



Welcome to the digital version of *Horizons* 2021!

This year the magazine is published as a special double issue. The print version of the book features two halves, back-to-back. This digital version features both halves. The first half starts on the following page, the second half begins on page 81. Please click on the image above of the half you wish to read.

The book also contains a special commemorative poster in the middle of the magazine made from all the former covers of the magazine and all of the names of staff and contributors throughout the years. Please click [here](#) to see the front of the poster and click [here](#) to see the back.

HORIZONS



CELEBRATING
25
YEARS
HORIZONS

HORIZONS

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF
WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Editors-in-Chief | Abigail Black
Mandie Jones

Managing Editors | Alyx Ptak
Brittany Raglione

Cover & Interior Designers | Emily Murphy
Kylie Tevonian

Bookmark & Poster Designer | Kylie Tevonian

Copy Editor | Ryan Lambert

Editorial Committee | Abigail Black
Lareina Cruz
Mandie Jones
Ryan Lambert
Alyx Ptak
Brittany Raglione

Advertisement | Abigail Black

Faculty Advisor | Dan Portincaso

*Art Reproduction &
Art Advisor* | Tonya Whitlock

Music Faculty Advisor | Sara Gregory

Cover & Bookmark Artwork | Daniel Capobianco
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Jargalmaa Enkhbold,
Self Portrait, (Cover for this side)
Acrylic on Canvas, 24 x 18 in.

Please visit us on the web at www.waubonsee.edu/horizons

3 Horizons

Acknowledgements

The staff of *Horizons* wants to thank the students who submitted their work for consideration during these difficult times. We also want to thank the student editorial committee for sifting through those submissions during their spring break. And, of course, *Horizons* would not be what it is today without the dedication and hard work of the Creative Writing Club at Waubonsee.

We wish to thank Sharon Garcia, Executive Dean for Liberal Arts and Sciences, for her tireless support of the magazine. This publication simply wouldn't exist without the efforts of her and her division staff.

We would also like to thank:

Todd Laufenberg, Assistant Professor of English, for his work directing the Waubonsee portion of the Skyway Writing Competition, a major source of submissions for this magazine.

The English and Developmental English Departments for teaching and inspiring the writers of the future and for helping us get the word out to students about *Horizons*.

The Art Department for energizing and training the visual artists of tomorrow in addition to their work with the Skyway Art Competition, from which the art in this issue was selected.

The Music Department who built a foundation for a new collaboration with this publication and for their work conducting students to a future in music.

Our Graphic Design faculty for connecting us to student designers and for their work in training artists who will frame our world.

Christina Goings, Archivist and Librarian, for her work organizing the historical copies of *Horizons* and making them available to us in a virtual environment.

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And last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank the college community of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and the WCC Board of Trustees for creating an environment that fosters the growth of the literary arts at Waubonsee.

Editors' Note

While every year holds its own unique set of hurdles, the continuation of the coronavirus pandemic and the coinciding distancing measures challenged us like never before. Some of us have never met in person. That being said, we are honored to have worked on this publication with some of the finest, hard-working, and enthusiastic people that we are blessed to call peers. From our advisor, Dan, to the managing editors, editors, our creative team, the art and music departments, and the student writers, we could not ask for a better community of people.

With twenty-five years behind us, we are proud to look back and remember the exceptional writers and *Horizons* staff who came before us. Without them, we would not be here and you would not be reading this. Inside, you'll find a poster with all of the covers from every edition as well as the names of those who worked on, or were published in, them.

We wanted to do something special this year. Not only to celebrate twenty-five years, but to acknowledge how challenging this pandemic year has been for all of us. This flip-cover design seemed the perfect way to accomplish this. These two parts may appear similar in some regards, but they both exemplify the struggle of this year from different perspectives. With the new addition of student's music, this issue of *Horizons* showcases how the Waubonsee community of writers, artists, and musicians have responded to these trying times.

We are extremely proud to present you with this volume of *Horizons*. It is important for us that, whether in person or virtually, we worked our hardest to provide you the same quality magazine that you have come to expect from us. We hope you thoroughly enjoy what we've curated for you this year.

Humbly yours,

Abigail Black & Mandie Jones

Editors-in-Chief

Table of Contents

FOREWORD: TO PAST HORIZONS	7
Dan Portincaso	
DOLL ON A SHELF	11
Elizabeth Hess	
YOU WALKED OUT	12
Elisa Reamer	
IMPOSTER SYNDROME	13
Brenda Perez	
END OF HARVEST	14
Garrett Austin	
NO REFLECTION	15
Angelina Trejo	
CHIN UP	16
Abigail King	
A TIGHT FIT	17
Daniel Capobianco	
ABSTRACT COLLAGE	18
Jargalmaa Enkhbold	
OWNER NUMBER 5	19
Alexie Diaz	
THE FLOWER OF THIS MOMENT, A GOLD GERANIUM	29
S.T. Brant	
THE LIES THAT MADE ME STAY	30
Elisa Reamer	
AMBIVALENT	31
Abigail King	
HOMOPHONE	32
Amber Leigh	
LUMIÈRE DE L'APRÈS-MIDI (AFTERNOON LIGHT)	33
Amber Leigh	
ROSY	34
Becca Overton	

WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE	35
Alyx Ptak	
TIME FLIES BYE	40
George Vander Linde	
THE PROCRASTINATION	45
Alexie Diaz	
FOREVER AND ALWAYS	48
Elisa Reamer	
THE FIRE BENEATH MY WINGS	49
Diane Gil	
ORANGE JUICE	50
Angelina Trejo	
VALVES	51
Daniel Capobianco	
UNTITLED	52
Garrett Austin	
WHITE SODA FIRED POT/VASE	53
Tanvi Aggarwal	
HOTLINE	54
Mandie Jones	
RYAN FROM THE FARM	59
Anonymous	
FRANKENSTEIN'S FRANKENSTEIN	62
Jeremy Davis	

FOREWORD: TO PAST *HORIZONS*

BY DAN PORTINCASO

In the mid-1990s — while Netscape was coming to dominate the burgeoning internet, Disney was releasing a movie called *The Lion King*, and artists like Boys II Men and Pearl Jam were topping the music charts — Jeff Weber had an idea. He had come to Waubonsee Community College in his late 20's after his plans to become a projectionist at a movie theater were altered when: “I got into a car accident at 18 and became paralyzed.” His goal upon enrolling at Waubonsee was to enter a profession that used computers, but his experiences at the school opened possibilities for him that he had never considered. One of those possibilities was the idea to start this literary magazine, *Horizons*.

Through high school Mr. Weber did not really focus on English as a subject. However, after taking several English courses at Waubonsee, including one in Creative Writing, he found a love of literature and a passion for words. At first, he became involved with the now defunct student newspaper, *Insight*. He eventually served as one of the Co-Editors-In-Chief of the newspaper during the 1994/95 academic year. Having built a network of students and faculty from his reporting, he realized that there wasn't a publication at the college that celebrated student art and literature. So, in his last year before transferring to a four-year school, he put out a call amongst his friends and in the newspaper for submissions to a new kind of publication, a literary magazine. At the same time, he helped found the Bard and Artist Guild, the initial student organization for what is now the Creative Writing Club, in order to get funding for the magazine. He also recruited two faculty advisors, Tom Zima and Gibby Monokowski, to sponsor his efforts.

Mr. Weber and his friend, Kurtis Hermes, compiled the first-ever issue of *Horizons* in the 1994/95 academic year using Adobe PageMaker software. The first issue featured a collection of writing and artwork from 10 students. Although he couldn't recall the exact reason for titling the magazine *Horizons*, Weber said it seemed fitting because of the metaphoric connection to Waubonsee's name and “where I was

at in my journey?’

The magazine wasn’t printed until the following 1995/96 academic year. Jeff Weber had transferred out of Waubensee and it was because of the efforts of Kurtis Hermes the first issue was placed in people’s hands. And with that, 25 years ago, the history of this publication began.

As far as those who were interviewed can remember, there was no volume 2 of the magazine. In fact, *Horizons* might have only had a single issue if the then new English professor, Ellen Lindeen, hadn’t revived the publication with the help of the enthusiastic student editor, Jason Sprague. They published the next issue of *Horizons* in the 1997/98 academic year and labeled it volume 3. Most of the student writing in this and following issues of the magazine was taken from Skyway Writers Festival competition submissions, though there would often be a general call for work as well. The masthead of *Horizons* usually consisted of students who were passionate about writing and had found their way into what was then called the Fine Arts Guild. This created the template that would remain consistent over the next decade. Professor Lindeen recounted many long days in her office “[...] sitting on the floor with a pizza that was delivered going through various selections[...]” with student editors. Professor Lindeen also orchestrated a large celebration on campus every year to commemorate Shakespeare’s birthday. The newest issue of *Horizons* would typically be released on that day.

During the 2007/08 academic year, English professor Todd Laufenberg took over as faculty advisor for the Association for Creative Expression, which evolved from the Fine Arts Guild. At the time, this was a small group of students who came together to share creative writing with each other. Professor Laufenberg and some of the students in the Association for Creative Expression thought it would be a good idea to reboot *Horizons*, since it had been on hiatus since the spring of 2006. They created Volume 11, which was published in the spring of 2009.

Just as before, the magazine consisted of a combination of Skyway Writers Festival submissions, work from club members, and a public call for work. Professor Laufenberg remembered sitting in the Henning Computer Center with students Melanie Hatch

9 Horizons

(Editor-In-Chief) and Stephanie Curts to assemble the magazine using Microsoft Word. That issue was received well by the Waubonsee community and stands as a memorial to Melanie Hatch, who grew ill and passed away not long after its publication.

The following year, then new professor in the English Department, Dan Portincaso, joined Professor Laufenberg as a co-faculty advisor to the magazine and the Association of Creative Expression. They advised the publishing of Volume 12 in the spring of 2010. This issue brought a collaboration with the Waubonsee Art Department to include color images that continues to this day. This issue's Editor-In-Chief, Steven J. Hessler, a veteran of the U.S. Marines, spent many long days in the Henning Computer Center compiling the issue in Microsoft Word.

Starting with the 2011 issue, the magazine expanded and formalized roles on the masthead. Students from the Graphic Design department were also brought on to create the magazine in Adobe InDesign. A student editorial committee was added to the masthead for the 2012 issue. As the years progressed, the magazine staff added more pages of student work and began innovating with different printing techniques.

The Association for Creative Expression changed its name during the 2012/13 academic year to the Creative Writing Club. To help interest in the magazine grow, Kenneth Rupp, Creative Writing Club President and *Horizons* Editor-in-Chief (2014/15), began an annual fall writing contest to help drive submissions. A custom bookmark with every copy of the magazine became a regular feature starting in this year as well. It was also at this time that Professor Laufenberg retired from his work with the Creative Writing Club and the magazine.

The following year the magazine began accepting submissions online to streamline the process. *Horizons* made its online debut when its own website went live in May of 2019 with the framework established by Volumes 19 and 20's Co-Editor-in-Chief, Sabrina Szigeti.

Today, *Horizons* is a formally structured organization with a publication manual, defined roles, and a culture where student staff seek to train their juniors to take over when they graduate or transfer out of Waubonsee. Each issue is the result of over a thousand combined staff work hours, many long nights, and passionate discussions about writing, publishing, and art.

Students who have worked on *Horizons* over the years have gone on to various career paths. Some of these alums have founded their own magazines, or have become librarians, teachers, and editors. There is even at least one broadcast news reporter and one linguist/scholar among their ranks. Nearly every graphic designer to work on the magazine has gone on to a successful career in that field.

The dedicated work of these students is transformative. This publication has always been, and will continue to be, a showcase for the innovation and creativity of the Waubonsee community. Its pages are a living monument to the minds and souls of the writers and artists who call Waubonsee home.

***Author's note:** The historical research on Horizons is ongoing. This narrative is derived from a limited number of sources from the current archives, new oral-history interviews with Jeff Weber, Ellen Lindeen, and Todd Laufenberg, and the author's personal records. As the archive grows, this narrative will undoubtedly be affected as some of the gaps in knowledge are filled. More of the magazine's history may be included in future issues of the magazine. The oral history interviews and archived copies of Horizons can be viewed by contacting the college archives in the Todd Library. If you have historical materials or memories you would like to share about Horizons, please contact Christina Goings, Archivist/Librarian (cgoings@waubonsee.edu) or Dan Portincaso (dportincaso@waubonsee.edu).*

DOLL ON A SHELF

POETRY BY ELIZABETH HESS

The body that I see in the mirror is not my own.
Oh my, how she looks so tired and alone.
Observe how her little body looks like a doll on a shelf.
I yearn for the old version of myself.

The girl that I stare at looks hollow and frail.
I attempt to reach my hand out, but she does not prevail.
“Please let me help you,” I vocalize to the girl. Unfortunately,
she was untouchable, her mind in a whirl.

As I look down at my rose-colored knuckles and hands,
I undoubtedly think that no one will understand.
The overwhelming feelings have become too much
And I realize that my pruned fingers have become sensitive to
the touch.

I gaze back to the mirror, and the girl who once stood was no
more,
I snapped out of my head when I heard a knock on the door.
“Sister, can you please read me a book before bed?”
Here and now, I knew that my obsessions needed to end.

YOU WALKED OUT

POETRY BY ELISA REAMER

I know he doesn't want me, that's why he left me.

These are the things I clearly know; he makes it so obvious.

I need to move on, let go, walk away. I shouldn't be talking to him, still getting excited when I see a notification from him.

I'm hanging on to false hopes, expecting him to crawl back to me.

But why? What's the point? He shows all the signs of not wanting me, but there's a little part of me that is staying hopeful.

I want him back, my heart is aching, my mind calls out for him like a lost, hungry fawn.

There's a lot of things I understand by this, oh man, this one I may never understand.

I know he doesn't want me, but I don't understand why.

Why was I suddenly not good enough for him? What did I do wrong? How can he want to marry me one day and then dump me the next?

I need my thoughts to stop, the questions to end. Everything swarms my brain.

I want him back so badly; he doesn't want anything to do with me.

I don't, nor ever will understand the power of breakups, especially when I thought we were a happy, healthy couple.

He was okay with leaving me behind, why can't I leave him, let him go from my life?

I have so many unanswered questions...

Why doesn't he want me?

Why did he leave me?

I don't understand...

IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

POETRY BY BRENDA PEREZ

Too Americanized for being Mexican blood
And too Mexican to be in America's mud
In a place where one does not feel like they belong
Tirelessly hoping they will find comfort through a song
A whisper of air, a crackling of a fire, a hum from the sun
Rather than consuming the fulsome behavior of toxic 'fun'
Freedom is a word bitten back from the tongue of the one
who seeks it the most
Seldom is the opportunity to seek the freedom brought on to
the host
The two sides of the world will not abash her
She will stay strong, love all, and conquer
Through her loving family and friends, she finds her inner
peace
For the bitter ache of what they say about who she is comes to
cease

END OF HARVEST

ARTWORK BY GARRETT AUSTIN



8 x 10 in.
Photography

No REFLECTION

ARTWORK BY ANGELINA TREJO

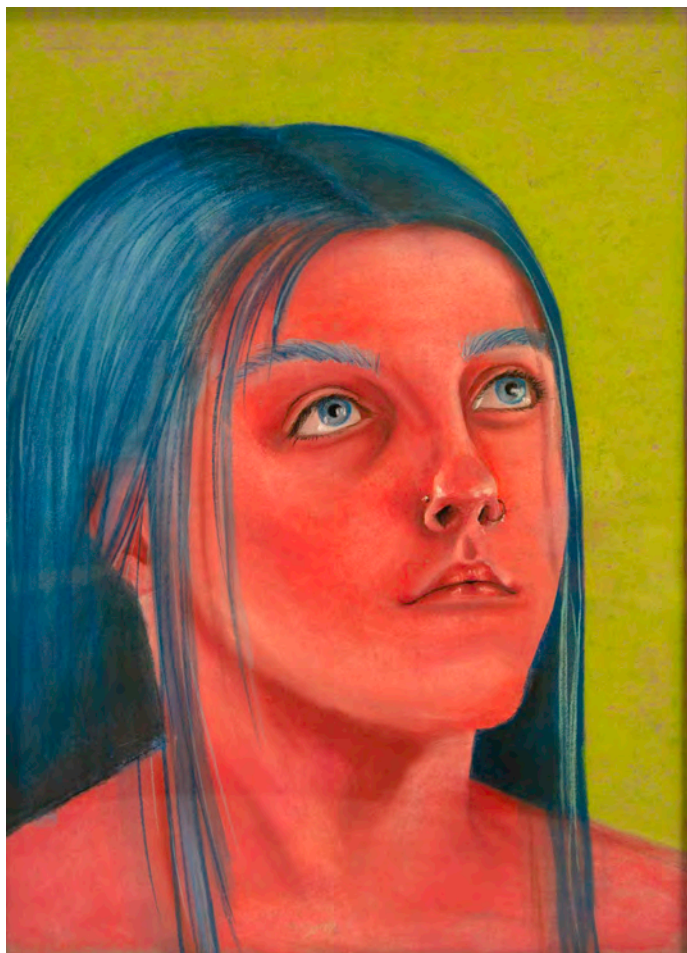


13 x 19 in.
Photography

Angelina Trejo 16

CHIN UP

ARTWORK BY ABIGAIL KING



24 x 18 in.
Pastel

A TIGHT FIT

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO



20 x 24 in.
Oil on Aluminum Panel

ABSTRACT COLLAGE

ARTWORK BY JARGALMAA ENKHBOLD



30 x 24 in.
Acrylic on Canvas

OWNER NUMBER 5

FICTION BY ALEXIE DIAZ

People find an amulet thinking it's worth a pretty penny, or a ring, or a pair of earrings. The jewelry varies for all of us "dark genies." It's a simplified name for our "evil" nature. Frankly, I wouldn't use it to describe us. We don't laugh at other people's misery--. Uh, we don't wish some of the population would kill themsel--. Well, we aren't psychopaths or kill--. We aren't psychopaths. We're assholes, but the same goes for the people that find our items. Only the worst of people can find our items. And the separation between regular genies and us isn't just in name alone, or our personality traits. Unlike the others, we have a higher aptitude with wishes, and we can choose whether or not to grant them.

All genies are bound to their "owners." And no, we don't have that three-wish limit; genies started telling people that so they didn't have to stick around too long. All of us can make infinite wishes. Another difference between the goody two-shoes regular genies and us would be the length we keep our "owners." Commonly, beings disown us after a week, sometimes even a few days. This is mostly because we drive them insane for not being able to kill others. Once we're owned we cannot harm the same species as our "owners." (Luckily only sentient beings can own us; it would be annoying trying to translate what a dog or cat wants.) All you need to know is these slave-drivers are always ineffectual bags of piss. Now that I'm typing, I remember my third "owner" foaming at the mouth and spouting incoherent gibberish at me. I'd never seen a walking tomato until that day, and it was beautiful. Of course, my hollers of laughter pissed him off more, but I didn't care. He only lasted three days. Undoubtedly, my shortest owner. And since we're on the topic of owners, I'll talk about my longest. She lasted two WHOLE months. Incredible, I know. She was such a sweet peach.

Autumn. It was her name, and the season in which she found my amulet. It laid in a pile of colorful red, orange, and yellow leaves. She fanned through them making leaf angels. Boy, she picked a beautiful time to play. The air was fresh and brisk. It streamed with

the scent of baked apple pies, one on the ledge of every window, and the Earth's hardy, moist soil wiggling its way into people's noses. The weather used a bullhorn every day to announce its presence before winter could stifle it. She'd enjoyed the daylight. Her parents came out of their modern home to watch their little girl rummage in the big pile Daddy scraped together. She giggled without care, living in a world free from-- Ha, it's funny to imagine that happened. It didn't. Our "owners" are always something else.

In reality, she gathered the leaves near the patted dirt. The darkness barely whistled. Her only living company, a bunch of old oak trees littered near a brook. Not a sign of conscious life besides hers, unless the corpse with a hole in its chest decided to join the living again. It was buried deep in the soil. The shovel used to conceal the body was next to her thigh. She sat on them to help pile things over. In the distance her car was off, at least fifty feet away. Not long after she moved the leaves did she touch it, my amulet. Her fingers grazed its gem, and threw the piece into the pile. She didn't even notice what she hit.

