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EDITORS STATEMENT

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SWALLOWS- THE Creative Builder Janet Peavey {Medium}



Hell Hath No

Allison Bock

After ten years, I've been in the business long enough to know a dangerous case when I see one. The moment she walks into my office, after a polite knock, I can tell she's got just that. I can see it in the way she looks at me. Something about her stare spells "danger," but I'm a sucker for mysterious, beautiful women. I can't pretend it's the first time I haven't been able to take my eyes off a lady, but something about this one seems different. It has nothing to do with her exceptionally long legs, her angular face, or her creamy complexion, and everything to do with her collected demeanor. A striking confidence hangs about her, accentuated by the way she refuses to break eye contact with me, even as she sheds her long coat and hangs it, with her hat, on the rack beside my door. Without them, I can see that her hair matches her unnervingly dark eyes. As much as I hate to admit it, she makes me nervous. Very nervous. She introduces herself as Mrs. Aria Jäger, emphasizing her title too clearly for me to fool myself into thinking she overlooked my appreciative gaze. I return the favor with an amiable smile. Her thin lips remain tightly pressed together as she answers me.

"I know your name, Mr. O'Malley. How do you think I found you?"

Although not angry, her voice chills me. It seems wrong for a woman—for anybody, really—to come across so unemotional. She wastes no time in presenting her case. The military calls her husband

missing in action, she says, but she doesn't believe them. In fact, she steadfastly believes him to be dead, which surprises me; most military wives hold on to hope as long as they can before submitting to the truth of their spouse's death. I ask her how she can be so sure he isn't simply stuck in a sea of immigrants and soldiers trying to get home after his release from a prison camp.

For a few moments, she doesn't answer, and when she does, she doesn't use words. Instead, she hands me a piece of crumpled yellow paper, worn as if she's carried it around for weeks, and sits in the chair in front of my desk. I unfold the paper carefully; it looks so used and delicate that I'm afraid I might rip it if I'm too rough. The faded ink on the letter's date smudges slightly when, accidentally, I rub my thumb over it; the fourteenth of May, after the fall of Berlin, I insist. My client tells me to read on with calmness that warrants a strange look from me. I continue regardless, repressing the urge to glance up at her every few moments.

Those three sentences would stick out even if she hadn't underlined them in felt pen.

'When I see the ruins, I can't help but remember my promise to you; I will not let it be broken. I want nothing more than to be back with you. You know very well that I have loved you, love you now, and will always love you.' Although love doesn't make sense to me personally, even I can recognize the cryptic tone of the letter.

"He's gone," she says evenly. "There's nothing I can do to save him anymore."

I hesitate as I fold the yellowed document and hand it back to her. "I'm a private detective," I reply. "What is it you need from me?"

The way she looks at me makes me feel as if she's in some sort of trouble,

"He didn't die all by himself," she says flatly. "I want to know who killed him. Can you help me?" The last four words are spoken slowly, as if to a child. I nearly stiffen.

"Honey, we're in Boston," I remind her. "I'm not going to Europe."

"Sure about that?" She asks, tossing a thick manila envelope across the table.

I know what it contains before I open it, but I check anyway. Even though I don't have time to count, the sum inside looks like a year's worth of a soldier's hard work. Shock jars me, gripping my esophagus and making it impossible to breathe, though I make it a point to keep my expression unreadable.

"I'll think about it." I meet her eyes slowly. "No promises."

She leans back in her chair and crosses those shapely legs. It's impossible to resist; my masculinity betrays me as I allow my gaze to sweep shamelessly over her thighs. She notices, of course, and raises one dark brow, remaining silent.

After a time, she says, "Wouldn't you want to know, Mr. O'Malley?"

"I don't know. I'm not married. Long-term relationships don't do it for me, Miss Jäger."

"Mrs. Jäger," she snarls suddenly. For the first time, her nonchalant face lifts and fury rises passionately into her eyes. I draw back slightly, watching her small mouth pull tightly into itself and her thin hands curl into angry fists at her sides. "It's still Mrs. Jäger."

Needless to say, I'm starting to rethink my plans to seduce her. Regardless of the eyes and the legs, she's still his wife.

"I apologize," I say quietly. "I meant no disrespect." She doesn't answer for a long while. I begin to think

she hadn't heard me until she speaks sharply. "Shall I take my business elsewhere? I have no time for dawdling."

