lays shaken not due to cold.
This being just suffers... from what he is told.

He hears the dark whispers,
Whispers and gasps,
From a time held deep from his past.
His body can suffer
But his body can't last.
Mild sanity eludes his grasp.
Jelly’s Journey
Jennifer Moore

I sit on the front step leading up to the house and observe your complex methods of finding the perfect spot. First, you lie down on the left side of the walkway and bask in the sun. Then a bird catches your eye, distracting you from your original task. After studying the bird for a good while, you suddenly remember what it is we first set out to do. The grass on the left side of the pavement isn’t green enough. It isn’t worthy of any more attention so you journey to the right side. The right side is, in fact, the correct side. The side you always end up going to, though you rarely start there. This makes me wonder if there’s a hidden message for me in how you go about this task. A vital and necessary task, yet very trivial and not worth worrying about, yet we toil over it far too long. Just make the decision and settle where to take care of business, get it over with, and come back inside before the rain starts falling down. Who knew such a valuable lesson could be learned from watching a dog take a pee.
The girl knew what was about to happen...
Girls On Cocaine Diets
Toffer Surovec
Winner, Poetry

I wonder if the girls on cocaine diets see the flawed vanity in their scratched compact mirrors.
Of course, some do.
I’ve met more than I wish I’d have.
They all broke my heart.

One destroyed it,
Made it easier for the rest.

Her name isn’t important because people called her different things.

I knew of her in high school and knew her body in college.
The drugs ate away at her body but I had it when it was perfect.

I don’t know her now; she has three kids.
None look like me.

I still know girls on that diet.
They’re kept at a distance,

Close enough to hurt,
Far enough not to kill.

Ying, Yang Twins
Sam
**Pregnant Gas Station Lady**

Good morning pregnant gas station lady on a smoke.  
I won't judge; please be friendly.  
You're the first person I'll talk to today.  
I've heard countless voices already  
Most to music  
Some to news  
A lot about death.

I go to the doctor today.  
There might be more news about death.  
I hope not  
but what would the big deal be?

People who disagree stop calling.  
They have to finish the test.  
You'll be the first to know.

**Miss September**

I take her hand  
Slide off her ring  
Put it in a drawer

Take her like I did before promises made  
She should have never not been mine

**A Sandwich Would Be Nice, Too**

I love you from the top of my heart since the bottom is broken  
The last girl fell right through the bottom  
Maybe you could help me fix it

You seem like a girl who knows how to use the right tools  
They're all in the kitchen  
I don't expect that to be where you live  
But some cookies would be good

**Cowgirl**

I swear some of the best sex is when you can just leave afterwards  
But this is my place.  
Get along, reverse cowgirl,  
Get along.

**Smile**

Playful flirty smile  
Glossed and welcoming  
Pursed sarcastically at my dissolute glances

Swallowing your straw unsafely  
Sexy stare locking my eyes to yours  
Are you just seeing how far you can take this or is it real?

You bite your lip like all girls learn to do in the mirror

What didn't that smile mean?
I am the one you pretend does not exist, the one you ignore, and the one you hope will go away so you don’t have to think too much. I am the one you write off as “dirty” because I am the one who doesn’t wear shoes, and picks flowers as I walk, forming them into chains to wear as tiaras. I am the one who watches the birds fly and sighs with longing to join them, to be one of them, knowing full well what people think of me and wanting them to love me, as I love them—so much it hurts. The world moves quickly around me while I am lost in the vast cosmos that is a plant, from its glorious birth from the fertile ground through its subtle growths, the florishes and the death, all silent and unnoticed by passersby that a far too busy to notice such a thing. I am the one entranced by watching a robin build a nest, the one who waits until the bird leaves so I may admire her eggs without disturbing her. I whisper my wishes for my love to be reciprocated, but who hears me? Only the wind. The wind is all that ever hears me.

Though I love you, I cannot understand you, cannot think on your level. And you wonder what you have done to anger me when I unleash my wrath. Though you have been warned, you continue your hateful ways. You are involved in appearances, though I provide you with all the things you covet. You absorb yourself in what people think of you, and in achieving the greatest number of friends and admirers you possibly can before you die, the ultimate goal of people. Everything you value nearest and dearest to you—your clothes, your electronics, your jewels—is only a trick to the eyes, a trick played by a cruel society that labels my destruction as “progress” and material things as “value”. I am all around you, selflessly giving forth all my beauty for you to see, and yet you turn a blind eye. I present beauty through all forms of life, and yet all you seem to see is profit or the next trophy hunt.

You laugh at my children, their flower-giving and blatant barefooted flaunting of all you have been told is “right”. You gawk as they read under the shade of the buttonwood tree; you yell for them to do something with their lives, not understanding that they have done more than you may ever imagine; they have brought forth life from once barren ground. Yet you tell them they are worthless; you tell them they should be ashamed of what they are. You say they will never be anything; they are only misfits to be shunned. And it is in my nature and theirs to endure these abuses, these horrible words, all while I pray you find the truth soon and love you in spite of this, and demonstrate my fury when provoked, hating your ways as much as I love you. And you my children, I coax forth beauty from the barren grounds you have created.

I wish occasionally that I could lift the veil from your eyes and make you see; but, sadly, I cannot—the veil is yours to lift, yours alone.

Above all, I wish to be met with less disgust and more understanding. But I know that is something you cannot give; it is not in your nature.
Contest Winners

Drama
Uproar
Elizabeth Redpath

Essay
My Grandmother’s Daring Escape
Rene Castillo
Miss Wonderful
Jerry Sparks
It Is Our Nature
Jess Acreman

Poetry
Erase Her
Leonela Gonzalez
Winter Hunter
Jeff Ficklin
World of Fiction
Andrew Hylton
Girls on Cocaine Diets
Toffer Surovec
Coffee Shop
Jennifer Moore

Short Fiction
Whatever Happened to Jonathan Gardner?
Toffer Surovec
encore
Paul Knowles
Heritage
Carol Deal
Is That You, Death?
Hannah Hargrave
You Don’t Know Anything
Shaun Peralta
America, Victor
Paul Knowles
=P (Life Stories, Everlasting Lessons, and Other Quirks)
Jesus Villegas

Drawing
Beauty and The Chair
Yanci Benitez
Pieces
Sandra Ramirez

Painting
The Pianist
Monica Chhay
Mojo
Thuy Tran

Sculpture
Drawing Pencil
Irvin Ortiz
Windy Rain
Christle Jolivette

Design
Machine
Yanci Benitez
Animalesk
Reneé Johnbaptiste

Best of Show
Time
Ruben Hernandez

Cupcake Ashley