Abruptly, her head twisted to it, similar to the scene in *The Exorcist*. An icy blue light drew her attention through the leaves. She thought it was a phone. Her hand sprang forward, resembling a jack-in-the-box at the final chime. This sweetheart wanted to make its brightness dim, and when she held it, her wish came true. The glow stopped. Because of her hands? No, it ceased once I leaned over her body. I sighed at her predicament. She was haphazard. Ungloved hands; a gun laid next to her; don't get me started with her state of mind. Not that I promote the crime. I was tired of people like Miss "Vixen" finding my amulet. I'm jaded with people seeing it.

"Woow," sardonic words left my lips. "This is the most interesting scene I've caught someone in."

She shrieked. I didn't think the banshee would use her powers right away. It made me wince for a second. And without a thought, she lifted up her automatic pistol.

She fired at my chest. Funny, my head was closer to her than my torso. Even today, I prefer its loud, thundering noise over her vocals. A small part of me wished there were cops nearby or someone to take her down.

I didn't curl back as the bullet burned through my plain gray t-shirt and hit me. How did I survive? How could I sit here typing this story? Well, it couldn't go through my body. No weapon on Earth could ever dream of harming me. Shock ran down her face as the hot metal bounced back and slapped her unclothed thigh. That's what she got for wearing that skanky skirt. She jumped with a pig's squeal as it smoldered her skin. The bullets erupted from the barrel, firing while she stumbled to her feet. A lot of shots missed, hitting nearby trees or the ground by my feet. I started to wonder how she even killed the man in the first place. She clicked and clicked even after its deflated fife.

"Are you done?"

Throwing her gun towards me, she ran in the opposite direction. Away from her car too. She was the girl people screeched at in scary movies.

I rolled my eyes. I didn't want to play cat and mouse. I tried to walk away. However, the constricting grip of rules refused to let me go. Every time I had an "owner," those dictations streamed in my head. If anything terrible happened to that woman, I would get an equal lash to my back. At least she threw the gun. If she attempted to reload it while running, I'd imagine her brains splattered across the floor for the woodland creatures to munch on. Then, my head exploding and joining hers.

It took half a minute for me to catch her, as she ran in jagged heels. I gripped her left forearm, and her momentum yanked her back. She flipped around, punching my chin. She ended up cracking her fist. She thought she hit an army tank. After all, its nozzle pointed in her direction.

"What do you want with me?!" she yelled.

Whimpers echoed in her voice. I would have bellowed if she cried. I didn't see any tears when she buried the carcass; she was like the others. The minute they meet someone they couldn't kill, was the moment they cried like newborn babies.

"I'm stuck with you because you found my amulet." My green orbs rolled like bowling balls. "I'm called a dark genie."

I hated explaining it. My amulet wasn't found as often as the other dark genies, yet it didn't make the introductions any less tiring.

“Blah, blah, blah, I can grant wishes, and will protect you if I feel like it.”

She stopped pulling, her eyebrows raised, and her mouth was ready for business, again.

“How. High. Are. You?!” Her breath came out after every word. My grip didn’t ease even as my shoulders dropped.

I forced a smile and moved closer to her face, “Listen, lady.”

Soon regret waved its mocking hand. I hated being so close to her and her cheap, knock-off perfume. It forced its way into my nasal cavity and coated my tongue. “You saw me take a bullet to the chest, and I caught up with you in seconds. Are you going to be that much of a dumbass?”

She didn’t say anything, only shifted. She slapped her thick palm across my face. The brunette flinched and held her injured hand. Did she not get it? I kept a straight face. First, her fist, and now her palm tingled with beads under the skin. The pain grabbed my attention.

“If you are a genie, then I wish for money.”

I laughed. “Granted.”

I twirled my finger in the air. The tree branches moved around us. Not from the magic. Her once-closed fist opened with a crisp, one dollar bill inside.

“Soon regret waved its mocking hand. I hated being so close to her and her cheap, knock-off perfume.”

Her lip edged upwards, and one of her eyes squinted towards me. “The hell is this? I WISH FOR MORE MONEY!”

I waved my finger again. “Granted.”

A penny dropped from the sky and landed on her dollar bill. At this point, I was messing with her. Every owner gets one wish without us saying “no” to granting it, but they have to be specific.

After that, we can pick and choose what wishes we allow. Of course, all of us won’t share essential details with our owners about rules because the less they know, the easier it is for us to use the rules against them.

She wasn’t astonished. She lifted her leg up to try and hit me in the male’s weakest spot. I sidestepped and kicked my leg up under

hers. She lost her balance and fell to the ground. Her dough went into the muck.

She shouted, “You asshole, I want a billion dollars! And get me off the ground!”

I shrugged, “No can do. I’m pretty drained from the two other wishes.” I put a hand on my chest and leaned it forward at a slight angle, “Plus, your legs still work, go walk to some corner and make that money.”

I encouraged her.

Throughout our tango, I refused to grant any of her wishes. After repeated nagging or begging for the same request, I would have to come up with a bullshit excuse. Another rule: we cannot keep saying “no” to a wish without an explanation after the third time. If the justification isn’t valid enough, we can be forced to make the wish through a phrase, one which I never discussed with her. Not my fault she never asked.

Nonetheless, she wasn’t angry enough to release me. No, she was resourceful. She got what she wanted from others if I didn’t hand things out. Who knew she had “connections”? Sorry, not connections, more like two plastic puppies, and three overused holes for desperate men. I hated the rule that made us remain close to our owners unless we grant them wishes. I had a few unfortunate front row seats to her activities due to it. I don’t understand how the curvy twenty-seven-year-old even pulled around lonely dealers and company bosses. How could anyone deal with the shit coming from her mouth? Gross. I loathe thinking of her trying to prop out her cleavage and whisper in my ear. God, strike me down now, please.

Sorry, let me get back to the reason she didn’t want to release me. The conniving woman found out my flaw. While she shaved her upper lip in some man’s apartment, it was hard to tell the disparity between the men she met; she peeled off a strip of her potato-like skin. Stupidity landed on my side of the court. After she cursed at me for distracting her with my “ugly-looking ass” face, she saw the matching wound that appeared on my face in the same spot. I was so used to her hurting herself that I didn’t flex a muscle when it stung me. She tested the theory further so that I couldn’t deny it. Because of that error, our second week turned into two

months.

She abused her knowledge. Running into danger, she was a drugged-up maniac firing her gun, missing shot after shot. Or, she threatened to hurt herself if I didn't grant her wishes. I'm a patient man. I don't rush my owners. I relish making them hate my guts and cursing my name. Is it so wrong to clap slow and lazily at the

entertaining acts they put on? Thus, I waited. I deserved to take her crap. But what fun is the same recycled, manipulative, worthless behavior? None at all. And, I waited because she neglected a rule that I never told her about dark genies.

“She abused her knowledge. Running into danger, she was a drugged-up maniac firing her gun, missing shot after shot.”

She was “invincible.” Foolish enough to think I was powerless. As a dark genie, I had so many options as long as they didn't injure her too severely or kill her because of the rule she didn't follow.

Since they “owned” us, they had a responsibility to make sure we didn't starve, and to use their one weekly wish. She would need a phrase to the weekly one wish, and I didn't tell her she had an obligation to make sure I was fed (go ahead, laugh up the similarities to owning a pet). If those standards aren't met, I gain more and more of my power to use on her. If I accidentally killed her, I would be sharing the same casket, though. So, what did I do?

Fluorescent lights beamed from the ceiling of the warehouse. If you could call it a warehouse. It had very few crates littering the concrete and metal inside. They knocked out spring cleaning early. Yards away a clueless guy aimed his 9mm at me. Did he not notice the condition of the other guys outside? His ratty eyes watched me take down every single one of his men from his “secured” door into this place. He witnessed a person that looked human somehow take down others with weapons. His hand shook, his gun aimed everywhere but straight. I almost felt sorry for the man.

“Seriously?”

I ran forward, getting behind him. He didn't snap one bullet at me. By the time he realized where I was, my bicep cradled his neck. Autumn hid behind a four-foot tall wooden crate, next to the

closed steel rolling door. She came out once I dropped him. His frame released a small chirp when it hit the ground.

“Kill him!”

I didn't respond. I disliked repeating myself, and Autumn knew I wouldn't kill the man. She aimed her gun at his body and wobbled towards us. She dragged a heavyweight at her ankle. It screeched as it scraped the hard stone floor. I had encased her foot in iron. Snickers left my lips when I saw her struggle. I didn't seal it too tightly, she could move her toes in her shoes. Lifting her foot up was another issue. I think she could, but Autumn whined like she couldn't.

“SHUT UP!” She shot at the male's body multiple times.

A gasp or gag erupted from his lungs. It soon died as the crimson fluid popped its head from his wounds. Its red inched closer to my feet, nearly embracing my shoes with its warmth.

I appended another block on her opposite foot.

“I wish you'd get rid of these damn things.”

“Denied.” I turned back and hopped on one of the wooden crates to avoid the flood.

“FUCK YOU.” She fell forward, the metal flipping as she caught herself on her palms and knees.

“What makes you think I can't shoot myself? I can do it,” Autumn threatened.

Her vocals are desperate and filled with lies.

I looked away from her face, packed to the brim with make-up. What a monster.

She pushed her upper body higher to rest on her knees. The gun already slipped from her grasp when she fell. It was next to my crate.

“Even if you could, you emptied the last of your bullets into him.”

“AHHH.” She hit the ground with her bare hands again.

“I hate you!!!” She hit a volume I didn't know she had. “YOU'RE SO FUCKING USELESS. WHY DO I KEEP YOUR ASS AROUND? YOU DON'T EVEN GRANT ENOUGH OF MY FUCKING WISHES!” She spewed, “ALL YOU DO IS STALK ME AND GET IN MY DAMN WAY!”

Her insults were weak. She couldn't even name off any good

ones. “Yeah, stalking you is my hobby like yours is sucking dick in back alleys.”

“SHUT UP!” she screamed.

It was hard to hold back the floodgates of laughter. “You know, you could end all of this. Let me go and then I won’t ‘stalk you’ anymore.”

I scrunched two fingers on each hand to place quotes while I hunched over on the hard sitting space.

“NO. HELL NO. NOT UNTIL YOU GRANT ME MY DAMN WISHES.”

I sighed and waved my right finger for the thousandth time. “Denied.”

I swear it wagged more than a golden retriever’s tail.

Hair strands littered the floor as she pulled at them. I felt tugging on my head, and snapped my thumb and middle finger together.

Two more weights added, each to one of her hands. They kept every digit separated.

“LET ME OUT OF THESE FUCKING THINGS!”

I chuckled, “It’s a good look for you.”

“GET THESE OFF ME, LET ME GET UP!”

I touched over my head, feeling the plucked hairs. Her stenciled eyebrows crinkled with her face.

“When you let me go, they will disappear.”

Again, screaming at the top of her lungs, “FINE, I HATE YOUR FUCKING ASS! I DON’T WANT YOU NEAR ME ANYMORE!! I TAKE AWAY YOUR FUCKING BINDING TO ME OR SOME SHIT!!!”

My eyes lit up. “Granted.”

The amulet she wore around her neck, shattered. It went to another location. If I could find it before someone else, it would be the happiest day of my life. Sadly, it could end up anywhere. We have no idea where our item goes afterward. Sometimes, as soon as we continue our lives of “freedom,” we get pulled to our new owner.

The weights on her vanished. She exhaled, feeling her wrists and ankles. I leaped from the box and stretched with excitement. Then, glancing down and noticing the blood, I couldn’t find the

will to care about my shoes.

“I’m free. I might cry,” I joked.

Autumn shook her head. “Good. Now get your ass away from me.”

She went to the side door, leaving a trail of bloody prints with her thick one-inch stilettos.

“One more thing, Autumn!” I got her attention. “When you owned me, I couldn’t kill humans. It’s a rule we are bound by.” Her steps stopped, my voice - no - my distorted words twisted near her.

My sound escaped in multiple echoes overlapping the other.

“Now that I’m free...”

My shoes and clothes snapped. They had no authority over my expanding form.

She twisted around. Her eyes widened, and her pupils shrunk to the size of a particle. Her muscles twitched as she froze. The tall, lazy, adult male around the age of twenty-four she knew no longer existed. Instead, horror created a delicate juggling act before her disgusting, hazy yellow globes.

“My insides were dark, an empty void where things would go in and never come out.”

“Let me show you my appreciation.”

The monster, or I, bowed. My arms spread out. They were now long tubes with six-clawed fingers on each hand. I jazzed my phalanges. Several pops went off as horns cracked through the skull-mask over my face.

Her eyes followed as I rose from the bow. My abdomen and chest pried themselves open, tearing the flesh away. The sound reminded me of velcro, with the lack of red leaking from the opening, or guts to splatter the floor. My insides were dark, an empty void where things would go in and never come out. An indented groove where my torso should be. Then, a flutter of large rings went around from my collar vertically to my shoulder blades. They lifted from the back as non-sheathed daggers.

Autumn finally filed the command, her feet obeyed. She turned on her heels and bolted for the door.

My feet boomed across the cement. My legs functioned backward to that of a human, much like an ostrich. Her meaty hands

struck the door since it wouldn't open. The word "help!" left the merry-go-round she called vocals. She had slit the throats of everyone I put down; no one would hear her. The warehouse was a few miles from town.

My fingers folded together, and I flipped my hand outwards to crack every single one of them.

I didn't mention that, did I? The big difference between a genie and us. The fact that our bodies could become massive, at least thirty-feet high with our knuckles touching the floor. The teeth that filled our gums were heavy, big, and humiliated the jaw-strength of the animal our incisors resembled: an alligator.

I towered over her. It wouldn't have taken much to kill her. I mean, I was a dark genie from Ultimate, and she was a human from Earth. There wasn't a competition.

I bound her forearms to the wall and made sure she faced me. Autumn was a nasty moth that someone accidentally propped up with pins. She fought uselessly. Autumn threw a tantrum, kicking her legs and squirming her body. She successfully hit me. Well, she hit the protruding tipped rods that were near her face; they were my ribcage. It faced outward, ready to impale prey upon its frame.

"Le-Let g-go, you as--"

She didn't finish. She couldn't say another word.

I leaned forward, and not a word left my crooked, crinkled grin.

You get the picture, right? She lasted two months, and from that moment on, I learned I'm never taking that bullshit again. So, there you have it, what I am and what I do. So, stop trying to figure me out and wanting me to write reports. My fingers are cramping, and talking to someone about this crap would be so much easier.

THE FLOWER OF THIS MOMENT, A GOLD GERANIUM

POETRY BY S. T. BRANT

A flower of fire in rings and rings,
distinctly petal'd,
Distinctly leav'd as no other flower is:
this is the heart,
and to love, one must through this swim
and touch the shore
Without the least perfume of inferno.

THE LIES THAT MADE ME STAY

POETRY BY ELISA REAMER

I believed all of your lies that dripped out of your mouth
for my ears to catch and my eyes to view.

You led me to believe that you loved me for 9 months
when you refused to ever fight for me.

You promised me a lot of shit that only led to leaving me
behind and preying on some other innocent girl who
doesn't know better.

I believed you when you said you only saw a life with me
in it, but yet, you broke up with me within a snap of a
finger.

I believed all your stupid, good-for-nothing sorrys, de-
spite your actions not backing up the apology.

You promised to take me to the city, out to dinner after I
got accepted into the college you made me apply to, take
me ice skating, to Bass Pro Shop, my local mall to buy
me matching pants, to pay for dinner. None of that hap-
pened.

You promised to treat me as if I were a queen, but re-
fused to even bring me flowers.

You promised to always give me your full attention, but
the phone glued to your hand said otherwise.

You are so full of shit and I believed every part of it.

I gave you everything. I catered to ALL of your needs and
you left ME.

You taught me so many lessons on how I deserve to be
treated that no girl should ever have to learn, we should
just know.

Lucky for you, love is so incredibly blind that you got to
use me for almost 10 months while I was suffering just
because you called it love.

AMBIVALENT

ARTWORK BY ABIGAIL KING



24 x 54 in.
Pastel

HOMOPHONE

MUSIC BY AMBER LEIGH



LISTEN TO
THE MUSIC

Genre: *Singer/Songwriter*

Vocals and Instrumentation: *Amber Leigh*

Music and Lyrics: *Amber Leigh*

Recorded and Produced: *Amber Leigh*

URL: [https://m.youtube.com/
watch?v=q6KBROveAJg&t=7s](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=q6KBROveAJg&t=7s)

LUMIÈRE DE L'APRÈS-MIDI (AFTERNOON LIGHT)

MUSIC BY AMBER LEIGH
FEATURING QUENTIN DOVER



Lumière de l'après-midi

Amber Leigh feat. Quentin Dover

Genre: *Instrumental*

Instrumentation: *Amber Leigh and
Quentin Dover*

Recorded and Produced by: *Quentin Dover*

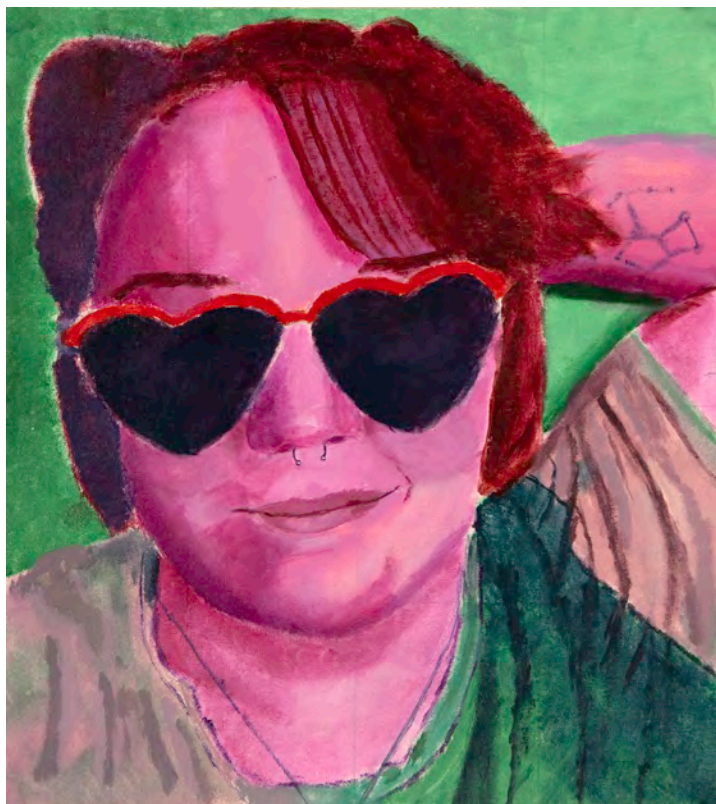
URL: [https://m.youtube.com/
watch?v=NbgjEONlwJk](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=NbgjEONlwJk)



LISTEN TO
THE MUSIC

Rosy

ARTWORK BY BECCA OVERTON



18 x 16 in.
Acrylic on Canvas

WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE

SCREENPLAY BY ALYX PTAK

Int. Unknown time of day. A barely lit corridor, bare and industrial looking. There is only dim light showing things heavily in shadows and spaced very far apart.

Everything is slightly tinted red/orange.

CAMERA: Low wide shot looking down the hall into the darkness.

CASEY sprints out of the darkness towards the camera, breathing hard and carrying a lit flashlight in their hand as they run.

CAMERA: Frame shakes as CASEY gets closer then runs past the camera. As they run past, it tips over backwards, and shows the hall that was behind the camera upside down.

CASEY runs away from the camera and into the darkness, light from the flashlight fades as they go away from the camera.

Everything is slightly tinted blue/green.

CAMERA: Cuts to what looks like the same hall. Medium shot slowly panning to the left.

ASH slowly walks down the hall, crossing the frame from right to left, passing in and out of the dim lights.

Everything is slightly tinted red/orange.

CAMERA: Cuts to a wide shot of the hall.

CASEY runs into the frame from the left. They look for a place to

hide for a moment, but can't find anywhere. They take off running again, exiting the frame to the right.

Everything is slightly tinted blue/green.