She pays my passage to Berlin in full, along with her own, insisting she has to be there. She wants to see the man, she tells me. I have no doubt she will do more than just see him, a fact that troubles me almost as much as the fact that I may become an accessory to murder on this trip. Assisting a wounded woman's revenge is as illegal as it is unorthodox, but I would be a fool to turn down money like this.

She tells me her husband worked as a spy, which she found out when he disappeared. Wilhelm Jäger was German, born and bred, and she says she'd never been certain of his loyalty to America, only of his loyalty to her, and that was enough. His German fluency would, of course, encourage the government to pursue him for such tasks. I can see how his devotion to keeping her safe might persuade him to agree. They used his weakness for her against him, she says almost casually, and she openly admits to blaming them for his death.

"The military? Why not file a lawsuit?" I ask.

"No grounds, obviously," she replies simply. "Anyway, how exactly do you think I got the money to pay you? They gave it to me. He worked hard for it."

"So you really think he would have wanted you to do this?"

The wife doesn't answer. Instead, she leans on the railing of the ship and stares out at the gray sea, her eyes as foggy and distant as the rain clouds creeping over the horizon.

Since the war ended, I've seen pictures of Germany's capital that chill to the bone, but no amount of photographs can properly demonstrate the destruction of a war-torn city. Berlin's history of grandeur remains clear even now, as I walk through the rubble-strewn streets, attempting to keep my profile as low as possible. It seems every building lining my path is half-destroyed, crumbling

into the street even at the slightest shower of rain. Smoke still curls from some of the feeble brick walls, a constant reminder of the heavy bombings from only months ago. Fall brings gray skies, robbing the city of most light, making buildings appear even more ghostly.

Today, however, I have no time to be concerned with the state of the city. The man turning into an apartment building no more than fifty feet ahead of me seems entirely unaware he's being followed. I find it disappointing he's no more than an ordinary Russian soldier—a damned infantryman at that. The intelligence I gathered indicates other suspects as well, but this is the only name I could get hold of. I hope he'll be able to provide me with more when I finally decide to confront him. I've known about him for a couple of days, even tracked his movements around the city. The wife won't be happy when she finds out I didn't inform her immediately. I would prefer to observe his movements for a week or so, if she wasn't so pushy. I like having familiarity with my mark's patterns. In this case, it seems I don't have that luxury.

"You should have told me right away!" she rages when we meet in her room that evening. "I'm not paying you to keep secrets from me. I'm paying you for results."

"I got you results," I respond carefully. It should bother me more, even scare me, that she seems so angry, but it doesn't. I know her rage has nothing to do with me. As the days creep by, the eerily cool demeanor she maintained that first day in my office slowly evaporates. "I know where he lives," I tell her.

"Take me there," she demands in an oddly quiet voice. Her dark eyes narrow dangerously and I can't help but take a single step backwards. She reeks of intimidation more than any woman I've ever met, and I find myself wondering if she's always like this.

"Look, Lady," I say, slowly raising my hands just to

have something between us. "I don't think you should be too rash about this."

"What do you know?" she cries at me, arms flailing, eyes afire with a kind of rage I haven't yet seen in her. "You didn't lose him. You know nothing."

I back up another step, cautious. "I'm entitled to know something, don't you think?"

"What is there to tell?" Her voice reduces to little more than a growl and she looks at me like a cornered animal. "You know all you need to know. I want revenge. Do I look like I care about the ramifications? That's it, that's all."

"Is it?" I ask quietly, bending to look into her face. She turns away stubbornly, staring hard at the wall.

"He went to war for me. He went because of me."

She blames herself. Somehow, that didn't click before, and all of a sudden it seems crystal clear. I fight to swallow the lump of uncertainty in my throat. I know it's wrong of me to help her, but her steadfast insistence makes it impossible to refuse.

"I want peace," she mutters distantly, her face going slack. She stares out the side window now, settling her unfocused gaze on the rubble in the street.

Doubt eats at me and I shake my head to clear it, although the feeling lingers, regardless. I heave a sigh and nod slowly. "You know I'll only be involved to a certain point. I helped you find him, that's—"

"—All I need, thank you," she finishes more evenly. A pause lingers between us, but I can only stand silence

for so long.