CAMERA: Cuts to a medium reverse shot of the hall, showing doors.

ASH goes to several doors and tries to open them. They are all locked.

CAMERA: Quickly cut to a montage of them trying several of the handles from different angles.

CAMERA: Cuts to a medium wide shot of the hall.

ASH gives up on the doors, and walks off frame to the left.

Everything is slightly tinted red/orange.

CAMERA: Cuts to a wide shot of the hall, looking at a corner where two segments meet.

CASEY rounds the corner and slows.

CAMERA: Cuts to a high angle tight shot on CASEY from behind, but from a distance.

A very low, inhuman growl comes from nowhere. CASEY looks over their shoulder and up at the camera. They scream in terror and take off running again, away from the camera.

Everything is slightly tinted blue/green.

CAMERA: Cuts to a medium shot of ASH.

CASEY's scream can be heard from off-screen. ASH jumps and looks around.

CAMERA: Cuts to a medium wide shot of the hallway that CASEY had been in. CASEY is not there. Cuts back to medium shot of ASH.

ASH
(Scared)
Who's there?!

Everything is slightly tinted red/orange.

CAMERA: Cuts to a medium tight shot of CASEY from the front, the camera moving backwards away from them.

CASEY runs towards the camera, then trips, the lit flashlight they were carrying flies out of their hand, and skitters across the ground.

CAMERA: Quickly follows the flashlight down to the ground, and pans to follow it as it slides past the camera.

The red/orange tint shifts to blue/green.

CAMERA: Continues to follow the flashlight until it reaches ASH, then tilts up to a low angle, medium tight shot of ASH.

The flashlight slides to a stop at ASH's feet. They jump back a step in surprise before quickly bending down to pick it up.

CAMERA: Cuts to a tight shot of ASH from the waist up.

They point the still lit flashlight in the direction of the camera, passing the beam across the lens quickly, then settling the beam of light below the lens.

Everything is slightly tinted red/orange.

CAMERA: Cuts to a high angle medium shot looking at CASEY on the floor. The space behind CASEY down the hall is the same place that ASH was standing, but they are not there.

CASEY rolls onto their back and looks up at the camera, terrified. They scramble backwards away from the camera, still looking up into it.

Everything is slightly tinted blue/green.

CAMERA: Medium shot of the hallway where CASEY had just been from ASH's point of view. CASEY is not there.

The light from the flashlight is lighting up the scene, coming from behind the camera where ASH is. CASEY's scream can be heard, as though they are right in front of the camera, along with the same type of low, inhuman growl that was heard earlier. CASEY's scream cuts off suddenly as a massive splat of blood and viscera appear on the floor, and the wall where CASEY had last been seen.

CAMERA: Cuts to close-up of ASH's face.

ASH flinches as blood splashes across their face. Their hand comes up and wipes at it. They look at their now bloody hand, horrified.

CAMERA: Cuts back to the medium shot of the hall from ASH's point of view.

There's a wet, squelching sound and in the now-shaking light from the flashlight, a large bloody footprint appears on the floor,

coming towards the camera. Right after the footprint, an equally large inhuman handprint appears on the wall. The low, inhuman growl is heard again, getting louder.

Fade To Black

Title Card
“What You Can’t See”

END

TIME FLIES BYE

NONFICTION BY GEORGE VANDER LINDE

***Trigger Warning** This narrative contains graphic depictions of illness and death.*

Johnny started out life like any other man. He was born into a family. Went to grade school. High school. Maybe college. At one time he enjoyed the love of his mother. At some point in his life, things changed. Johnny was dealt a hand that he just couldn't win, no matter what the stakes were. On the West Side he was an urban legend. Some people only saw him for his outward appearance and damned him to hell. Others would look a little deeper if only to justify to themselves his ability to remain alive.

I don't know how Johnny lost his legs. I do know how they became stumps of excoriated flesh, pink and shiny. He was a double amputee, with both legs gone above the knees. I don't know why he had a colostomy. I do know he never used a bag to collect his excrement. Some people said he lost his legs in a car accident. At one time he supposedly had his own van outfitted with special levers and pedals for him to drive. That disappeared. Johnny now lived on the streets. His home was a rotten, fetid wheelchair. Paramedics would refuse to take the wheelchair when transporting Johnny to the ED. Nobody ever stole it. Nobody but Johnny would ever sit in it.

The colostomy stoma on the left side of his abdomen constantly spewed a mixture of gastric contents and fecal matter. The continuous corrosive cascade of acid and liquid feces had eroded the skin on his buttocks and scrotum. The stoma itself was rosy red, and resembled a sea anemone when flush with the abdomen. But, more often than not, his intestine prolapsed half a foot out of the hole in his side. A pink, fleshy, cylindrical life form that seemed apart from Johnny. A metamorphosis from anemone to cucumber.

Last winter was hard on Johnny. Before Christmas there was

a bad cold spell. Johnny had not visited the ED in a week, and the rumor on the street was that he had died. Frozen rock solid. At the Yuletide table of my home, before the ham dinner with all the trimmings was served, prayers were offered. I included Johnny in our prayers. Not entreating God to forgive society for the worthlessness assigned to him. Just a prayer that his soul had made it to Heaven. At that instant my youngest daughter was captivated by Johnny. He has no legs? He has no home? Her first taste of demographic injustice. She became a disciple of the Good Shepherd in her fervent crusade to make me see the errors of my ways.

The rumor of Johnny's death was dispelled in mid-January. Johnny rolled into the ED on a paramedic cart sitting up, a little worse for wear and tear.

"I thought that you were dead?!?"

Johnny smiled.

"I know. My sister started that rumor."

The cold was not kind to Johnny during his sabbatical. In 2017-18 the winter was not kind nor forgiving to the homeless of Chicago. Johnny's fingers had swollen up to the size of bratwursts and were about as grey as a faded asphalt street. The next time I saw him, all his fingers were gone except his thumbs and half a pinky on his left hand. No fingers. Only staples closing the skin where his fingers used to be. The fingers were amputated in late February when they began to rot. That was the beginning of Johnny's ultimate demise.

My youngest daughter is a surrogate son. We didn't enjoy tea parties in her room on rainy days. We went fishing. The end of March meant the annual youth trout fishing derby. This year cold rain froze on her fishing pole and line. We were soaked to the bone. Shivering cold. But she is stubborn, and not until the first trout was caught did she beg to leave. On the way home, in the warmth of the car, she asked if Johnny was outside today. I told

"On the way home, in the warmth of the car, she asked if Johnny was outside today. I told her he probably was."

her he probably was.

“That is so bad! I want to build a house for all the homeless people.”

The little social crusader ranted for five miles why everyone needed to live in a house.

The summer of 2018 would be the last summer Johnny would see. When he arrived in the ED, he always wore several layers of clothing despite the high temperatures. Heavy trench coat, multiple sweatshirts, trousers with the legs tucked under his buttocks like some kind of impromptu cushion. Rancid clothes stiff with the swill that would endlessly expel from his unbagged stoma. The emanation was unbelievable. It was a stench all his own. “Eau de Johnny”. And that stench permeated everywhere. Once that smell got into your nose, it set up residence and never left. The whole ED was filled with the putrid odor of decaying flesh. And the maggots. Hundreds of maggots that were hiding under the layers of clothing. When Johnny’s clothing was cut off, the maggots were like so many grains of basmati rice, wriggling in an undulating mass on his bare skin.

Some ED staff would refuse to care for him. They would yell out “not it” like it was a game who cared for him. When the music stopped, you didn’t want to be the one left standing looking for a chair.

There is one rule of leadership: Never ask anyone to do something you are not willing to do. Johnny was in a room with a door. Two other staff members joined me. The rest of his decomposed clothing was cut away. All the maggots were wiped from his body. Soapy warm washcloths cleaned him of the liquid feces. His grimace betrayed my lack of empathy. I left the room, and immediately vomited in the nearest trash can. The smell of my puke was a welcome respite as I wretched over the can.

His clothes were bagged up. There was money in the pockets. A blind person needed no explanation for his plight. Johnny trumped all the beggar-addicts. On Chicago Avenue he was most adroit at soliciting alms. Mostly small bills. Some tens and twenties. All covered in fecal goo. Good for all debts public and private

did not apply here.

That was mid-June. I predicted that Johnny would not last past August. I was wrong. Early July, Johnny came into the ED with a wild vacant stare. His hair was nappy and matted, his beard dotted with spittle. Up to this point, Johnny had survived a couple of code blue resuscitations, always losing another piece of himself. Now it was kidney failure. Twice brought back from the dead. Twice signing out of the ICU after stabilizing dialysis. I was behind the desk the last time he rolled in with the paramedics. I can't forget those eyes. Wide open. White sclera glowing. Darting eyes, searching. Looking at me. Then his head dropped, chin planted on his chest. And his head just lolled there. He was rushed into a room, and transferred to a hospital cart. Unresponsive to verbal or tactile stimuli. He was on his back wide-eyed, staring at the ceiling. It was confirmed he had no pulse. Resuscitative efforts were again put into play. CPR was initiated. Scissors instinctively started cutting outer garments.

“Don't cut off the clothes!”

His chest was exposed. Defibrillator pads were applied. Every thrust on his chest expelled liquefied fecal goo from his stoma. IV's were started. Johnny was intubated. Drugs given. Nothing worked. Johnny died in the early evening. He was put into a body bag. His family was notified. A white sheet covered the bag, his head left exposed. Soon Johnny's family was bedside. They loved Johnny. Grieved for him in a dignified way that showed tender devotion. After Johnny lost his fingers, his trajectory towards a final demise changed from a helium balloon floating back to terra firma to a meteor burning itself out in the atmosphere.

Johnny's death was met with relief in the ED and first responder community. Some people celebrated his death, recalling times when Johnny would hurl handfuls of feces as they attempted to tend to him. His stench and decay would make people lose their religion. He never really asked for much. Just something for the pain, a turkey sandwich, and a glass of ice water. My daughter had written him a letter. I read it to him weeks before he died. “Let my Papa know when you want a glass of water. Happy birthday.” I

left out the part where she wrote she wanted to meet him. Johnny couldn't believe it. "Bless her heart." His eyes twinkled. It was only the second time I ever saw him smile.

The nine-year-old social crusader will not let me pass a panhandler at a stoplight without adding a coffer to the cup. "Give him money Papa!" She vows to house all the homeless. To feed all the hungry. And I am scolded for my narrow views and failing to see the humanity in everyone. Some people tried to give Johnny dignity. Not many. All he wanted was a sandwich, a glass of water, and to be left alone. For that, he died in a hospital emergency room. Eyes open, staring at the ceiling with a tube down his throat and needles in his arms. A cracked crash cart bedside with open cartons of drugs, and glass syringes scattered about the floor was testimony to the work that went into the attempt of resuscitation. The trash of the code blue. I was there. I saw it myself. Time of death 17:29 hrs.

I went home an hour and a half later. July 3rd in my town means fireworks down by the river. My daughter and I watched the sky explode with sound and color. Crowds of people who lined the banks were illuminated with every explosion. The fireworks reflected in the flowing water of the Fox. At one particularly beautiful burst, I told my daughter that Johnny had died today. Time stopped a few short seconds for her. She looked at me seriously, searching for words before speaking. Then her face became bright and clear.

"He's in Heaven, I know it."

We both sat in quiet reflection. The sky kept filling with brilliant explosions of blazing color, followed by the oohs and ahhs of the crowd. As we sat on the blanket, my daughter moved a little closer and held my hand. Johnny died today. I thought not so much as to what a proper tribute the night sky had become to Johnny. I just contemplated that another urban legend had died. And I wondered who would take his place.

THE PROCRASTINATION

POETRY BY ALEXIE DIAZ

Once upon a midnight dreary,
while I trudge through feebly and teary,
over too many assignments given,
such a very long time ago.
While I nodded,
coffee failing,
suddenly I heard my cell phone blaring,
as if there were friends impatiently waiting,
a social life I would adore.
“It’s some scam,”
I muttered,
making it tumble to the floor.
“Only that and nothing more.”
Yes, I remember,
a time during winter break in December;
when we,
friends, all gathered knelt on the cabin floor,
strongly came the ocean of sorrow writing
this project on Kitagawa Utamaro,
a project very much due tomorrow,
tomorrow on Kitagawa Utamaro.
An amazing artist in Japanese culture,
whom wasn’t named Lenore.
Sadly,
nameless to many more.
And the sulking,
mad,
uncertain face,
of each student hurtin’,
hustled me,
showed me to realities,
I had pushed far down before.

Now,
the caller continued to try to make me spend,
and I kept repeating again,
“It’s some scam beseeching at my phone to bore,
some dumb scammer beseeching at my phone to bore.
That it is and nothing more!”
Irritated,
my itch grew stronger,
hesitating then no longer.
“Scammer,” I said,
finally answering their buzzing snore.
“I don’t want to listen to your yapping,
I’m already tired, I should be napping,
so stop with your obsessive tapping,
tapping at my phone to bore!”
Here I listened for their roar,
only an end and then nothing more.
Here,
I was peering,
long I sat there discovering,
to flaking,
whizzing,
and shaking,
while gripping on the device I had before.
My stillness remained unbroken,
maybe I had misspoken,
and the only words I had spoken were my whispered words,
“It’s dead.”
I whispered
and the room said it back,
“It’s dead.”
That’s all it was and nothing more.
Sat back in my chair twirling,
every part of me was swirling,
then I caught the sound again blaring as it did before.
“No,” said I.

“Surely that’s not possible.
Let me press the button again,
let me settle my nerves and press the button again;
it’s a fluke and nothing more!”
Pressed it, I did,
its vibrant colors it had forbid.
Yet its ringing,
its constant singing,
the caws continued to talk much more.
The phone did not stop;
it continued to shake and rock,
calling my attention even as it rested,
such defiant misconception.
The cell held its own whim in my palm,
a senseless rattle in my palm.
Ringing, it did, and nothing more.
Suddenly my eyes pried open,
flinging to my phone,
to which I’d awoken,
its surface alit, along with my laptop’s fluorescent emit.
“Fuck!”
I shouted, my face turning pale.
I felt like I had been impaled,
with this new information
mocking.
My essay,
uncompleted barely a paragraph in
mocking.
My fingers glide quickly across the keys,
a last-minute effort to make a piece.
I turned it in with lightning frustration,
continuing to feed my procrastination.
Quoth its alluring weight,
“Forevermore.”

FOREVER AND ALWAYS

POETRY BY ELISA REAMER

Forever and always,
right?
We probably said “forever and always” to each other 100
times, maybe even more.
You promised that you would love me
Forever and always,
right?
I guess that was just one of your sweet little lies that I was
stupid enough to believe.
Forever and always,
right?
You promised me a lot of things.
You were a man of words, not actions.
And I fell right into the trap.
Because forever and always.
We would talk about our future careers, kids, homes, all the
fun things we would do together as a family.
Forever and always,
right?
Yet here I am
without you.

THE FIRE BENEATH MY WINGS

ARTWORK BY DIANE GIL



8.5 x 5 x 14 in.
Clay

Diane Gil 50

ORANGE JUICE

ARTWORK BY ANGELINA TREJO



13 x 19 in.
Photography

VALVES

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO



24 x 18 in.

Oil on Aluminum Panel

Daniel Capobianco 52

UNTITLED

ARTWORK BY GARRETT AUSTIN



8.5 x 11 in.
Photography

WHITE SODA FIRED POT/VASE

ARTWORK BY TANVI AGGARWAL



10 x 9 in.
Clay

HOTLINE

FICTION BY MANDIE JONES

****Trigger Warning**** *This story depicts suicidal ideation and graphic violence.*

Author's Note: This story is not meant to diminish the struggle of those who struggle with suicide. Horror, as a genre, focuses on unsettling the reader to examine dark themes and the monsters that live there.

“Hello, Suicide Help Line. My name is Maria. Who am I speaking to?” Maria spoke smoothly. Her voice soothing like the warmest blanket on a cold day.

“Oh uh, a real person. I shouldn't be calling. Other people have it worse. Ya know?”

“Your problems are just as important as anyone else's,” Maria cooed. Suffering is not a competition,” she added softly.

“Yeah.” A sniffle. “Yeah, you're right. I'm Chloe.”

“There you go. Off to a great start, yeah? So how are you doing today Chloe?” Maria nudged the conversation forward. Just a smidge though, not to upset the poor thing.

“I'm okay. How are you?”

“I'm great, thank you for asking, but I would be better if we were a little more honest with each other. Do you think we could try that?”

“I guess so,” Chloe mumbled feebly.

“Wonderful. I'm so glad to hear that. So how are you doing today Chloe?” Maria tried again.

“I don't want to be here anymore,” Chloe blurted. “It's so hard. Everything is so hard. It hurts, everything hurts.”

“Chloe. Are you safe where you are?” Maria questioned.

“Yeah, I mean, I'm in my apartment, so I'm good.” Chloe paused.

“Good. Go on Chloe. You're being so brave being honest with me.”

“I just want to die. It’d be easier. I just want to fucking end it all. No more pain, no more...”

Weewoo weewoo. Wah wah wah. Weewoo weewoo. Wah wah wah.

“Just a minute,” Chloe said rising to her feet. “My security alarm is going off. I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll be here when you get back,” Maria assured her.

Chloe made her way to the downstairs keypad and jiggled the door handle.

Locked. Just as she had left it.

She double checked the deadbolt. It was also locked.

Weird, she thought as she punched the security code into the keypad. Chloe listened for any noises as she made her way back to the phone in her bedroom. Not hearing a sound, she closed her bedroom door and sat on the edge of her bed.

“Sorry about that. Must have been a glitch or something,” Chloe said nervously, hoping that Maria had not hung up on her. She couldn’t take that kind of rejection. Not from a stranger.

“Nothing to be sorry about love. As long as you’re safe,” Maria said in a motherly tone. “Would you like to continue our conversation?”

“I s’pose so. I just didn’t expect adult life to be so lonely and empty. Nobody would miss me if I was gone.”

“Nobody?” whispered a voice from the dark corner in the room. A shiver ran down Chloe’s spine.

“Maria, did you hear that?” Chloe whispered into her phone.

“No dear, I’m sorry, but I didn’t hear anything. What were you saying?”

“She said nobody would miss her. Isn’t that right, Chloe?” The voice said louder. A man wearing a black balaclava emerged from her closet.

Chloe screamed and flung herself on the opposite side of her

“I just didn’t expect adult life to be so lonely and empty. Nobody would miss me if I was gone.”

bed.

“Who are you? Get the fuck out! I’m calling the cops!”

The man smiled a hideous smile.

“Now Chloe, Chloe, Chloe. Why would you do something like that? You want to die, correct? I mean, you just said it out loud. You told a stranger that you want to die.” His dark eyes twinkled as he stepped closer to her. “Chloe, I can help you with that.”

Chloe reached next to her and found her hands wrapped around her bedside lamp.

“Get back! Stay away from me,” she screamed as she threw the lamp at the intruder.

The man ducked it easily and lunged at Chloe. His agility and speed caught her by surprise. Chloe screamed and clawed, bit and stomped, but the intruder’s grasp didn’t ease. As she became exhausted, the man sat her down on her vanity chair. He took his time tying her with thick nylon rope. She could see in the vanity mirror that the man had come prepared as he set a small leather toolkit on the bed. Chloe let out a whimper as he unrolled the kit to reveal a large array of knives, saws, and other sharp instruments.

“Ah, my tools,” the man said. “Do you like them? They’ve been very reliable through the years.”

Chloe shook her head as tears streamed down her face. The man ran his fingers over his kit.

“Which one, which one?” he said in a singsong voice. “Ah! This will do the trick.”

The man plucked an instrument and brought it around her so Chloe could see up close. Chloe sobbed upon seeing the knife.

“It’s a boning knife. Sharp as can be. Ya see, I use a whetstone myself to keep it that way.”

The man ran the blade lightly over the skin on Chloe’s shoulder catching the strap of her tank top, easily cutting it in half. The strap fell down limply on her chest and back.

“What do you want from me?” Chloe sobbed.

“I just want to help, Chloe. And I will help, eventually,” the man smiled again.

She hated that smile.

“This isn’t helping,” Chloe spat.

“I’m going to help you die Chloe. Just like you wanted,” the man whispered into her ear as he held the knife to her throat. “Now, just tell me when. Or, I’ll decide.”

The man stood up, knife still to her throat, and smoothly walked behind her. Chloe could see him in the mirror and he could see her.

“If looks could kill, Chloe,” the man chuckled darkly, “I’d be the one in danger. But, they can’t, and here we are.”

The man reached back on the bed, grasping blindly for Chloe’s phone, an easy task in her cramped apartment bedroom. With quick success, he placed the phone in front of Chloe on top of the vanity.

“Now Chloe, you decide. Would you like to die now or later?” The man growled menacingly as he held the knife tighter to her throat. A trickle of blood rolled down Chloe’s neck.

“I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die!” Chloe cried out. “Let me go you monster!”

“Are you sure, Chloe?” the man asked, “be very sure now, or I will kill you.”

“Fuck you! I don’t want to die. FUCK YOU!” Chloe screamed with all her strength. The scream ended with sobbing. “No no no no no,” she groaned and grumbled.

The man removed the knife from her throat slowly. Chloe screeched as she saw the knife in the mirror come down at her with immense speed and closed her eyes.

Seconds sped by. Minutes of silence and darkness until Chloe was sure she heard nothing. She wasn’t dead. She peaked out of one eye into the mirror. The man was gone.

“What the fuck?” she whispered. Her eyes darted around her room to see nothing. She tried to move forward to find she could stand up.

“He cut the rope? What is going on here,” Chloe whispered to herself. She shook loose the rope and ran to the bedroom door, stumbled down the stairs, almost falling off the last

step in the dark.

“C’mon c’mon,” she whispered as she fumbled with the door locks. She breathed a sigh of relief as the door swung open and she ran out into the night.

That was quick. The man thought to himself as he stepped back out of her closet with his kit. He walked over to the vanity and picked up the phone.

“Hello, are ya still there?” The man spoke gently into the phone.

“Of course I am Jim. I’m a professional,” Maria said smoothly. “Busy night?”

“She was my fourth one tonight. Eh,” the man shrugged in the dark, “it happens more around the holidays.”

“Tell me about it,” Maria sympathized. “I’ll be bloody happy when this season is over. Well, give my love to Linda and the kids.”

“Yeah same to Roger and the little ones. Merry Christmas, Maria.”

“Merry Christmas, Jim.”

RYAN FROM THE FARM

NONFICTION BY ANONYMOUS

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *OUR STORIES*,
THE CREATIVE WRITING CLUB'S 2020 COMING OUT DAY ZINE

I met Ryan on a farm in New Hampshire three years ago.

The farm was a faith-based rehabilitation farm for troubled young men and women, aged eighteen to thirty-five. It was the kind of farm for people fresh out of rehab, out of prison, off the streets; the kind of farm where you worked everyday, you praised God, you got better after a committed year; the kind of farm that had a strict schedule, monitored diets, and barracks-style living; the kind of farm where you weren't allowed to talk to the women, they sealed away your phone, they read the diaries you were required to write, they cut you off from the world.

Most importantly though, it was the kind of farm that ran on donations, and, other than the eight hundred dollar deposit for emergency airfare in case you were kicked out, it was the kind of farm that was free. I had jumped at the chance.

Ryan was instantly one of my favorite people there. Warm guy, killer smile, welcoming, caring. He had been there for eight months when I arrived, two phase groups ahead of me, so maybe some of that Christ-like kindness had already rubbed off on him. I still haven't decided. But he was there for people. There always seemed to be some sort of pain underneath the surface, though. I figured it was the same pain that all us troubled young men and women from eighteen to thirty-five had. Maybe, but not entirely.

Early on, I had struggled with being on the farm. I wanted to leave. I doubted the program, I doubted my faith, I doubted sobriety. Ryan walked me through it, guided me. He wove me a hemp bracelet, red, yellow, and blue, tight and secure, and that piece of string gave me more comfort than any amount of prayer.

Now, lots of people were there for lots of reasons. Ryan was

there for opioid addiction. The funny thing about the farm, though, was that it had a tendency to unearth problems that you didn't know existed, or problems that you didn't think were problems.

It didn't take long for me and my phasemates to find that the farm moonlighted as something of a conversion-therapy camp. It's a simple concept if you're unfamiliar: gay people go in, Christ

works his magic, straight people come out. Because homosexuality is a "sin," and because, you know, homosexuality is an epidemic right up there with fucking fentanyl and heroin, right?

"Cue righteous indignation. Grab your pitchforks, pick your side. Grab your torches too, because it's so much greyer than that."

Cue righteous indignation. Grab your pitchforks, pick your side. Grab your torches too, because it's so much greyer than that. The tricky thing is when you need help that bad, you take it where you can get it. And you'd be surprised at how fast you'd conform to

an idea just like everybody else, and you'd be surprised at how perfectly a clean, well-lighted place fills a void in a broken life. Despite any bitterness I might have, the farm was not evil. It got a lot of things right. Just not this one.

Ryan was gay. I found this out a few months in. It was a card that he kept close to his chest because although the farm knew (and was working to change it), he still risked drawing lines between him and the other guys. Homophobia was a very real thing in an open floor plan, bunk bed dorm room of aspiring Christian men from less than savory backgrounds. Not in the Bible thumping ways that you'd think, but it was still there.

What I loved about Ryan was how he dealt with it. He knew what he needed, and he knew what he didn't. He needed the structure, the support. He needed grace and forgiveness, meaning and a second chance. What he didn't need was to change something he couldn't—something he shouldn't. He still rolled with the punches.

During confessions one time he smiled and said, “Every time I take a shower, every time I go to the bathroom, my sin is right there in front of me.” Joke or not, there was still no tragedy lost to the statement—that this was something he was made to confess.

Ryan didn’t crack. He didn’t conform. While everyone else was pressed to fit that stereotypical mold, he took the best aspects and made his own shape.

When it neared his phase’s graduation, Ryan told me, “I’m going to change a lot of things about my life. I’m going to stay clean. I’m going to keep my relationship with God. But I will always be gay. That doesn’t change.”

Only three guys from Ryan’s phase made it to graduation, and he was one of them. And he wasn’t just going to disappear either. He planned to come back as a servant leader for the farm. Maybe he’d even help rein it back in. I have my reservations though.

Shortly after he graduated, I left the program and never saw him again. And yeah, I lost that eight hundred dollar deposit.

I don’t know his full story though because he was outside my phase. I wish I could give you the trials he had to overcome to navigate both his faith and sexuality in that kind of complicated, oppressive environment—I’m sure it was one hell of a feat. All I can tell you for certain is that he came out the other side stronger, more secure, more whole, and I think that is goddamn beautiful.

Ryan. You’ll never read this, but I love you brother. I still have the hemp bracelet—it never left my wrist till it came apart last year. I wish you were around to put it back together for me, because I still don’t know how.

FRANKENSTEIN'S FRANKENSTEIN

SCREENPLAY BY JEREMY DAVIS

AWARDED THIRD PLACE IN DRAMA AT THE
2020 ILLINOIS SKYWAY WRITER'S FESTIVAL

EXT. CAFE - LATE EVENING

Two young men, VICTOR, a timid, slim, and bookish-looking fellow, and LAWRENCE, a stocky, confident, domineering type with sideburns, sit at a cafe table with seemingly nothing to say to one another until...

LAWRENCE

So... Frankenstein... That supposed to be German or something?

VICTOR

Hmm, what? No, Italian... Specifically Sicilian, I think... Bit of Swiss, too.

VICTOR stares blankly into his coffee. He takes a sip and begins to gently stir it with a spoon.

VICTOR (V.O.)

Relationships. They're all the same. A meets B, they fall for each other, they spend their days thinking of nothing but one another, then there tends to be a fork in the road. A and B could decide that they want to spend the rest of their days together, perhaps raise a child, 'C' perhaps, and begin to become something bigger than themselves. Part of a cosmic plan to ensure that this seemingly futile species endures. A and B will live their lives, knowing that after they die, C will continue to live, find D, raise another child, E, then die, then the cycle will begin again up until the very end of time

itself. Or at least until they get to Z. However, A or B will eventually live to see the other die. They both know that it was going to happen, and they both know that, statistically speaking, they won't have the luxury of dying together. The inevitable heartbreak occurs, and there will forever remain an aching loneliness taking the shape of their now lost lover.

LAWRENCE

Coffee stirred well enough?

VICTOR, seemingly broken from a spell, suddenly stops stirring.

VICTOR (THROUGH A FORCED LAUGH)

Yeah.

LAWRENCE gives a light chuckle.

VICTOR (V.O)

Damn, forgot to talk again. This happens all the time. Yet another pause in the conversation. There seems to be truly nothing more to say.

VICTOR clears his throat, takes another sip from his coffee, and begins to stare blankly at it again.

VICTOR (V.O)

Where was I going... Right. Alternatively, A and B could continue their relationship, until one day, they can't seem to recognize one another. They, of course, know who they are, but they aren't the same idea that they fell in love with. The both of them feel ashamed about their feelings and they decide to simply keep it inside, watching the life in each other's eyes slowly fade into oblivion, until the truth inevitably comes spilling out. This too leads to heartbreak, but a quite sudden one. Both will begin to look at themselves in the mirror and think to themselves, "Why can't I just be that

idea?” This was more along the lines of what happened with Fritz and I a couple of months ago. It all leads to heartbreak, doesn't it? Man, this date is going terribly. Oh god, and I haven't even gotten to the worst part.

VICTOR clears his throat and takes a deep breath.

VICTOR

Hey, so, are you... Um... Nevermind.

LAWRENCE

Tell me.

VICTOR stares blankly at LAWRENCE.

VICTOR (V.O)

God, that's hot. Finally, a guy who knows what he wants. It's been so long since I've been with a guy who knows what he wants. Not a huge fan of the sideburns, but maybe I could make do with that. Thank God this is going somewhere.

LAWRENCE

What are you, deaf or something? I said tell me.

VICTOR (TO HIMSELF)

God.

LAWRENCE

You Catholic or something?

VICTOR

NO! What? I mean, I was raised- not currently but like- that wasn't- sorry, did I say that?

LAWRENCE

Jesus Christ, are you gonna tell me?!?

VICTOR

Alright... Um... Are you cool with like... kids?

LAWRENCE

Why? You got one?

VICTOR

Well, that's a tricky question. It's not technically a 'child.' Actually, I'm not entirely sure it can count as a human or any form of living being.

VICTOR laughs and looks to LAWRENCE to laugh as well. LAWRENCE doesn't find it as funny.

VICTOR

Yeah, he's technically a corpse. My ex called him 'Frankenstein's Monster,' but I don't know what to call him. Ya know?

LAWRENCE does not know.

LAWRENCE

Well, if this is the time for... 'disclosures'... Then I suppose I should tell you... one night I was bitten by a wolf, right?

VICTOR

Right.

LAWRENCE

Then, the next day, some guy told me that I was gonna turn into a wolf every time a full moon rises, and I was 'psh yeah right,' but yeah turns out he was right.

VICTOR

He was telling the truth about- the-you turning into a-uh-

LAWRENCE

Yeah.

VICTOR takes a second to wrap his head around what was just said.

VICTOR

Okay... That's um... I'm sorry did you say wolf?

LAWRENCE

Yeah, I was bit by a wolf.

VICTOR

No, um, you like... Turn into a wolf?

LAWRENCE

Yeah, when a full moon rises.

VICTOR

Is it like... You know... Is it 'transferable'?

LAWRENCE

Well, I know by wolf bite, yeah, but through other means? I don't know.

VICTOR

I... I don't know... I can't say I'm necessarily that into um... That.

LAWRENCE

AND I'M SUPPOSED TO BE INTO YOUR WEIRD DEAD KID THING?!?

VICTOR

That's-

LAWRENCE suddenly stands up and slides everything off the table. After his brief fit of rage, the two just stare at each other.

VICTOR

Can you pay? Sorry, I'm just not very liquid right now.

LAWRENCE continues to stare at VICTOR, then he angrily takes a \$20 bill out of his wallet, throws it on the table, and storms out. VICTOR sighs.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

VICTOR walks along the sidewalk, looking down at the ground with his hands in his pockets. He stops for a second and looks to the crescent moon.

VICTOR

Can't be that bad, can it?

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX HALLWAY - NIGHT

VICTOR fumbles with his keys and struggles to unlock the door to his apartment.

VICTOR (V.O)

I've always been quite proud of this apartment. I got it for only a couple thousand a month. With the prices of rent being how they are today, that's something of a steal! So long as I never turn on the A.C. or the heat.

VICTOR finally unlocks the door.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

VICTOR enters his apartment consisting of a kitchen with a table, two chairs, and two beds left unframed. As VICTOR turns on the lights, he is startlingly greeted by THE CREATION, who looks quite remarkably like VICTOR, except made of an amalgamation of things that you would NOT want to know the nitty-gritty de-

tails of. He is also quite damp.

THE CREATION

Ha!

VICTOR

Jesus Christ! Why are you so damp?

THE CREATION

Damp...

VICTOR

Damp! Like, slightly wet. Soggy! Moist!

THE CREATION

Soggy... Moist...

VICTOR sighs.

VICTOR

Nevermind.

CUT TO: VICTOR laying on his bed in a fetal position, as he scrolls through his phone.

VICTOR (V.O.)

I hate social media. I really do not like social media at all. Not one time have I scrolled through any social media platform, and said: "I'm having a good time."

VICTOR comes across some selfies posted by DRACULA, a hip goth guy. Everybody wants to be DRACULA.

VICTOR

Goddamned Dracula.

THE CREATION

Dracula...

VICTOR

He's this Romanian guy that everybody thinks is so cool, because he's like, rich, and he wears all black, and only goes out at night, and stuff like that.

VICTOR puts down his phone.

VICTOR

Goddamned Dracula.

VICTOR tries to get some shut-eye.

CUT TO:

INT. ABYSS - ????

VICTOR floats aimlessly through the abyss.

THE VOICE (V.O.)

VICTOR!

VICTOR tries to place the voice. He knows who it is, it's on the tip of his tongue. Then, he realizes...

VICTOR

God?!?!

THE VOICE is unresponsive.

VICTOR

Why do you sound like me?

THE VOICE (V.O.)

IT IS THE ONLY VOICE YOU WILL LISTEN TO!

VICTOR

Alright, fair enough. What's up?

The frame begins to split in three. In one third, VICTOR'S legs are walking forward on a sidewalk. In another third, VICTOR is seen moving backward in a forest. In the final third, we see an amalgamation of eyes, noses, and mouths that belong to THE VOICE.

THE VOICE

CEASE ALL FURTHER ATTEMPTS OF IMITATION!
LEAVE IT TO CHANCE! ALL OF IT! OR ELSE YOU
WILL BECOME A VERMIN OF SOCIETY!

VICTOR

Oh, dear.

THE VOICE

THIS IS MY MESSAGE!

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

VICTOR wakes up in a cold sweat.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

VICTOR sits alone on a park bench.

VICTOR (V.O.)

The thought has passed again. Taking a ride on the grimmest greyhound across the country with Fritz. I can't quite understand it. I'll take a ride on the dirtiest bus with someone I love over a plane any day. I brought up the idea with him before everything happened, but he always brushed it off.

VICTOR takes an orange out of his pocket and looks at it. He takes a look around and sees an OLD MAN sitting on another

bench, staring at him. He attempts to peel the orange with his hands, but can't seem to do it. He looks back and forth at his hands, fumbling with an orange, and the OLD MAN, still staring at VICTOR. Suddenly he drops the orange, and it rolls away. Slowly, he looks up at the OLD MAN, who shakes his head and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAFE - LATE EVENING

VICTOR sits alone at a table with a coffee. A BARISTA walks up to him.

VICTOR

Can you believe this? Jesus, I guess this is why they call him the Invisible Man.

BARISTA

So, will that be-

VICTOR

I mean, I've never considered myself a very ugly guy. Am I?

BARISTA

Um... No, I guess not.

VICTOR

I'm sorry, I shouldn't- You don't get paid enough to hear about my... troubles and such.

BARISTA

Will that be all?

VICTOR

It- Yeah, give me a second.

VICTOR reaches for his wallet.

VICTOR
All the money I had! Wasted on this guy!

VICTOR takes out a couple of dollars and puts it on the table. The BARISTA takes it and walks away. He stands up.

VICTOR
Modern love! Right everybody?

VICTOR leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

VICTOR angrily walks along the sidewalk with his hands in his pockets looking down at the ground. He suddenly stops and lets out a scream of frustration.

VICTOR (TO THE AIR)
I AM A SICK MAN! I AM A SPITEFUL MAN! AN UN-
ATTRACTIVE MAN! I THINK MY HEART HURTS BUT
I DON'T KNOW! AND YET! I HAVE YET TO FIND A
CURE! IS IT OUT OF SPITE?!? HUH?!?! YOU KNOW
WHAT?!? FINE! MY HEART HURTS?!? GOOD! LET IT
HURT SOME MORE!

VICTOR is suddenly splashed with a bucket of water from above by a DISGRUNTLED MAN.

DISGRUNTLED MAN
YOU OUGHTA BE A QUIET MAN! I'M TRYNA GET
SOME SLEEP HERE!

VICTOR
GOD!

VICTOR turns a corner and finds FRITZ and DRACULA walking arm in arm. All of them stop dead in their tracks.

VICTOR

Fritz?!?

FRITZ

Oh my god! Why are you so damp?!?

DRACULA

Hector!

VICTOR

GODDAMNED- Victor- GODDAMN DRACULA?!?!

FRITZ

YES, GODDAMNED DRACULA! HE LETS ME BE ME!
FOR ONCE!

VICTOR is taken aback. Speechless, he walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

VICTOR unlocks the door, turns on the lights, and is again, greeted by the creation.

THE CREATION

Ha!

VICTOR just stares at THE CREATION.

VICTOR (ON THE VERGE OF TEARS)

Goddamned Dracula.

VICTOR leans on THE CREATION and cries.

FADE OUT:

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

VICTOR and THE CREATION sit on a log and eat ham and cheese sandwiches.

VICTOR

You remember Fritz, right? Do you even have the ability to remember?

THE CREATION

Fritz!

VICTOR

Yeah, Fritz... I don't know if you noticed, but he isn't really around anymore. I don't think he's coming back for a while.

THE CREATION

Gone?

VICTOR

Yeah, gone I guess... I don't know... I guess I just haven't processed the fact that he's gone just quite yet. It's like... I just feel like... empty and aching inside, and I feel like... everything that is in the galaxy is against me! And I'm so lonely! I'm really just... I'm so lonely.

THE CREATION

Lonely...

VICTOR

Lonely. Like, alone, I don't have anybody around me, you know?

THE CREATION

No! Me!

VICTOR

You... I guess I do have you, don't I? Look at us. Victor and um... say I don't think I ever gave you a name. You know Fritz used to call you Frankenstein's... Say, how's Frank?

THE CREATION

Frank.

VICTOR

Frank, it is. Victor and Frank, out to rule the world... Ya know, Frank, I think this is the start of a beautiful friendship.