"Do you ever smile?" I ask lightly, a terrible attempt at a joke. She doesn't glare, to my surprise. Instead, she gives me a blank look and reaches into her pocket, pulling out a wrinkled photo. She stares at it for a moment, with longing in her eyes, before handing it to me.

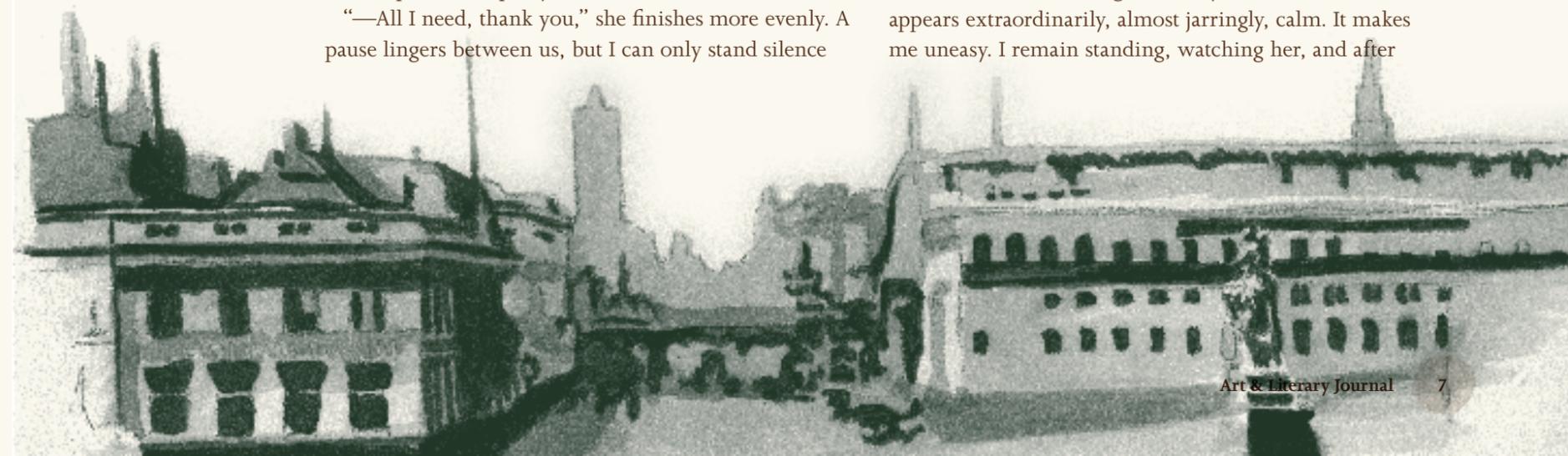
She smiles in the picture, and so does he. They sit under a tree, leaning casually against one another and grinning happily for the camera. He's good-looking, and I notice she looks much prettier in the photograph than I've ever seen her. Perhaps the sun hits her face just right, or perhaps it's the way her cardigan hugs her so. I consider these options, but I know neither is true. I know what makes her so lovely in the picture.

Mutely, I hand the photograph back.

Everything else aside, I still think I'm better looking than her husband.

Regardless of her talk, the wife knows she isn't particularly skilled, at least not in the ways I'm skilled. I pick the lock for her while her perpetrator runs errands. She asks me to come up with her. It feels wrong. The way she looks at me makes me feel as if she's in some sort of trouble, though I know the situation is exactly the opposite. Either way, I agree, and ascend the stairs into the man's living room with her.

She sits on the couch, hardly relaxed, and wrings her hands, her feet twitching nervously. Her face, however, appears extraordinarily, almost jarringly, calm. It makes me uneasy. I remain standing, watching her, and after



a time move aside the pistol in my belt and remove a pack of cigarettes from my pocket.

“Reconsidering?” I ask conversationally as I stick a cigarette in my mouth and replace the box.

“Not at all,” she replies rigidly, her back drawing straight up against the couch. Immediately, her hands stop fiddling and she lays them calmly on her well-formed thighs. I draw in a breath as I light the smoke and say nothing else. Instead, I stand with her for a few more minutes before turning to the staircase again.

“I better get out of here,” I grunt. “Nice meeting you. Wish you the best.” What a joke.

She doesn’t answer. Her eyes remain so empty that it becomes disturbing. Such pretty eyes. It feels like such a waste that it makes a part of me feel empty, too. Maybe she would have a beautiful life in front of her, or maybe this truly was the only way she could have peace. If money meant nothing, if security meant nothing to her anymore, did this make her right?