They continue to eat their ham and cheese sandwiches

THE END

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Questions? Contact Dan Portincaso at
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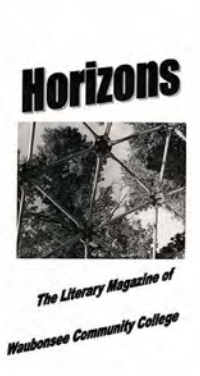
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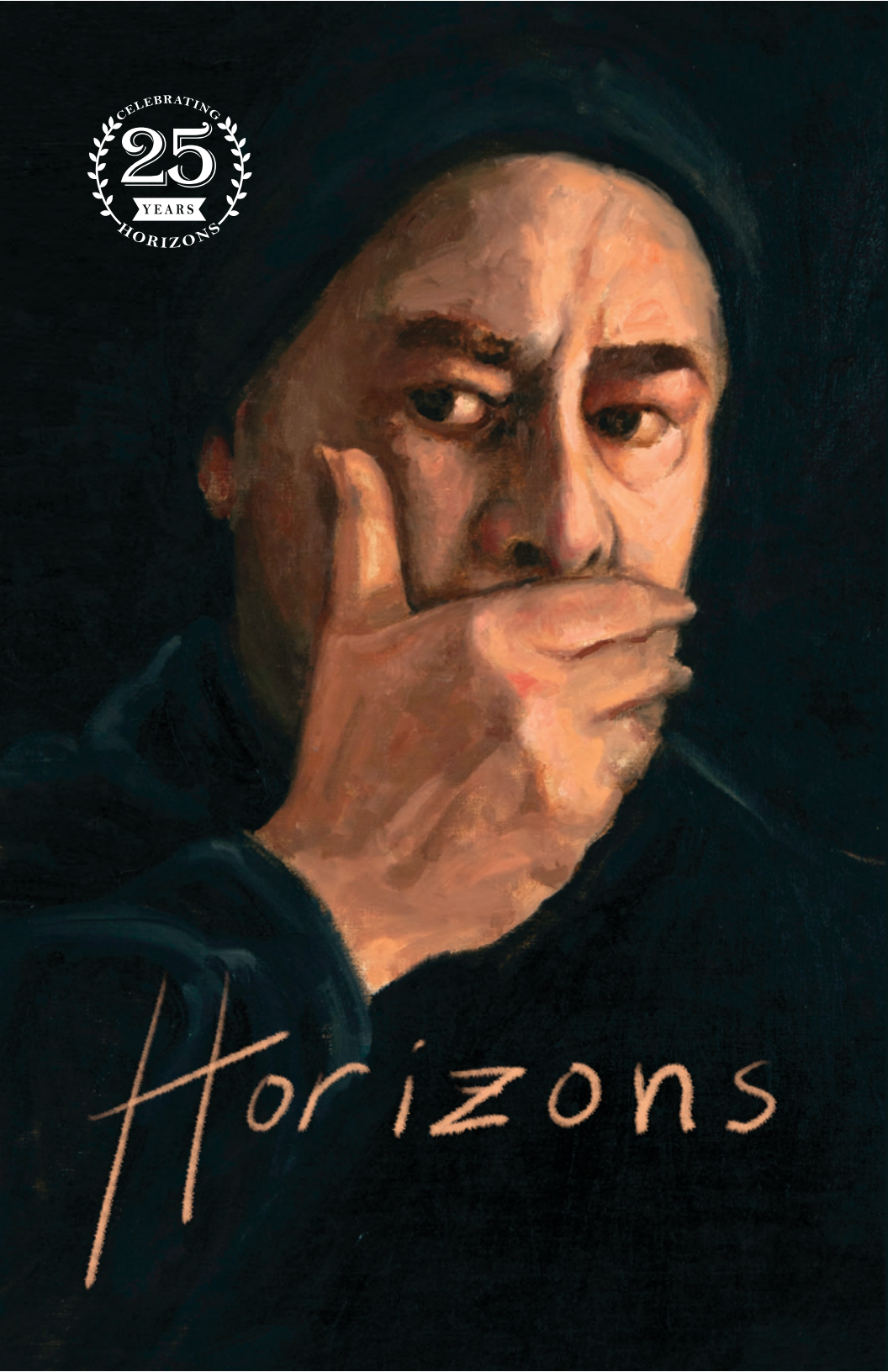
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Horizons

HORIZONS

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF
WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Editors' Note

In this challenging year, the continuation of *Horizons* seems ever more important. Covid-19 and the subsequent social distancing has shut down much of our society, including moving school online. Many of us miss seeing people in person. But working on this magazine together has eased some of that distance, and we were grateful for the opportunity to work with such a wonderful team to create this issue of *Horizons* for all of you and celebrate the creative works of Waubonsee students.

Because we are looking back on twenty-five years of *Horizons* in this issue, we wanted to add some special features. The first is the inclusion of music to the magazine. The second is a pull-out poster collage of all the previous covers with the names of everyone who ever worked on, or was published, in the magazine on the back. And, the third is this flip-cover design. The two portraits, while both stunning, represent the duality of this magazine. The emotional expression of one cover represents to us the daunting task of completing this magazine during the pandemic. Between school, life, the pandemic, and the events going on in the world around us, it is sometimes hard to not respond with shock, disbelief, or even horror. On the other hand, the radiant cover represents our choice, collectively, to build on the challenges of the world, remain positive, and hold our heads high to produce our best for you, the reader. While we are proud of our work and the writers, artists, and musicians who so graciously submitted their work, it is ultimately sharing this magazine with you that makes this all worthwhile.

When you read these works, you are celebrating and supporting Waubonsee students and the Waubonsee community. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

Abigail Black & Mandie Jones

Editors-in-Chief

Table of Contents

“I THOUGHT”	7
Lillie Lane	
VITRIOLITICS	10
John Dosselman	
LANDSCAPE	11
Daniel Capobianco	
CARVING MY OWN PATH	12
Diane Gil	
COMPOSITION OF CHAOS	13
Garrett Austin	
BLACK AND WHITE SCRIBBLE STUDY	14
Abigail King	
A KNIGHT OF THE GARDEN	15
H. A. Bari	
AND SO WE THINK	24
Rebecca Monroe	
THE LIST I CREATED	27
Brenda Perez	
GRAZING WHILE THE GRASS IS TALL, OR THE ECSTATIC SONG	28
S. T. Brant	
A DELECTABLE TREAT	29
Angelina Trejo	
GLASS FULL OF STRAWBERRIES	30
Angelina Trejo	
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST, AGE 19	31
Becca Overton	
A TIGHT FIT TOO	32
Daniel Capobianco	
NEWSGATE	33
Ryan Lambert	

THE SPACEMAN IN AISLE SIX	38
John Dosselman	
IT WASN'T JUST A DREAM	44
Michelle Fregoso	
LOOKING GLASS	45
Becca Overton	
TENMOKU JARS WOOD FIRED	46
Tanvi Aggarwal	
WEAVED BLISS	47
Madeline Schuster	
SCARY THINGS	48
Ian Jake Robleza	
PHANTASMAGORIAS	49
S. T. Brant	
CONSCIENCE	58
Abigail Black	
SHABONNA FIELD	62
Garrett Austin	
WATERFALL GLEN	63
Garrett Austin	
5 O'CLOCK SHADOW	64
Garrett Austin	
ZEN ZEN ZEN	65
Brenda Perez	
ASYMPTOTES	66
Kathryn Kraus	

“I Thought”

NONFICTION BY LILLIE LANE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *OUR STORIES*,
THE CREATIVE WRITING CLUB'S 2020 COMING OUT DAY ZINE

As far as I could remember I assumed I was meant to be just like all the others. I was meant to be a cookie cutter image of all the girls in my grade, of my race, and of anything. I believed I was meant to like pink. Hate dirt. Play with dolls and glitter and be a fairy princess. I believed I was meant to hate sports and dislike the color blue. I thought I was meant to be so many things that before long I was imagining a version of me that would never exist, but I wanted to manifest it into reality more than my ACTUAL self.

I was wrong...

When middle school arrived, and even prior to this, I had always found pronouns to sound odd, not in the literal sense but more so in definition. Whenever someone referred to me as “she” or “her,” the words rang in the back of my head. I did not dislike them. It’s not like I enjoyed them at all. I just felt neutral about the thing. I ultimately just assumed it was normal, that that is what I was labeled as and there was nothing I could change about it. I was often made fun of because of the hobbies and quirks that I had. Ultimately, I assumed that everything I thought about me and my sexuality and me as a person and my gender identity was wrong. Ultimately, as I aged and got older, I assumed two things. I assumed I was gay. I assumed I was trans.

I assumed so many things about myself that by the time I got to high school I thought these things for certain. I thought these things, mainly because I learned what trans meant and I ultimately felt that this was me. After years and

years, I assumed this was right, but in reality I was wrong. I just wanted to be created equal. I wanted to be myself. I wanted to basically be a boy, but actually not be a boy. At the same exact time. I wanted to act like a boy and do boy things, but I didn't want to become one, or so I didn't think. I was a tomboy, and I always will be.

I was, and am, pansexual and I don't really know my gender identity (nor do I care).

When it comes to my gender identity, it's very much lost in the abyss and, quite frankly, I don't know how to get out of it. I do know this, that I accept and agree that I am female born and raised. I accept that. But at the same time, I just don't give a damn. I just truly don't. I feel as though my gender and my sex have nothing in common, but at the same exact time I accept it as a God-given right; so with that being said, I guess I am gender neutral and non-binary at the same time.

“I just wanted to be created equal. I wanted to be myself. I wanted to basically be a boy, but actually not be a boy.”

When I told someone that I was pansexual, I basically swore that I would never tell my mother. Mainly because I knew she would judge me; not in the way that you see romanticized and aggressively stated on TV and media, more so that I would be judgmentally ostracized. Ostracized from my mother and her opinions, and I have enough of those as it is. So my mother, well, let's just leave it at that.

It took me all but a few moments to scroll through tumblr, of all places, for me to find this answer at the ripe age of 15 to understand this basic thing. Ever since I learned that, I've stuck by that and have not changed since. And, I think it's the funniest thing ever because I have many people trying to tell me what my sexuality is and how it actually works and people telling me and explaining to me how every other sexuality works. It's more or less funny be-

cause if you just go by the base of the definitions so many people are wrong about this basic aspect of me, just like I was back when I was younger. This isn't a true coming out story, it's more or less me coming to understand myself as a person. I may never tell my mother about myself in this respect; mainly because I don't think it's relevant. I don't think any aspect of my gender identity or my sexuality is relevant to anyone outside of my sexual circle or, specifically, any person who needs to know. This isn't a thing where it's like I go to the doctor and I must tell him because my life's on the line. These are aspects of my life that, realistically, don't really matter to anyone else besides myself, and maybe my partner.

I realized that when I was younger, that I was the way I am because of two things: I was Born This Way, and that I grew up this way. What I mean by this is simple. I grew up with four boys, one was my cousin and the rest were my nephews. I grew up boyish because I was surrounded by boys. So in fact yes, I was born this way but I was also raised this way.

Whatever label you may list upon me, I do not care because I am still me. Regardless of what terms and conditions happen throughout life and how often I change my mind about various things, as long as I am me, that's all I care about.

Forevermore and forever, I will always think that I am this or that. I am that. And this is why I say, "I thought."

Vitriolitics

POETRY BY JOHN DOSSELMAN

I hear that people nowadays
are walking on their hands
to better grip that whirling earth
—or so I understand.
The land, the land, the land itself
spins faster by the hour
first forwards, backwards, inside out
the ground now growing sour
from all the retched up filth and such
that dribbles down their hair,
but who could blame the nausea
of those who truly care?
Suppose we are not animals
suppose we're so much more
when we can puke up all our guts
and polarize and whore.
I heard that, yeah, I feel it too
I'll learn to walk and stand
by seizure of a bile-slick world
with both my trembling hands.

Landscape

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO



*24 x 18 in.
Oil on Canvas/Linen*

Daniel Capobianco - 11

Carving My Own Path

ARTWORK BY DIANE GIL



4 x 5 x 16 in.
Clay

Composition of Chaos

ARTWORK BY GARRETT AUSTIN



8 x 10 in.
Photography

Garett Austin – 13

Black and White Scribble Study

ARTWORK BY ABIGAIL KING



*18 x 12 in.
Pen and Ink*

A Knight of the Garden

FICTION BY H. A. BARI

It had been two hundred years since the Northrock fell. Ninety-nine knights, sworn under fealty to the Lady of the Two Moons, had fallen alongside it. Some had stood tall and proud, facing the offspring of the Forest with their last scraps of courage, while others had hidden in fear and met their silence in fits of cowardice. Either way mattered little. Each and every one of the guardians of the Northrock met their end all the same, mercilessly slaughtered by the advent tide of the cursed Forest. All but one.

The knight stood amidst the gray world under the two new moons, gazing at the ruins of the castle before him. The last lord of the Northrock had finally arrived.

The knight was clad from head to heel in armor, which long ago must have been among the finest steel in the Realm. It was little more than a shadow of its former self now, deformed and dented every which way, and covered in unsightly stains and patches of rust. It looked as if it had not been removed once for the past two centuries. The seal of the Rock which had once proudly emblazoned the center of the cuirass had been hacked at furiously, as if to remove any trace of its existence from the armorpiece. Over the steel the knight had drawn a large brown cloak, ragged and torn and doing little to hide the pitiful armor underneath.

They were looking for him, the knight knew. Many nights he had caught glimpses of them, searching the roads under the radiant moonlight for the last of his Lady's men. Some searched in small groups, cloaked and hooded as they blended into the darkness where the moons didn't reach. Others, more lithe and limber, prowled the desolate landscapes on their own, twisted and contorted in inhuman shapes as they

scoured the plains in their skulking hunts. There were many kinds of them, the accursed progeny. For two long centuries the knight had avoided them, through tenacity or sheer luck he knew not which. But the Forest would come to meet him sooner or later, just as it would come to meet the rest of the Realm. He would rather make its acquaintance at his Lady's side.

And so he found himself once again gazing upon what remained of the Northrock. It had stood all on its lonesome long ago, with nothing around it for leagues, but now the dark wall of the accursed treeline loomed not far behind it. Many of the castle's walls were little more than rubble at this

“The walls that had been his home, now hardly more than a few arrays of cracked stone and strewn brick.”

point, but the keep they guarded stood as intact and proud as the day the knight had left it. His Lady awaited him inside.

The wooden bridge, still there after all this time, groaned as the knight's weary feet passed over its rotting planks. The moat underneath stood dry as bone. Long ago the drawbridge had let out into an iron portcullis beneath an arched stone gate, but at present little remained of either. No watchmen guarded the ruins, the desolate castle grounds in want

of the silver mail and dark blue raiments of their proud guardians. The knight had been a part of their ranks once, long ago. The walls that had been his home, now hardly more than a few arrays of cracked stone and strewn brick. The metal grating they used to protect lay bent and skewed on the gray grasses beneath, the far ends twisting ominously towards the sky like the legs of a dead insect. The knight's cloak caught on one of the edges and began to tear. He cast it off. There was no need to hide anymore.

The knight climbed up the cracked stone steps, surmising himself to be the first in eons to lay foot on the ruined entryway. The pedestals where the sentinels used to stand

lay empty, as well as the perches where the gargoyles kept watch. Blue tatters of tapestry blew in the wind up above, a far cry from their original form depicting a knight kneeling before a white moon. The dark wooden doors underneath no longer stood on their hinges, rather lying on the ground a fathom or two inside the doorway. The bracings were torn and the metal lattices sat ruptured in many places, as if struck against with something heavy. The knight clambered warily over them, jumping a little as a stray plank cracked underneath his feet. His heart pounded in his ears. He staggered forward in shaky steps over the tattered blue carpet, gazing at the long, dark hall before him. He could hardly make out the other end of the room, but he knew his Lady was there waiting for him.

He continued along the given path, and soon came across the lifted steps that marked the end of the hall. They were arranged in a broad semicircle, and the carpet climbed tightly over each flat stair before finally reaching an end at the foot of the throne, which was little more than a carved wooden chair sitting atop a cracked stone slab. Behind this was an altar, and carved into the wall further down was a large alcove like an arched cleft, underneath a cracked window of stained glass. In this indentation stood the statue of the Lady of the Two Moons, tall and proper in all of her divine glory.

The knight caught sight of the statue before he had even neared the foot of the steps. His shaking legs finally gave, and he collapsed to the floor. He had finally returned. He was with his Lady once again.

He gazed upon her face, trying to make out what he could in the darkness. The years had not been too kind to her; her features, once carved ornately in tribute to the beauty of the Maiden of the Night, were now dull, masking her fair face with a sullen and weary look. But it mattered not. She was still the same Lady, the knight knew, and he was still steadfast and devout in his loyalty. Even alone. Standing himself up on unsteady feet, he began to climb the steps, so he could

kneel properly before the altar. But as he got closer, he heard a noise, one previously hidden under the deafening pounding in his ears: a sob from some unseen soul near the throne.

The knight froze.

The sobs continued. They sounded closer to the gasps of a dying beast, he thought, the pathetic wails of one close to the end. He loosened his sword in his sheath. As he approached closer to the stone slab that upheld the throne, he could make out the silhouette of a hunched-over figure at its foot, head to the ground in prostration and arms splayed pitifully out before him. The figure took no notice of the knight as he approached, continuing to heave his forlorn cries at the empty throne in front of him.

The knight unsheathed his sword. It was a pitiful thing, blunted on every edge and indelibly stained all over with rust, among other things. But he paid no heed to its largely useless state, holding it threateningly over the curled-up figure, who had yet to give any indication of notice. The knight took a step closer. He cleared his throat. "What business have you here, desecrating the sanctity of my Lady's abode?"

The sobs stopped abruptly. The figure, hardly rising from his hunched position, slowly turned his head towards him. His face was wrapped tightly around his skull, black eyes sunken in their sockets and mouth shriveled and lipless. His neck was craned in a position the knight would not have thought possible, and, beginning to feel uncomfortable, he took a step backwards, blade still held out before him.

Suddenly, the figure began to laugh. It sounded far worse than the dying wails he had been letting out before, like the anguish of a thousand shrill breaths escaping from his lungs at once. The knight took another step back. "I asked you why you are here," he said shakily. "Answer me!"

Another laugh, somehow more harrowing than the last. The figure began to turn, contorting his torso from the same prostrating position to face the knight instead. His eyes, unglazing yet piercing both at once, met the knight's, and he be-

gan to feel very cold. Finally, raising a gnarled hand to point at him, the figure answered.

“We do but the same as you, my lord,” he said. His voice was raspy, and had an unpleasant quality to it that seemed to prick at the knight’s ears like frost. “Service to our Lady.” He moved his hand to point off to the side, trembling. The path of his finger seemed to run to the wall at the far end of the hall rather than the Lady’s statue, but the knight ascribed it to his haggard state. He could hardly be in any shape to see straight. The figure began to sob once more.

Though deeply unsettled, the utter patheticness of the image before him stirred pity in the knight’s heart. He brought his sword down, but he did not sheath it quite yet. He wondered who this decrepit husk could be, he that still remembered the Lady of the Two Moons.

“I did not know others still existed,” he said, approaching the figure once again. “Those in her reverence. Come, what ails you?”

The figure wept. The knight could hear the teardrops hit the ground, and saw faint trails of black running down his skeletal face. “Oh, we are bereft,” he moaned, “we are bereft, we are bereft...” He continued to repeat it over again, pressing his head weakly against the ground as he did so. The knight was taken aback. He stepped forward.

“Bereft? Bereft of what?”

The figure craned his neck to gaze at him once more. The dark tears flowing down his face gave the impression that his black eyes were seeping out of their sockets. “She hath forsaken us, my lord,” he said feebly. “Would that I had never left the Garden!” He struck the ground with his open palm. The knight crouched before him, letting the tip of his sword touch the ground. He stared at the figure’s senescent face, in

**“The dark tears
flowing down
his face gave
the impression
that his black
eyes were
seeping out of
their sockets.”**

pity.

“Your Lady has not forsaken you,” he said, gesturing to the statue behind the throne. “She stands here yet; we are with her once more!”

A wheeze broke out from the figure’s mouth, harsh and pained as if his very lungs were being squeezed to force it from him. Then, forgetting the tears of but moments prior, he began to laugh again. Strident it sounded, his toothless mouth upturned in a leer. The knight fought against the sudden urge to cover his ears with his hands.

“Oh, you arrogant sap,” he gasped. “See how deluded you have become.” He reached out and grabbed at the knight, who staggered back to avoid his hand.

“What are you saying?” the knight said. “Do you not serve Her Divinity before us?” His eyes widened. “Who are you? Why are you here? Answer me!”

More tears rushed down the figure’s face, black as ink. “Wretched, wretched soul. You cannot run from it. Neither you nor your Lady.” His voice shook. “We all become children of the Garden ere long.”

“Garden?” the knight asked, nonplussed. “What garden?”

The figure rose, twisting himself in such a way as to be face-to-face with the knight. His melting eyes stared into him with the despair of the abyss itself. “Have you not yet seen it?” He laughed, devoid of any mirth. “Oh, our beautiful Mistress. The only Lady this hollow land deserveth.”

The knight trembled. He took notice of a damp black spot forming in the center of the figure’s chest, seeping into his ragged garb like an inkblot. It steadily grew larger and larger, matching the dark tears streaming down his face. “I did not come here to run!” the knight said, more to himself than to the blackening figure before him. “I face my fate, content! For I am with my Lady, and I will be with her evermore.” He took several steps back, and stumbled over the stone steps.

The figure leered at him once more, as some black liquid began to course through his veins. He crawled slowly

towards him, moving with a strange gait, as if limping. His body seemed to be elongating, limbs growing lithe and torso twisting over itself as it extended. His neck appeared to wind as it grew, so that the figure's head bobbed sickeningly whenever he moved.

The knight had raised his rusted sword before him again, arm shaking as the abomination in front of him neared. The figure's smiling face soon disappeared behind a shroud of darkness. The rest of his body grew black with it, as if painted with the tears he had shed. The blot in the center of his chest had grown to about a foot in diameter, spiraling endlessly within itself like a void.

Whatever stood before the knight now was no longer a man.

The figure's arms did not touch the ground anymore as it moved. It prowled along on only its two grotesque legs, stooped over so heavily that it looked as if it was falling and barely catching itself with each petrifying step. As the figure drew closer, it reached out a slender arm to grab at the throne beside it, grasping the armrest loosely in its spindly fingers.

"Yes," it rasped, gazing at the empty seat. "Yes. We will be with our Lady evermore."

The figure staggered closer as the knight continued to retreat. Reaching into some unseen darkness, it pulled out a jagged dagger with one hand, its blade adorned in crooked engravings now long faded, and in the other a pale mask that looked as if it was made of bone. A horizontal crescent adorned the top, its edges cracked and worn, and a carved sliver ran downwards from its center. The figure gazed at the mask for a moment, almost longfully, as if it were something it had not seen for a long time. Then, turning its head back to stare at the knight, it put the mask on over its featureless black face. "We will be with our Lady evermore," it repeated, turning the blade over and over in its bony fingers. "But your Lady dies with you, my lord."

“No,” the knight said, hardly more than a whisper. “You are mistaken.” He stopped moving backwards, standing defiantly in place with all the strength he could muster. His legs trembled beneath him. “You may have been forsaken by your wretched liege, but my own Lady would never desert me.” But even as he heard himself say it, he was unsure.

“Yet it did not sound entirely inhuman, rather as if the grief of a hundred mortal souls shrieked alongside it.”

The figure began to circle the knight in tottering steps, winding its body and craning its neck so as to always remain facing him. Then, after a few moments, it turned its head to the darkness above and let out a piercing shriek. The knight dropped his sword and covered his ears. It was a horrible scream, of such despair he had never imagined. Yet it did not sound entirely inhuman, rather as if the grief of a hundred mortal souls shrieked

alongside it. After several agonizing seconds, the cry died down, and the figure, still circling the knight, started to weep once more. This time, the mask hid its tears.

“Oh, sweet Mistress!” it cried. “See how they mock you! See how they deceive themselves!” Moving back in front of the knight, the figure pressed its unstarling face a mere inch from his. “How long,” it rasped, running the dagger down the knight’s breastplate. “How long will man continue to reject the coming fate? How long will he cling to his false gods? Oh, how they have served him! How they have deluded him! Surely the blessed Garden, inevitable in its advent, befits him.”

The figure slowly began to stand itself upright from the grotesque stooping position it had been cowering in. The twisted torso uncoiled, and the winding neck stretched to its fullest extent. It towered over the knight, he realized in horror, reaching nearly double his height. He gazed up at the pale white mask, shaking.

“But he shalt see it today,” the figure said, looking down at him with an air of solemnity. “No Lady of his could spare him from our Mistress. She is the only beacon of truth in his sea of lies. It does not matter how many walls he builds, nor towers he erects, nor gates he shuts, nor armors he adorns, nor gods he creates.” Its voice dropped to a raspy whisper. “The Garden has come.”

The knight felt cold. And more than that, he felt alone. Could his Lady truly have forsaken him, much like the figure seemed to believe? His head was heavy and his soul felt empty. He turned his head once more to see his Lady’s face, hoping to glimpse her guiding moonlight once more. But she did not gaze upon him in kindness, he now saw. Her sunken eyes were filled with malice, and her once-fair mouth now curled in contempt.

His Lady was not the truth, he realized. He was bound to her not by blessing, but by curse. The roads he had walked, the battles he had fought, the victories he had attained, and the losses he had suffered, all for naught. His countless efforts lay discarded at the feet of an apathetic idol. The only traces of her majesty existed within the confines of his mind, gone from the spirits and the souls of the watchmen and the sentinels and the splendorous arrays of knights that had once served her, gone even from her statue in the keep. There had never been any Lady of the Two Moons.

And yet.

And yet, what need was there for despair? There existed still one mercy, a single solace to end his years of misery. It had stood alongside him all this time.

The knight smiled, perhaps for the first time in two hundred years. “Yes,” he said. He knelt down on the ground, head bowed. The edge of the figure’s blade felt cold against his throat. “The Garden has come.”

Somewhere, far away, a bell rang.

And So We Think

NONFICTION BY REBECCA MONROE

I awoke and rolled out of bed, my first thought, *‘The refrigerator is making a weird sound. I hope it doesn’t die. Like the stove will soon.’* Then, *‘I didn’t call Alicia. She is probably upset and who knows what she’ll do when she’s upset.’*

Sure. Alicia wasn’t exactly stable. I spread toothpaste on my toothbrush.

‘I shouldn’t have said that about Carol.’

No, I probably shouldn’t have. However, she was constantly late. I pulled on my shoes.

‘I hope I don’t lose my job today.’

Shut. Up! I hadn’t even made it to the car yet.

For a moment all was silent. Then,

‘It will be a good day.’

I picked up my purse and went to my car. The morning was beautiful; sunny and warm. Traffic shouldn’t be too bad. And work had been going well lately.

‘Except for Charlene. She’s okay, but she wants my job.’

She was just a lonely woman who thought humor had to bite.

‘No, she wants my job. She’s probably stabbing me in the back with the boss. Like Sam used to. Man he was a piece of work.’

I slammed on the brakes as the car in front of me stopped suddenly.

“Idiot!” we shouted in unison.

‘This daily crap is ridiculous, fighting traffic and morons. I look terrible. My hair is sticking out sideways and...’

Shut. Up. I clenched my jaw.

Silence. *‘Right. Be positive. I actually don’t look too bad and I’m sure I’ll only be a few minutes late, like Carol.’*

I turned on the radio and found the news.

At work, a client called to check on the status of their delivery. I found their information, gave it to them and they hung up.

'They seemed disappointed. I should have worked harder to make them feel better.'

I reviewed the conversation. No, they sounded pleasant. They said thank you.

'They were lying.'

Shut. Up.

Silence. Then,

'Might want to double-check that figure.'

I did. It was wrong. I changed it.

'Good thing I checked. I'm slipping...'

Shut. Up.

'Charlene is coming. This should be interest...'

This time I said shut-up and slammed the door.

"Hey, Marge, how are you?" Charlene paused at my desk.

"Good. Very good, actually. How about you?"

Charlene grimaced, "Okay, I guess. I'm really sick of the crappy way the company treats us, aren't you? I think they ought to at least give us longer lunches." She folded her arms, "I know Don in accounting is bad mouthing me." Her lips pulled down even further, "He's probably bad mouthing you too. You know that, don't you? He thinks you're not real bright?" She raised an eyebrow.

I just stared at her. For once, my mind was blissfully blank.

Her face turned red and she walked away.

Silence. What an eloquent response!

Then it burst out. *'What did she say? What did she say? Why the witch...'*

"I just stared at her. For once, my mind was blissfully blank."

It was too late. She was gone. With her own voice nattering in her mind. Not mine. *'She's right. Of course she's right...'*

Shut. Up. What Don thought, or Charlene, did not concern me.

Marvin stood up on the other side of the cubicle. "You handled that beautifully. Ignore her. Don likes you."

I relaxed. "Thank you. A blank mind. It works wonders."

I went back to work.

'What else has Marvin heard, eavesdropping?'

Shut. Up. Poor Charlene. What her thoughts must be like!

'I'm such a good person.'

Shut. Up.

The List I Created

POETRY BY BRENDA PEREZ

Today I counted the number of times I created “sadness” in my head

One: When I first woke up with my body lying on my bed

Two: When I forgot there was no milk in the fridge as I served myself breakfast

Three: When I didn’t keep track of time and realized that I’d be late for school... what’s next?

Four: When I entered the class and became anxious from the stares as I rushed to an empty seat

Five: When the teacher called on me to read, the stares came again, the room is humid and I began to feel the heat

Six: When I left and then I had to rush to pick my brothers up from their school

Seven: When I was almost there, but I arrived 10 minutes late due to traffic, it’s okay, be cool

Seven: I got a call from my parents asking where the heck I am, that I had to get my brothers

Eight: I got home and had to prepare the food before my parents got home, clean, besides those chores, was I missing any others?

Nine: The food was salty, my salsa was bland, I forgot to do the dishes and I was told I don’t help out as much around our home

Ten: My brothers played games, but they yelled loud as I tried to do homework and other assignments, and in my head I tried to meditate as I repeated the phrase “OM”

Today I created the reasons I became “sad” in my head

Tomorrow I will create a list of gratitude instead

Because today is just another day

And tomorrow isn’t promised anyway.

Grazing While the Grass is Tall, or the Ecstatic Song

POETRY BY S. T. BRANT

There's a fire (Me?) hallooing in the roses, twirling,
the roses, though,
Are burning and the conflagration of the garden burns
on the shoulder
Of a view of a rose, scorching spines! and infernal
petals! demons cackling
In the calyx! Wonderful, wonderful flowers! O burn
to me when in the sun,
Your fragrance renders my Sense Troy.

The hand that desires you will find you.

A Delectable Treat

ARTWORK BY ANGELINA TREJO



*13 x 19 in.
Photography*

Angelina Trejo - 29

Glass Full of Strawberries

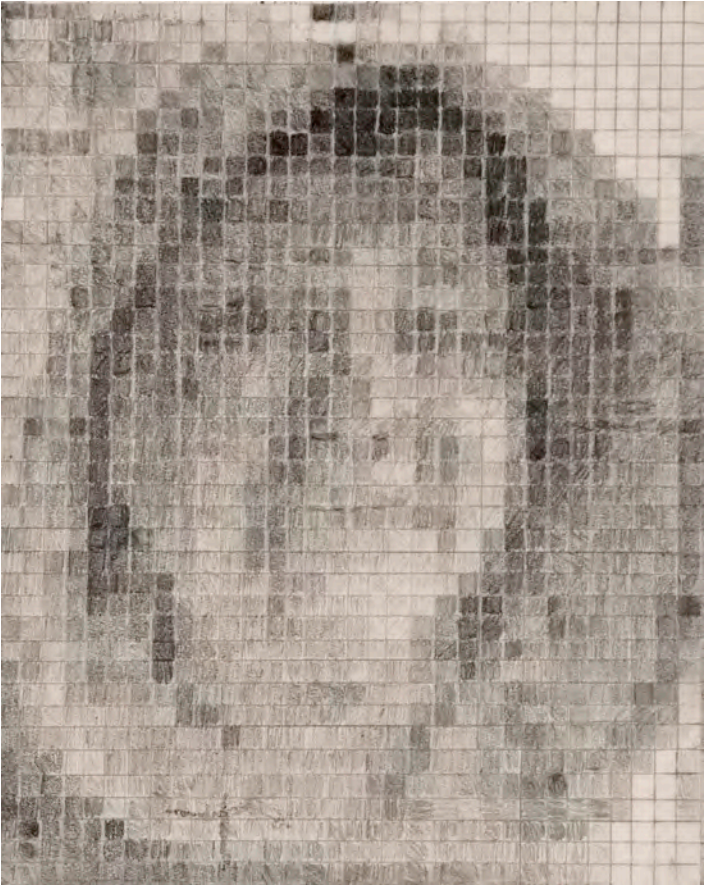
ARTWORK BY ANGELINA TREJO



*13 x 19 in.
Photography*

Portrait of the Artist, Age 19

ARTWORK BY BECCA OVERTON



*10 x 8 in.
Graphite on Paper*

A Tight Fit Too

ARTWORK BY DANIEL CAPOBIANCO



*24 x 20 in.
Oil on Canvas*

Newsgate

FICTION BY RYAN LAMBERT

“I can’t believe I’m saying this,” Jim Fields said. “But you just may be the stupidest politician I have ever spoken to on my show.” He felt the eyes and ears of millions of Americans, as well as the attention of media personnel around the world, concentrating on him.

“You know what, I came on this show to provide some transparency to your viewers, but I see you are not willing to do the same,” responded Vince Thompson, hopeful representative for Congress. His feed was directly cut off and the graphic transitioned to Fields, front and center again.

Jim Fields did not say such things often, but he felt that he needed to tonight. He was prepared for the backlash, and already had his battle plan: Decline any requests for comments that came in from all media outlets, brush off a mass exodus of advertisers as “no big deal because they’re all corporate goons,” and then address the criticism on tomorrow’s show, but never apologize for it. He’ll say that the media would rather shoot him down than give him a voice because he’s the one with the truth coming out of his mouth. It will make him look strong to his loyal fanbase, most of the advertisers will be forced to return due to unfulfilled multi-year contracts with the network, and curious “unenlightened” viewers will give his already-juggernaut ratings a slight boost. It’ll be a win-win for everybody, and that’s just the situation Jim Fields strived for during an election

“[...]The media would rather shoot him down than give him a voice because he’s the one with the truth coming out of his mouth.”

season.

He carried on with his live program by mentioning his next topic: A proposal from the president at a recent press conference, which reflected the ideas of FDR's New Deal, to bring the country out of its current recession. "This New, radical Deal," declared Fields, "is setting ourselves up for our next ten-year-long Great Depression."

Now, Fields had attended enough high school history classes to know that something on the scale of the Great Depression would not be spearheaded by a president with a fancy brochure, and he knew that the New Deal was a major contributor to helping Americans get out of the Depression. But that's not what his audience believed. His audience thought that the New Deal was a failed attempt to enact socialism into the country under the guise of "helping to create jobs," and that only the rumblings of WWII foiled FDR's plans, as capitalism was able to prevail and boys were molded into real men.

"I suspect that the media will consider our president—certainly not MY president—to be a superhero: A patriotic American that cares for every citizen of any political party and former prisoners of any crimes and immigrants from any countries," Fields rambled. "But I'll tell you someth—" Fields pointed a finger to the camera, but quickly let it form with the other fingers into a fist to cover his mouth. He looked down at his glass desk as he was noticeably holding in a laugh. He knew he was supposed to get back to the teleprompter, but his next line was supposed to be said in a serious manner. It wasn't meant to be funny at all.

He stared at his desk for a couple more moments, desperately trying to think of a humorous remark that would seem planned. He had been in situations like this before. He would say something chuckleworthy on the fly, take a brief pause to let the camera crew's laughter get heard in the background, and then take a moment to thank his wonderfully comedic staff writers. They're the ones who truly

make his day, and help inject a little humor into such a depressing political climate. It'll be a win-win for everybody, and that's just the situation Jim Fields strived for when he unintentionally deviated from his pre-planned script.

“But I'll tell you something,” Fields continued, desperately thinking of a joke. “The president doesn't even seem able to save himself. Uh, take a look at this video of him falling down the steps of Air Force One.” The camera lingered on Fields for a few seconds, as he was waiting for the director in the control room to quickly cue the Air Force One video that went viral yesterday. The video was about twenty seconds long, which was enough time to let Fields compose himself again. Now he knew that footage of an aging, stressed-out president falling down some stairs was not in good thing to make fun of. But that's not what his audience believed. His audience thought that the president was very clumsy, and soon his blundering behavior would lead him to become the second handicapped president, right after his socialist role model, FDR. Fields rarely thought about the deranged mindset his audience must possess, like feelings of demonization towards any slightly progressive candidates, a racist or homophobic stance on groups of U.S. citizens, and especially wishes of poor health (like a physical disability or even death) towards the current president. He did not have time to worry right now though, as the video was just about finished.

As the video ended and the cameras were back on him, he adjusted himself in his seat, adjusted his posture to sit tall, and took a deep breath. “I wanna take a moment to acknowledge my writing staff”—clapping ensued across the set—“who help make this job more lighthearted than I ever imagined it could be. They are great researchers—re-

“Fields rarely thought about the deranged mindset his audience must possess [...]”

member, we are always independent thinkers and do our own research—but they are also great comedians. Hidden gems of comedy, I must say.” The point Fields was going to say earlier was that “the president was only going to save his radical cohorts from the taxes imposed upon the rest of the country.” It was a false talking point, but still one that should have been treated with some seriousness (even Fields knew that).

The time had passed for that, however, and he moved on to his next monologue: Yet another segment discussing “Newsgate,” a scandal he made up about the mainstream media’s inherent bias towards the president and those endorsed by the president. Fields was ready to move on from the topic of “Newsgate,” feeling it had run its course and

“Do not fall for the fear-mongering. They only want to further divide us into another Civil War.”

was getting old. It was tiring to rag on the same mainstream media hosts and journalists every weekday. But that’s not what his audience thought. His audience believed that all of the mainstream media institutions were spreading lies about politicians, and even lying about car crashes, illnesses, shootings and protests to distract them from the president’s demonic plan to turn their country into the one from 1984. (The same statements Fields had purported, and

the same book Fields had mentioned.)

After repeating the same jokes he told every night, like one about the *New York Post* (“*New York Post?* More like *New York POS*, piece of...I can’t even say that last word on television.”), he ended his program with a direct message to his audience: “Do not fall for the fear-mongering. They only want to further divide us into another Civil War. You’ll be playing into their hands if you do that. The media wants us at each other’s throats. I’m Jim Fields, good night everybody.”

“Aaaaaaaand we’re clear,” announced the floor director. Jim Fields got out of his seat and started giggling to himself, covering his mouth with his left hand. Fields was just waiting for a production assistant to run onto the set, and tell him that their rival network was reporting on his behavior against Thompson as they spoke. But he wasn’t willing to wait for the production assistant tonight. He pulled out his phone, and clicked on the latest news livestream from their rival network.

“Y’know, Chris, it’s ironic that he says people like *us* create the divide,” the news anchor said. “His public display of arrogance and contempt towards Vince Thompson tonight only shows that people like *him* are the ones creating a divide in American culture.” The news anchor was just as familiar with Fields’ show as he was with his own.

“Oh, I surely am,” Fields said to himself, still hiding a smile behind his left hand.

He clicked off of that video, and clicked onto the Twitter app. There were probably so many repulsive individuals in his notifications, retweeting his tweets or mentioning him in one of their own as “a true patriot.” Fields didn’t like to spend too much time on social media. He saw it as a cesspool of angry citizens who were constantly at each other’s throats. But that’s not what his audience believed. His audience believed that they were smart citizens, and enjoying to get at each other’s throats to prove how they were more correct than the other sheep.

“The sheep still flock to me,” Fields thought. “For one reason or another, they tune in.”

A production assistant came onto the floor, ready to show Fields the isolated clip of him belittling Vince Thompson trending on all social media platforms.

“Don’t worry about that crap, man,” Fields told the assistant. “The people will be back tomorrow, and we’ll still be on the payroll tomorrow. No harm done.”

The Spaceman in Aisle Six

FICTION BY JOHN DOSSELMAN

**AWARDED FIRST PLACE IN FICTION AT THE
2020 ILLINOIS SKYWAY WRITER'S FESTIVAL**

****Trigger Warning**** *This story depicts suicide and suicidal ideation.*

“So that’s him, huh?”

“That’s him. The spaceman himself.”

Save for the two cashiers whispering to each other from their registers, the spaceman in aisle six is the sole occupant of Party Goods.

It is late—too late for strange customers, too late for tired cashiers, too late for anything but the rows of colorful plastic that line the shelves. Even the shadows have taken leave for the night, bleached away by the fluorescent lighting overhead, abandoning the spaceman to the white of the linoleum below and the pastel world around.

“It is a fever dream world to which he is lost, a world that shimmers just a little too brightly for the hour.”

It is a fever dream world to which he is lost, a world that shimmers just a little too brightly for the hour. A world of sugar confetti polyurethane, one of saturation that makes teeth rot and the mind like molasses if taken in too long or too late.