I turn and take the stairs one step at a time, each one creaking under my weight. I stare listlessly at the toes of my Italian shoes. This feels so wrong. I grind the cigarette on the railing mindlessly.

The next moment, the doorknob twists and I drop the smoldering butt on the dusty step. The Russian steps inside, turns, and locks the door behind him, shrugging off his military coat. He doesn’t realize I stand there as he fiddles with his keys, humming a tune, his back to me. I remain silent until he turns around.

The coat immediately falls from his grasp and his eyes widen. The second he reaches back for the doorknob, I grab his wrist instinctively and wrench it away, somehow pinning him against the door with my abdomen. I feel his rapid breathing against my ear. I even feel him try to scream, but his voice seems gone. I feel the same way. Before now, my investigations have been much

different, just clients who pay me to track down their spouse’s lover, or rich assholes looking for their relatives.

“Don’t move,” I growl, backing off slightly, one hand on my gun. “It’s not your lucky day, Mate,” I add after taking a minute to breathe. You speak English?”

“Some,” he answers quietly. He keeps his palms flat on the door in front of him, and I watch his nostrils flare as he pants fearfully. “What are you doing here?”

I find his thick accent only slightly difficult to understand.

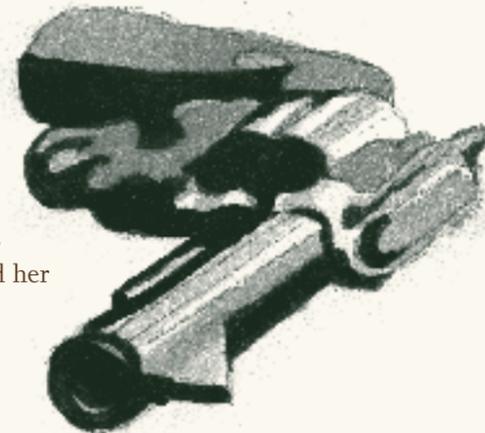
“You killed somebody very close to a friend of mine,” I respond, coolly. It surprises me how calm my voice sounds, even to my own ears.

“Killed? I fought in war!” Some English indeed, I thought.

“Up the stairs,” I say, removing my gun from my belt and gesturing. “Now. Up.”

He nearly sprints upstairs, but I don’t bother; I walk slowly. Suddenly, my head feels filled with lead, the ache nearly unbearable. Peculiarly, I feel responsible for making sure he doesn’t off her, too. Before I reach the landing, I hear a muffled squeak. Something heavy falls against the ground. My chest tightens, and I quicken my pace up the stairs.

She must have surprised him when he reached the top, knocking him off his feet before he realized what happened. Her legs pin him to the ground as she ties his wrists tightly with thick twine she probably stowed in her pocket. I swallow, taking a single step forward as I watch her stand, and I notice a poker from the fireplace lying on the ground not far from her. Unskilled, perhaps, but Mrs. Jäger is nothing if not clever. She shakes where she stands, and her



jaw trembles with anger. Intuitively, I reach forward and take her arm.

“Wait,” I murmur in her ear.

“I planned on it.” Her voice quivers, and I can tell she feels frightened. I hush her gently and ask her for the picture, which she hands to me without a fuss. Kneeling in front of the Russian, I hold it in front of him. He gazes at it, wide-eyed, as he gasps for air.

Slowly, he lifts his gaze from the picture to my face. The uncomfortable silence that follows lasts far too long, and I watch his throat constrict as he swallows heavily. Finally, he nods, curling his knees to his chest and laying his head back on the carpet.

“It was order,” he says, his voice weak and raspy with fear. “He was good spy. Knew something about the captain. We needed five to catch him. He fought. Said he had wife. Said let him go. But captain said, kill him. We shot his kneecap and his chest. Tied him up. Threw him in river. It was storming.”

“Is he dead?” the wife demands suddenly.

The terrifying rage returns in her eyes. I can’t understand what she feels, but I understand that look.

“He could not have survive,” answers the Russian in a small voice.

I expect a wail of rage, or a cry of hopelessness. Instead, she stares at the floor, her gaze unreadable. I don’t want to know what she’s thinking.

“Will you hurt me?” he asks. I realize after a moment that his stare rests on me. I blink and tilt my head a little.

“No,” I respond, thoughtfully, “but I can’t speak for her.”