He holds this truth tight to his chest with both hands as he searches the aisle.

“What’s he looking for?”

“Balloons. Forty of them.”

“Gonna need more than that to fly to space.”

“He said it’s for his birthday.”

The spaceman strains hard not to hear, not to notice. It's nothing, it's nothing. He focuses instead on the glint that catches his eye.

Suspended from streamers, gold sequins spin above. A dozen reflections of himself fold over and over upon themselves in a flash, and suddenly he needs to look at something else, needs to shake the image of those tiny gaunt faces trapped in amber. He grabs a fifty count bag of balloons from the shelf and turns it in his hand.

Fifty balloons. Some red; some green; some pink, blue, yellow. Choking hazard. They look the same as those from his tenth birthday, the ones in the wicker basket. He remembers stretching them over the mouth of the faucet and watching them fill until they split at the necks. Water sprays, the torn balloon is discarded. A pile of savaged balloons beads with the failures of one more. Mila holds up the next and says, "Try again, we need the Earth one to be water."

The balloons lay dull and inert within the packaging, the memory dispelled like nebula dust from their folds. He does not consider what he will do with the extra balloons. He does not consider their color.

"Does he still send applications to NASA?"

"No, not anymore. They stopped responding a few years back. Now he sends waiver requests."

"I wonder where he keeps all the rejection letters. He has to have kept them."

"I wouldn't doubt it. Probably gets off to the worm logo."

"There's got to be a whole room filled with them at his mother's house."

"Maybe at one point. Not anymore."

"How's that?"

"The house was repossessed."

"Oh. So the glove box then."

The spaceman glances at the cashiers with averted vision, a technique he mastered in astronaut school. The

trick is to look just to the side of a faint object to see it with better clarity, and he looks so far away that they are clear as crystal.

Their mouths do not move, but he hears. Their lips do not articulate the words spoken, but he sees the words just the same; he had read them at once upon entry, words plainly legible in capricious smiles. And if his eyes should shut, if he should look away, the words would instead echo down the aisles, tumbling over each other like laughing schoolchildren, chasing, jeering, taunting; eager for tears, hungry for reaction; the words now coalescing into conversation directed at him, about him, the spaceman in aisle six. He hears it all.

No, he tells himself, he hears nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. Words are cheap and thoughts do not matter, so if he thinks at a rate of a mile a minute multiplied by the absolute value of words, soon, nothing will matter at all. He pulls a helium canister from the shelf.

Fourteen point nine cubic feet of gas. Contents under pressure. Black print. A whimsical design. See how it catches the light. Focus on the color. The can is red; his knuckles, white. The handle presses into his fingers, greeting the bone with a pinch. A firm squeeze. A walk to school. Keep them away, Mila. Please, keep them away.

“What do you think he’s going to do with all the balloons?”

“Fill his car with them. Eat them. Lure small children with them. Who cares?”

“Nobody, I suppose. Anybody who would’ve is long gone now.”

“Poor little rocket man, burning out his fuse up here alone.”

The spaceman makes his way towards the front with parallax in flux, gaze shifting constantly from feet to shelves but never forward. See the display rack. Congratulations, says the cardstock; congratulations, happy birthday, thank you. A cartoon koala reaches for a diploma. Eighteen can-

dles remain lit on a cake. The “U” tails off and curls into a heart. See the glitter. Mila, do you want to count the stars?

Carl Sagan says: “He can judge his progress by the courage of his questions and the depth of his answers, his willingness to keep going down a claustrophobic store aisle to his death.”

Neil Armstrong says back: “He thinks he’s going to check out because it’s in the nature of the human being to face challenges. It’s by the nature of his deep inner soul. He’s required to do these things just as salmon swim upstream. But I think it’s gonna be a long, long time, Carl.”

The cashier then says: “Find everything alright, sir?”

He looks up at the cashier in front of him. There is only one cashier.

The spaceman places the items on the counter. First the balloons, then the helium canister.

I know it isn’t you, he wants to say. I know it isn’t you that says these things, I know that it’s me. But even so, it is certainly one of us still, and for that I am all the worse. So please, if you would, say something else because I have indeed found everything

alright—my fears and failures, my sorrows and tragedies—all right here and all right then and all at once, again and again and again. And for the life of me I cannot seem to displant everything that I have found. Friend, please say something else, anything else, because I so dearly need to hear something new. If you would, tell me that the balloons don’t have to be a ruse, that I can fill them with the helium instead, that I can tie the whole mess of it together and watch it all float off into space—please tell me that that would be enough.

The spaceman says instead: “It’s a beautiful night,” and leaves.

—

“It is late—too late for strange plastic dreams, too late for tired excuses, too late for anything but a launch.”

It is late—too late for strange plastic dreams, too late for tired excuses, too late for anything but a launch. All the other cars and space shuttles have taken leave for the night, abandoning the spaceman to a parking lot of dark matter and dry August air.

It is a stark reality to which he is lost, a reality where the heartbeat slows down and coherent thought cycles back as frost behind the eyes. A reality where gravel grinds beneath each step and no one else hears. One where a shopping bag of fifty balloons weighs infinitely heavier than the helium canister in the other hand.

He shuts the car door but does not start the engine. The stillness is something to behold, something sacred, a moment of bitter respite before the dash lights fade. Now in the darkness, he tosses the balloons aside, and they disappear into the heaps of clothing and garbage.

On the passenger seat beside him is a length of hose, a plastic bag, and a roll of duct tape. He sets the helium canister next to these items and begins to assemble his launch suit.

The Apollo XIII crew had to improvise a carbon dioxide filtration system when the mission was aborted and the air supply needed to be adjusted. The mailbox rig, it was called—a unit made from cardboard, plastic bags, a pair of socks, and duct tape—that saved the crew from dying a slow death due to poisoning. They just had to follow the step-by-step instructions from Mission Control. He follows a blueprint as well.

When he is done, he shivers in the cockpit, cold and alone.

Cold temperatures caused a failure of the O-rings to properly seal the fuel segments of the solid rocket boosters, and caused the Challenger to explode. All the O-rings and valium and mindfulness in the world make no difference when seated above four point four million pounds of fuel on a particularly cold day.

And Mila, he thinks, it's been cold for so much longer

than a day. It's been so cold for so long, and you've been gone for so long as well. It's lonely out here on the launchpad, and these dreams are so much heavier now that I'm older, and now that I have to carry the full weight of them alone without you. But I'm so much farther, so much closer now than ever before, Mila—I found a way to launch. I found a way to blast off without NASA, without rockets, without you. I'm going to space, and I'm going to leave all of this behind—the fake dreams, the sugar plastic worlds, the cashiers, the past, the failures, the loss, the pain, the panic attacks, the thoughts, myself—all of it. The method is so simple: all I need to do is turn this valve. Ten seconds, and the g-forces will render me unconscious; ten minutes, and I'll be out there in space. And when I'm out there, Mila, I'll count the planets as they go by, and when I get to Pluto I'll land and find you there. We can fly out of the Kuiper belt together, and at the speed of light neither time nor any of its cruelty will catch up to us. The stars will be waiting for us just as they always have been, and we can count them like before, or gather them up and rearrange them as new constellations. I'm sorry it took me so long, but I'm ready for launch. I'm on my way, Mila, I'm on my way. The spaceman turns the valve, puts on his helmet, and breathes in deep.

—
Save for a single car in a dark corner, the lot is empty. The cashier exits Party Goods, locks the door behind her, and begins her walk home.

There is a whistling briskness in the August air, a slight change in the wind, and the cashier finds herself staring into the ether above.

The man was right, the cashier thinks—it is a beautiful night. All the stars are out.

***** If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text the Crisis Text Line (text HELLO to 741741). *****

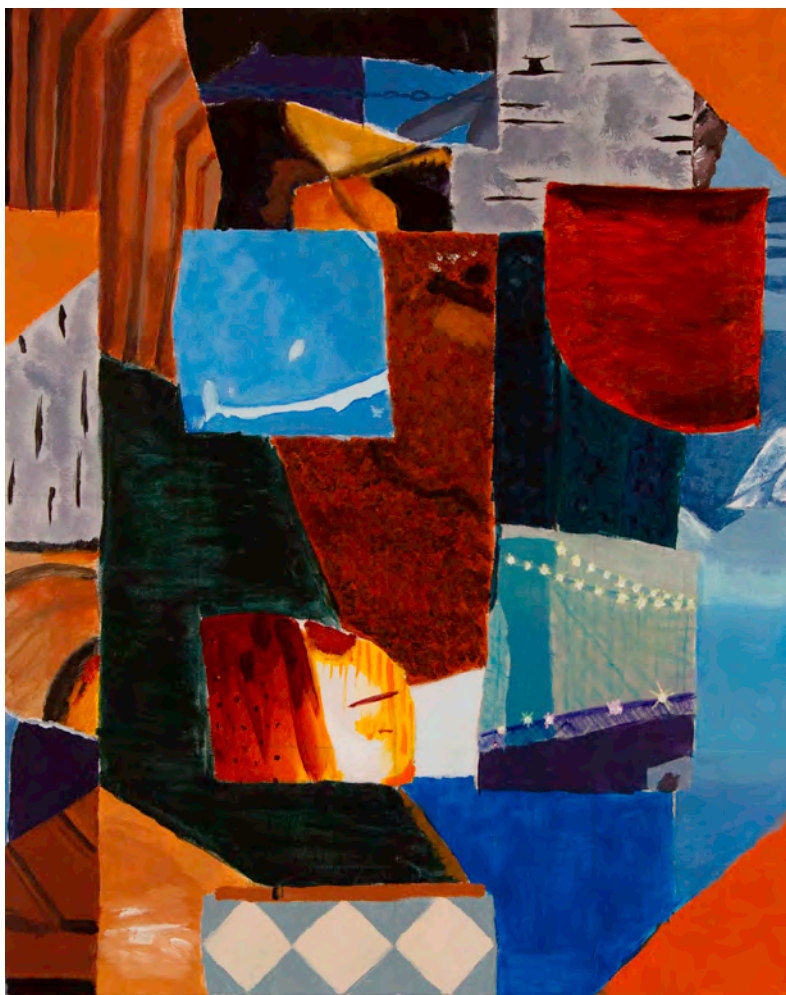
It Wasn't Just a Dream

POETRY BY MICHELLE FREGOSO

I dream of the day
The day we can all breathe without fear
No hateful word to hear
The day that we are all healed
When humanity reigns true
The day we can all agree, we should live in harmony
I'll be there
Will you be there to?
I'll be waiting by the tree, the one bearing fruit for all
to eat

Looking Glass

ARTWORK BY BECCA OVERTON



*30 x 24 in.
Acrylic on Canvas*

Becca Overton - 45

Tenmoku Jars Wood Fired

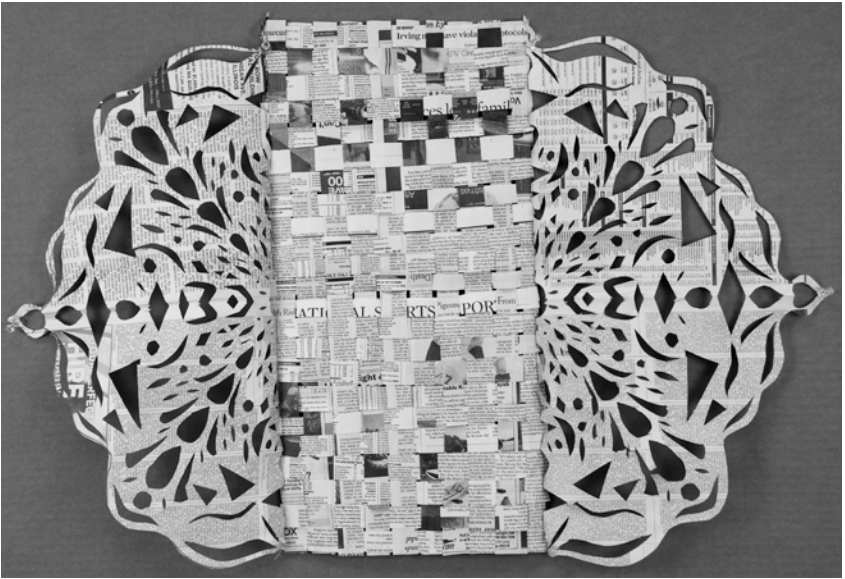
ARTWORK BY TANVI AGGARWAL



10 x 6 x 10 in.
Clay

Weaved Bliss

ARTWORK BY MADELINE SCHUSTER



*20 x 30.5 in.
Newspaper and Thread*

Madeline Schuster - 47

Scary Things

MUSIC BY IAN JAKE ROBLEZA



LISTEN TO
THE MUSIC

Genre: *Singer/Songwriter, Pop*

Vocals and Instrumentation: *Ian Jake Robleza*

Backing Vocals: *Niki Sodetz*

Music and Lyrics: *Ian Jake Robleza*

Recorded and Produced: *Ian Jake Robleza*

URL: [https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=fl1c2CSNe5k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fl1c2CSNe5k)

Phantasmagorias

DRAMA BY S. T. BRANT

Phantasmagoria I: Solipsism

Stage in darkness. A soft hum pervades so softly it isn't heard, but creates a dimension of tangibility to the darkness, as though the darkness in the theater is heavier than the familiar darkness in a familiar room. The darkness changes, grows, and expands the room as the hum is thrown differently around its compass. The density differs in waves; some enduring, some that take you under, though waves are waves, we say, careless with our words, careless with distinctions. There's never a repeated dark: every darkness is a fresh fragment of Abyss. This is the first lesson the audience learns. They learn in the fear of dark so differently dark, so deep it seeps deep in them, to their heart, and eats. Then the lights: Spotlight center stage, small circumference, just wider than SHANE'S SOUL.

How long to keep the station dark, is a question I know the technicians will wonder; so, say fifteen seconds. Fifteen seconds in the dark, its pulse pulsing? Life changing.

SOUL

...Welcome to my one soul show...

You'll ask yourself—how do you intend to make a one-man show that utilizes a troupe of actors? (Troupe of actors comes out on stage, a rainbow of actors arching from end to end behind SOUL. Lights dance from face to face, lighting, darkening, as it flits. Flashes on all the faces after lighting each uniquely; lights off on the supplements. Shadows, memories they become.)

A phantasmagoria is a grotesquerie of rules; so a unit is both one and a multiplicity... concomitant. (Vague, wand-wave gesture to indicate the lack of commitment to this stance.

The troupe has stationed themselves behind SOUL so that as SOUL flicks his hand, like a bird, each actor in succession will mirror this motion, the house lights aiming at the line of hands, the contagious bird flying from center stage off into shadow. Why? Ontology. The choreography of the soul always ripples to the periphery.) One itself is a multiplicity. Multiplication is addition! One times one is more than one in this funhouse!

“All happy families,” Tolstoy said... To shine in this world necessitates distinction; it’s the only thing that refracts light uniquely when all else is the same substantially. Nothing without some tarnish glows... at least if reading Tolstoy is of any worth. To find that sentence, inspiration already puts us in a desperate spot: to justify our worship of it relays more distress; to approximate it to a goal, a state desirable, sets our table amid the ruins. Serves our tea with debris in it. We drink life uncomplainingly.

Family! A dread inevitability. There’s no mirror around.
That’s not a horrorshow. Reflecting back is the horror
Of our unasked-for lives. Another withered leaf among
The family tree. Each autumn they’re raked into a pile,
And the pile’s burned. That’s the fate of those unconsulted

Toward their birth! A burning hill of powerless incarnations.

The godless carnality of familial carnations.

Poison plants, I pluck thee!

A poem in a dark room. Monomania in a dark room, monologuing. All is well.

I’m asked why I’m overly abstract. I obviate, prevaricate some destiny, claim a distinct vision. *I can’t see what you are seeing*— “What do I see?” I’m asked. The family tree: what do I see, as an example? (*The actors, all in black body suits, plant themselves around the stage with their arms out, imitat-*

ing trees. Stage remains dark, except where SOUL is and will follow his movements; light spotlights the shadowlike figures as well. SOUL walks among the human forest.) I utter nonsense. I see the singing of the Elohim, (*Trees sway*) their notes transmute to trees. (*Lights go out completely. SOUL begins the next monologue in darkness.*)

Every image is Abyss. All is *less*. Hear that? That great word of scope

Is at the bottom of all meaning. *Less*. Life's emptied out.

I see nothing, (*Lights on SOUL*) just the words of spoken things as the figures of the words,

Bodied texts. (*Lights on troupe; for every actor standing, one is on the ground, playing their shadow*) They silhouette the essence they're intended to portray, relaying images,

Yet they keep their soul in the shadow of that goal, and I seek the shadows (*Lights out on troupe*).

Where all there is, are the letters written out, the living alphabet dancing

In the realm it rules. My eyes. Mind. Everything I hear I hear as softly

As well water sloshing. The words roll; roll and roll and roll. The shallow

Water storms! It has its moments where it rises, and I fear

Some monumental change precipitates; but nothing ever gains the rim,

And I remain as I am, and the idea of Change dies. (*SOUL is center stage again; lights come on to show the troupe is seated around him, cross-legged, like school children listening.*)

Life is at some unaffordable distance from my living.

All is pitched at a distance, all is veiled by distance,

And the bridge that is that distance is the Abyss that stirs.

The Leviathan in the sea. Should any image succeed to

strike me as its speaker hopes

And gain the rim of my imagining, I'll know that Chaos
has splashed ashore,

And that the singing of the angels will begin, raising up
the final sun.

SOUL speaks to the troupe, surveying each:

I'll have parts for you to play, leaflets, in Act II.

Dark.

Phantasmagoria II: Others

Barroom. Center stage is the bar top, five stools; behind the counter are alcoholic accoutrements. One of the actors in the troupe, black bodysuit with a red vest and a plain red hat, is behind the counter doing bartender duties: cleaning mugs, moving one mug from one end of the bar to the other, moving it back after realizing it worked better where it was, wiping down the counter, moving the mug back to the other side without seeming to notice the journey it's already taken, etc. Two figures in black body suits, one in a Seahawks jersey, and the other in a plain white shirt that reads "I Washed This Shirt in the Same River Twice," sit at the end stools. Throughout the scene the bartender and two figures will intermittently have interactions, to appear as though there's drinking to be done and the mission is being accomplished.

Circular tables are set up throughout the rest of the stage, each with two chairs. At stage left is a door and a window; outside the window a light comes through and leaves its iridescence on the floor. The moon. The atmosphere is of a place that never closes, nothing ever ends, and that reality is too much to bear. The door is green. A dull green, spotted with black stains, brown stains, rusted spots near the hinges. The door handle is off, the rectangle where the PUSH would have been is bare

wood. Above the door is a sign that reads “THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.” The door is the desolate hue of Eden, neglected by God or angels since we left it. The mood is Adam and Eve sitting with their backs to the gate crying.

At the table closest to the door are two black-suited figures, one looking philosophical, with a plain white shirt that on the front says “Jürgen Habermas” in big letters and “IT’S NOT IMPORTANT YOU DON’T KNOW ME” in little parentheses below, still visible to the audience. Across from him is the figure playing SOUL. They’re in a crown, with a blue cape, and a scepter with a Bluebird at the top. The figure wears this very nonchalantly. If the audience could see into the heart of this person, this character, they would see a wasteland. They would see this person, in all their regal garb, sleeping beneath a bare oak, in the desert, using their cape as a blanket against the wind and rain, begging in their sleep for mercy.

SOUL stands at the front of the stage and will narrate the conversation, which the conversational figures will mimic, gesturing, moving as needed to express their liveliness. The remainder of the troupe takes up space at the other tables, pretending to play darts, mopping, etc. They play their parts throughout as well; they don’t draw focus, they merely fill the void.

SOUL

I walked into the bar, having just turned twenty-one, to meet someone a few of the phantoms I hang around with recommended: Jürgen Habermas. We met; we got a table. We talked: he said, “One never really knows who one’s enemy is.” He told me that he’s done too much in his life to dwell on passing thoughts. “What’s your take on cognitive relativity?” I asked him. “It’s relative to infinites,” he said, presumably joking, not altering his stoicism. I explained to him that this is a world made of colors that no one can see clearly; we perceive them in blurs. The blurs one sees, therefore, are equally as accurate as the blurs another sees. “Whatever I have argued before must be so,”

he said. I asked him if he could specifically explain to me what he meant by emancipatory knowledge. He did, and I disagreed, though I can't remember what he said or what it meant. Language is an appendix to freedom, but the idea that the two will eventually overlap is overestimated. People are not destined to be free but must be set free. Freedom and language exist as unaligned soulmates who must meet in order for each to work. "People must liberate each other, Jürgen; the only thing that's *a priority* is emptiness." A person's first sentence is meaningless; it is their last sentence in which they approximate their universe. "The limits of my language are the limits of my world," I said, "said Wittgenstein." He drank. "All fools will mention Wittgenstein." We were the last attendants in the bar when we began our leaving. As we were separating, he was already at the door, I was still putting on my coat, I said to him, to conclude our talk, "After all, as Democritus and Leucippus put it-"; "I will hear no more from ghosts," and he was gone. (*Habermas leaves.*)

*All freeze on stage. SOUL sits across from actor shadowing him; makes a broad sweeping gesture:
Ridiculous showmanship, this.*

Lights die.

Phantasmagoria III: The Vicious Gladness of the Kingdomless King

Giant mirror at center stage. (The mirror is an illusion. It appears to be a mirror, but it's a screen which will project an accurate reflection except for when indicated.) Dark all around. A voice in the dark. The voice is mellifluous yet admonishing. Coming from above, not from any particular spot above, but the sense that the voice is thrown down from everywhere. The

immediate reaction is that we're being spoken to by God, and as God speaks, to begin, we don't feel loved. It is the god of Abraham when he tells Abraham to slice Isaac.

VOICE:

You want to discover things you connect with; you know the falseness of your connections with all things, the emptiness of your love for life. Your Being is an empty feast table; you host starving parties to dine on Nothing; toast extravagantly on the satisfaction of the meal, the occasion, the greatness of the company.

A table appears stage right, a long table fit for a castle. A chair is placed at each end. SOUL is seated at the chair closest to the mirror. The table is set abundantly: chalices, cutlery, big plates for big dishes, little plates for individual portions. All of it blank of contents. Ornamental.

VOICE:

You slit the throat in the mirror alone. You cannot overcome your lack of knowing.

“You slit the throat in the mirror alone. You cannot overcome your lack of knowing.”

SOUL leans back in the chair, looks at his reflection. The reflection is natural for a moment, then the projection on the screen is altered thusly: SOUL's throat develops a gash, and bleeds. The facial expression doesn't change. The image in the mirror, losing life, doesn't notice he is dying. The person looking in the mirror doesn't know that he is living.

Lights go out on the table and SOUL. Image in mirror remains.

VOICE:

You cannot miss the life you hear about that's not your own; you know your own is lost in life. (*Mirror is reset.*) Ex-

ile whispers its desires in your mind as you lay meaninglessly in Meaning's bed, unloved, untouched, unnoticed.

A bed appears in a circle of light stage left. The bed of kings. SOUL is in the center, staring up, eyes open.

VOICE:

You are a dog at the foot of the bed. Kicked to the floor. Let outside. You've run away and are unlooked for; you don't look for life out there lost but keep lost. (*Lights out on bed.*)

If there was Life in you, you would find Life in wandering, in the desert of your empty heart; you would find a brook, a patch of trees, some answer to your searching that would fill you, a source of Life to flow and garden your deserted being with Power's occupancy; but you sit, an unpitied dog, and look to where you think you lost your way, where home is hoped, and whimper, scratch your ear, you move slow, your motion is dejected, and you look down. Your heart howls.

(During this speech, the mirror's projections will run as follows: It begins with SOUL looking out as though a true reflection of someone standing directly before the mirror; SOUL fades out and the scene of a desert comes on, a stream flows through the desert. The projection follows the flow of the stream as it runs past a garden, past trees; the silhouette of someone in the garden is seen. Their back is to the audience; they glow, the transfiguration in Gethsemane. The stream flows to a stop, where it dies. A dry abyss is left. SOUL returns to the mirror as a reflection, no other images in the mirror. At the end of this speech, the mirror resets to nothing for a moment, then complete darkness.)

A light from overhead right is aimed at the stage. The sun. On the mirror is a creek, running through the desert. Onstage is a replica of that wasteland from the mirror earlier. Stones scat-

tered through. The backdrop is mountains. Desert vegetation. SOUL is onstage and wanders throughout, as though recently cast out: Oedipus fleeing Thebes.

VOICE:

Essence's river howls through you, and you admit it to the world in a weak, abandoned groan. Unloved. Loveless. Love the hardness of the stones, the stacked impenetrability of Mountains, the ancient tongue of Land, and connect with the unlovable voice of your soul, that one that others scorn, that they petition you to change, criticize, implore you dress it friendlier, and to teach it time. (*SOUL is in front of the mirror; the surrounding stage has returned to darkness; the mirror has shifted from the creek to SOUL's reflection.*) Connect with that godly beast and no loneliness, no wilderness, no death can unmake you. You are Master of the world and Time, you are Life.

Dark.

Conscience

FICTION BY ABIGAIL BLACK

The two young women meander down the plain grey sidewalk, drinks held in their swinging hands, as they chat with each other. The wind is gentler than normal for this city, a simple breeze flowing around the corners and through the streets lined by skyscrapers. The buildings tower over them, but the shadows are too small to give them refuge as they make their way down the street towards the sun.

Conscience turns its body to the side in order to keep the women in sight as they pass right through where it stands, watching them continue on their journey of comfortable companionship. The bright sun casts the elongated shadows of the women's figures, harsh in their darkness on the brightly lit ground, onto where it remains watching.

Some might look at the two women and wonder what they are talking about that has them so delighted, as they smile and laugh with each other, the wrinkling around their eyes showing their genuine joy. They are so untroubled, so at ease at this moment in time. The more imaginative might craft a story about how they met, what their relationship is, why they are here in this place today. But Conscience does not have to wonder, does not have to imagine.

The women continue on, caught up in their own world, and Conscience wonders if it will stay here to people-watch some more or move its focus to somewhere else. Conscience peers up at the sun, its exceptionally brilliant light on this warm, sunny day would be blinding were it anyone else.

Its mind wanders, the heat causing it to remember the smothering, warm feeling of the blazing sun of a different continent, as it is at this very moment beaming down on a woman who is tending to her farm. Conscience blinks, the very act of recognizing the connection pulling it, and it opens its eyes to a different

sky and an expanse of crops. A group of women are kneeling on the ground and weaving through the crops as they work together, singing in rhythm as they go. As the women care for the field, the light glistening off the sweat coating their dark skin, Conscience knows and feels and remembers. There is a woman on her knees in front of it, with her hands in the dirt as she works. Conscience remembers her life as it remembers the lives of all other people.

With the sounds of nature and the voices of the singing women all around, a song pushes to the forefront of its mind, upbeat and joyful it rings through Conscience's head. It is in a classroom, desks placed in uniform rows, sitting on the windowsill of the second story of a building. One of the boys entering the quiet classroom is humming the song that is playing in Conscience's mind. His uniform is clean and well taken care of, the light of the morning practically shining off the white of his shirt. He is a good student. But Conscience knows there is more to him than just that, there is always more to everyone than simple descriptions can express. Many people do not know that his favorite thing to do is help his mother cook dinner, but Conscience recalls the smell of the food and the sound of his mother's voice as she carefully explains what to do. It recalls his reaction when he tasted the food he had made with her for the first time, the wonder he felt at his creation. Conscience waits and watches, a silent observer and companion in their experiences and lives.

Sometimes Conscience wonders if its knowledge is a blessing or a curse. For while it is sitting in this classroom, it still stands with the women nurturing their crops, and the women who have now parted and are heading home with the few stars they can see in the city starting to peek through the dark of the night sky.

Conscience is sitting with these women, with their parents and family members, as it is sitting with every family, as it witnesses and experiences the life of every person on the planet. Its attention might be directed at the boy, who is now sitting at his

**“Sometimes
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desk watching some of the other students trickle in, but its focus does not hinder the constant connection to all other people that embodies what Conscience is.

Not omniscient, but yet somehow still all-knowing. It is the realization that there will always be mystery, and no one can ever truly know another person. The joy, though, is to learn. And it has learned, it has learned about all who have ever experienced life. Every child that is born, it watches and feels and learns beside. When an old man breathes his last, Conscience's skin chills in detection of Death's quiet presence when it welcomes life's final breath into its embrace, as Conscience closes the book of the man's life and grieves. It has watched him grow and love and learn, for it is the only being that can be said to truly know anyone.

Death is not the only Essence it perceives, though. As entities such as them are always intertwined. Conscience smiles when it identifies the all-encompassing web that is Love as it observes a wedding or sits and watches the uncomplicated innocence that is little children's friendship. It must experience the cold chill in its bones that Fear brings as it seeps into the environment, and the glowing ember in its chest that Courage plants when it grows in the hearts around it.

“It must experience the cold chill in its bones that Fear brings as it seeps into the environment, and the glowing ember in its chest that Courage plants when it grows in the hearts around it.”

But Conscience is not like these Essences. They may all be tied to the people who walk this Earth, but the distinctness of Conscience's purpose has caused its existence to be unique.

It is not uncommon for people to possess this incredible and aching desire to not be forgotten, Conscience has seen and experienced it through them many times. But it knows that in the end this wish is futile, at least in one respect. For these people have always yearned to be remembered by their fellow people, yet in the end Conscience is the one who will

fulfill their wish. It is part of its purpose.

To define Conscience's purpose is difficult, for human words struggle to encapsulate the experience in its entirety. It may be correct to call Conscience a historian, but that does not explain how it lives along with the people it observes, how it remembers how they felt and thought as if they were one and the same. The best description Conscience has thought of in its lengthy existence, is that it is tasked with understanding, with remembering. Some may even consider it as being a witness to humanity.

It remembers the Pharaoh who began the creation of the Great Pyramid, but also that a simple man centuries ago would give the one he loved a flower every day because he considered the smile that lit up their face when they saw it the greatest thing he could ever accomplish. Conscience witnesses all, it remembers all. What can be called the good and the bad in humanity, it must carry on in observing and living alongside. During wars, pandemics, peaceful eras, and everything in-between every life is significant to Conscience. It is hard for them not to be, when it experiences all that they experience it cannot deny their sentience, their rich and real lives. That is something it found other humans can sometimes forget. Its name was inspired by this rarity of awareness.

Although people in this time may hear the name that it has chosen for itself and think of personal beliefs and moral senses, Conscience will always think back to when it emerged in the world. It fell in love when it first heard this name, the meaning striking deep into its being and imprinting itself upon it. It will never forget that "conscience" once meant "an awareness of secret knowledge."

Shabonna Field

ARTWORK BY GARRETT AUSTIN



13 x 19 in.
Photography

Waterfall Glen

ARTWORK BY GARETT AUSTIN

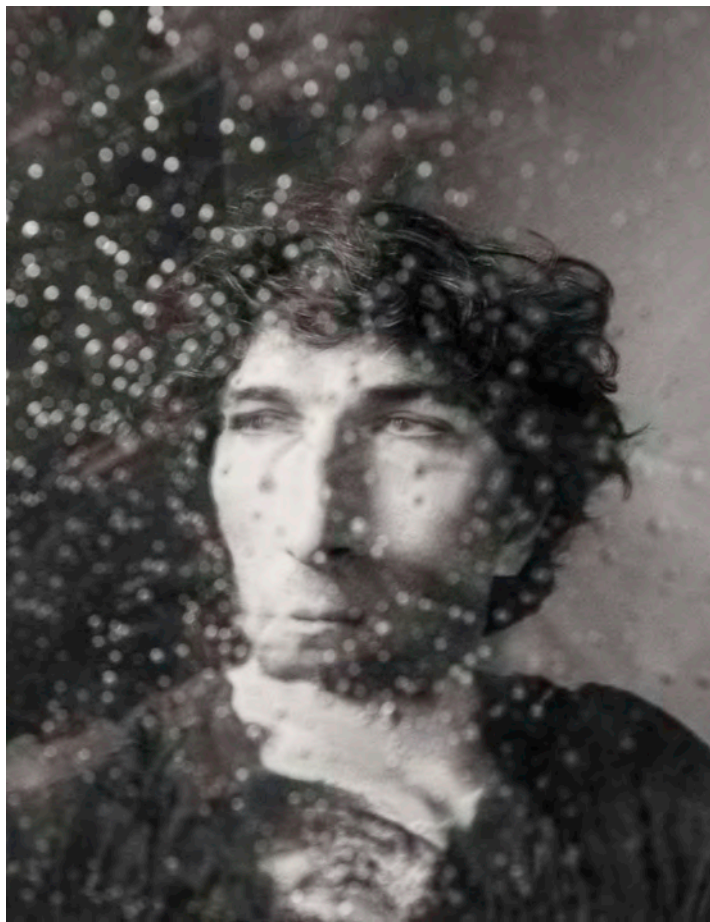


13 x 19 in.
Photography

Garett Austin – 63

5 O'Clock Shadow

ARTWORK BY GARETT AUSTIN



8.5 x 11 in.
Photography

64- Horizons

Zen Zen Zen

POETRY BY BRENDA PEREZ

There's stars and space dust in the air
It feels like the world split, but there is no tear
A floating sensation, warm and zen
Not beautiful, but intimate like the inside of a den
Full of lost treasures and poems from escapees like me
Who seek shelter with freedom and to 'just be'
Don't falter to the rhythm of your heart as we await
For the dancing of our hearts beat fragments to elate
Ourselves and the moon residing in the sun
As dusk turns to dawn, hours passed with much fun
Laughter and joy as we come to embrace
And to our somber past, to this life we erase

Asymptotes

FICTION BY KATHRYN KRAUS

**AWARDED THIRD PLACE IN FICTION AT THE
2020 ILLINOIS SKYWAY WRITER'S FESTIVAL**

I wake up today. Again. There's always another day. The feeling of tomorrow has never been so daunting before. I shower. The water is so hot it scalds my skin. Steam rolls from the water and covers the mirror. I take my finger and write in the mirror. "Hello." Backwards, so he can read it. I pretend that the mirror is actually a two-way mirror. My friend lives on the other side. He watches. He understands me. One time he spoke to me. One time. But that was a very long time ago. Now he just watches.

When I was younger I had a jar of peanut butter. It was just a normal jar of peanut butter, but he was actually my best friend. I took him everywhere with me. He slept in my bed with me. Most kids have a stuffed animal. I had a jar of peanut butter. I decided to see if my daughter would enjoy it as much as I did as a child. I went to the grocery store and found the aisle with the peanut butter. I looked at the shelf with all the jars. I tried to be a 5-year-old. I tried to pick the peanut butter I would want as a five-year-old. Organic peanut butter. Chunky peanut butter. Peanut butter with purple jelly in there too, that could be fun. But I just picked one with a red lid. The red was nice. It made the 5-year-old me feel safe.

"The red was nice. It made the 5-year-old me feel safe."

I brought it home and gave it to her. Gave it to my daughter. I wanted to see if it could be her best friend. She asked me to open the lid. She wanted to eat her new friend. I was upset. I was angry. But then I decided it was a good thing my daughter was nothing like me.

I had to put her to bed tonight. She asks for a story. "Do you know the story of how I fell in love with your mom?" She doesn't.

Every day, she rode her bike down my street. Every day I

would see her. And one day, I saw her, just like every other day. And I realized that I was in love with her. So I bought a chair. I only had one chair and one tiny table in my house. I bought another chair. And then I stopped her on the street. I asked her if she would like a glass of iced tea. She said yes. I told her I didn't have any sugar. She said that's okay. I gave her a glass of iced tea. I put a straw in it. And she asked me if I was going to have a glass of tea too. I told her that I only have one glass. "You only have one glass?" I told her there was only one of me. "Don't you have any friends?" I have a friend. I have one friend. But he doesn't need a glass. He lives inside the glass. And she said, "This might be crazy but I think I love you" and I told her it is crazy. And that's how we fell in love.

My daughter asks if that's really how it happened.

"No, we met in a bar."

"I like it better that way."

"Which way?"

"The second way."

"Oh."

"Dad, you know what we should get?"

"What?"

"One of those vacuums. You know, like on tv. They go around the whole house by themselves. And they just know where to go and what to do all by themselves. You don't have to guide them or anything. They just know."

I want one too. I want a giant one. And I'll just ride around on it. It will go where it's supposed to go, because it just knows.

I drop my daughter off at her mother's house. She likes it better there. She doesn't say she likes it better there, but I see her relief when we pull into the driveway. I see every muscle in her body suddenly relax as she steps through the front door. It's like her whole self was tense and uneasy, and suddenly she feels safe again. Her mother made me feel safe like that too. But that was a long time ago.

She left two years ago. I was just trying to be honest with her. She asked me what I was thinking about. I told her about

my dreams of leaving. My dreams of forgetting and getting to start over without a wife and without a daughter. I wasn't going to leave. I just wanted to tell her how I was feeling. She left me.

Sometimes when I drop off Chloe, I imagine myself running up to the door and professing my undying love for Jen and begging her to take me back. I muster up all of the romantic shit I've ever heard or read or seen in the movies and I outdo it all. And she looks at me and she kisses me and we have the best sex. We just do it over and over again, until we both can't even move anymore. We can't even move our eyelids. We lay there for so long that our flesh starts to be sewn together by tiny beads of sweat. And we spend the rest of our lives together. Again.

“Sometimes I feel like pancakes could make everything in my life better. Sometimes they actually do, if only for a short while.”

I drive around and eventually stop at IHOP. Sometimes I feel like pancakes could make everything in my life better. Sometimes they actually do, if only for a short while. The waitress is friendly. I can tell she is a mother. I pretend she is my mother. I ask for a straw for my orange juice. I can't drink out of glasses made of glass. It tastes strange. It's like I can taste how dense the glass is, and it scares me. She calls me honey. I arrange the sugar packets so they all face the same direction. I open a cup of cream and drink it. It's thick and sticks to my throat. The sugar packets make me anxious. I mess them up again. Chaos feels better.

My boss sends me a link to a website. It's a quiz to determine how mentally healthy you are. “Do you worry a lot?” Yes. I worry a lot. I worry when I'm sleeping my bed will decide to consume me. And I'll sink into the mattress and never get out. I worry that the mailman thinks I have no friends, because I only ever get bills and free samples that I send out for so I get mail because I have no friends. I worry that the water supply to my house is poisoned. Someone puts a tiny bit of poison in it everyday. And it's only a little bit so I can't taste it. But it's slowly killing me. I click “no.”

No, I don't worry a lot.

I open the box and pull out my new robotic vacuum. Chloe was wrong. I was wrong. It doesn't know where it's supposed to go. It just goes around the room and when it bumps into a wall it turns around until it bumps into something else. It doesn't know what the fuck it's doing.

A sparrow flies into my window.

Crashes.

I run outside and find it lying on the ground. I rhythmically push on its chest with my thumbs. I breathe life into the tiny beak and its fragile body hops up.

“Hold on. I'll take it all away.”

I jump onto his back and he flies away. We fly away together, high above everything. We'll never come down. They'll see us above everything and envy us, but we'll just keep flying.

I run outside. The bird is dead.

Calling All Writers!

Do you have a passion for the written word?
Are you looking for a community of writers who share
your love of the craft?
Would you like to be involved in the creation of future
issues of *Horizons*?



Join the Creative Writing Club!



What is Creative Writing Club?

- The Creative Writing Club is an inclusive group open to writers of all genres and forms. Our goal is to create a space where art can be shared and new ideas can flourish. As one of the most active clubs on campus, we meet weekly to workshop pieces, play writing games, and discuss all things related to the written word. Each year the club also hosts open mics, writing contests, write-ins, and even travels to a national writing conference. You don't want to miss out!

- **Creative Writing Club meets Wednesdays from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., room 120, in the Student Center (Student Life Office) on the Sugar Grove Campus.**

- **Attend meetings virtually on Zoom!**

<https://waubonsee.zoom.us/j/94068124898>

Meeting ID: 940 6812 4898



Questions? Contact Dan Portincaso at
dportincaso@waubonsee.edu

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