“What are their names?” she interjects fiercely, staring firmly at her captive. “What are the names of the other men involved?”

His breathing quickens, his white hands straining fearfully against their bonds. “I cannot tell,” he replies. “They are my comrades.”

“What are their names?” she shouts. Her face contorts into a mask of frustration and fury.

For a moment, I feel very sorry for her.

“I cannot say!” he wails, as if something tangible holds his tongue.

His friends must be real good to him, but it’s the wrong time to play hero.

As if all the tension she built up since receiving her husband’s letter finally broke the dam, a terrible yell of rage escapes her like a battle cry. Before I can blink, she reaches over and snatches the pistol from my belt. The force and abruptness of the motion pushes me back without warning. My shoulder catches the wall behind me and I wince, first from the pain, then from the ear-shattering sound of the gun as it fires, again and again. As quickly as I can, I stumble forward and take her by the arms.

The pistol falls to the floor with a thud. She thrashes, fighting violently for a good twenty seconds before she finally slumps in my grip. The next thing I know, she buries her face in my shoulder with a weak sob and my arms carefully wrap around her.

I look over her at the body on the floor. His blood pools on the cream-colored carpet. I fight a wave of nausea. It all feels strange to me. To be honest, I expected her to make me leave. I expected her to be up here for hours, milking the information from her victim minute by minute. Something about the way she weeps into my shoulder suggests she expected something much different, too.

“He’s gone,” she sobs hoarsely. “He’s gone.”

I know she isn’t talking about the Russian.

Turn It Up

Leah Thomas

Sometimes being good
Isn't good enough.
After a time,
You just need to break free.

For the times you feel like running,
For the times when the walls are closing in,
When everything is all wrong,
Turn the music up;
Tune the world out;
Let your heart beat with the drums
And just breathe.

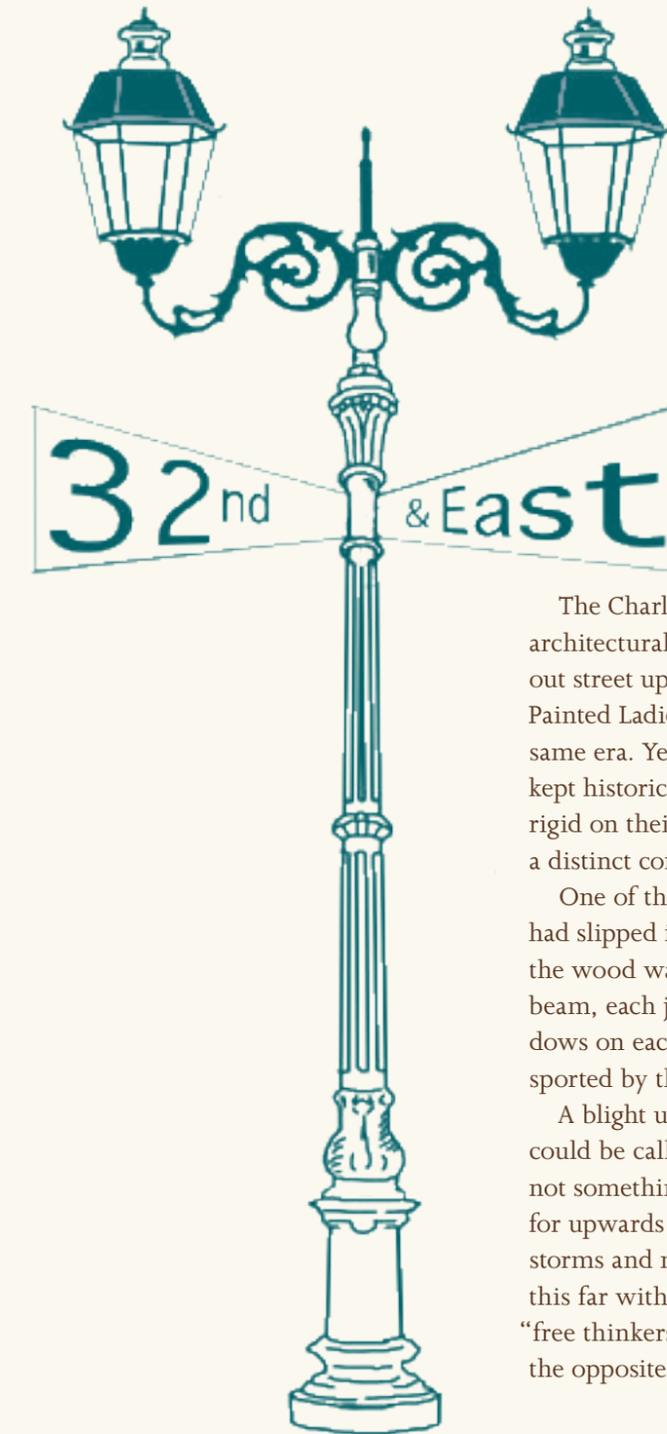
Hopes of the future
Tinted with fear of the unknown
Force the choice:
Are you willing to take chances?

For the times you think fear will swallow you whole,
For the times you can't even breathe,
When everyone is waiting for you,
Turn the music up;
Let it take you away;
Let it slow your pounding heart
And open your eyes.

It's better to love and be loved
Until you've lost them,
And all that's left
Is your broken heart.

For the times when you can't handle the pain,
For the times when all that's left is broken,
When every time you open your eyes you see Hell,
Turn the music up and
Feel it bring you back,
Piece by piece;
Let it fill your heart
And start to sing along.

For the times you don't know what to do or say
For the times when all you can do is pray
Let the music take you away.
Turn it up
Shout it out
And just breathe.



Aaron R. Mathisen

The Charles Village neighborhood in Baltimore contained every form of architectural beauty America could give. Victorian houses sprawled throughout street upon street in a vast array of colors. They were called “Baltimore’s Painted Ladies,” likening them to San Francisco’s famed row homes of the same era. Yet, sprinkled haphazardly within these rows of pruned and well-kept historical estates, many less maintained but equally venerable homes sat rigid on their plots, unwillingly flaunting their weathered exteriors, providing a distinct contrast to their street-mates’ prestigious displays of grandeur.

One of these “second-class” residences fared particularly poorly. Its façade had slipped into decay, the faded red paint cracking and peeling away from the wood walls. The dirty white gutter lay precariously on a failing support beam, each joint disconnected from the next. Stained and cracked bay windows on each floor glared down upon the wildflowers and foot-high reeds sported by the utterly ignored lawn.

A blight upon the rest of Thirty-Second Street was all House Number 1225 could be called, because he embodied second class. Ignorance, however, was not something else he could be accused of. He had sat on that street corner for upwards of twelve decades, enduring thousands of rainstorms and snowstorms and nearly baking alive in searing August sunshine. He hadn’t come this far without a few scrapes and nicks. Those so-called “intellectuals” and “free thinkers” established that “time heals all wounds,” but to House 1225, the opposite rang true. Time created them.

The last week of September was quickly approaching in Baltimore. The sun would soon fade, replaced by dreary days and a crisp chill to the air. House 1225 sighed into the rolling west wind, letting groans and creaks emanate from his decaying floorboards. Paint sloughed off the wall and skittered up into the breeze. Along with the red flakes, papers flew away from their rightful place, taking off from a plastic box near

the ground and clouding the sky with overly large confetti. The worn house considered what this

A flash lit up the sky, followed by a loud rumbling sound. He braced himself for a hell-storm.

box meant for some time now, and finally concluded that, for only the fourth time in his long and tiring life, he would soon get pawned off to another set of bipeds to intrude on his peace, whose offspring would run and trot about, crawling into places they shouldn't, destroying him from the inside out. What could he do about it? He could only sit and rest his bones. That was all he'd ever been able to do.

As time went on, he saw the world develop around him. He watched the houses he knew as a youngling become historical landmarks, and he looked on hopefully as landscapers walked across his sidewalk to work on the manicured lawn next to his, ignoring his weed-marked garden in favor of one much less deserving of service. But House 1225 didn't complain, having been around longer than ever he could have hoped. He was a realist.

The years had been hard on him, yet House 1225 understood his good fortune, especially while others around him improved to new heights. As fame and recognition entered the neighborhood, lowly homes such as he feared demolition and removal. He differed from the rest, so he worried. He once witnessed an old

friend, built around the same time as he, condemned and ripped apart, strip-by-strip. They exposed his framework, and then bulldozed over him. No, House 1225 avoided jealousy at all costs. He was his own entity, and he respected what was his.

The wind whipped through the grass on the front lawn, sprawling leaves about and making its way through crevices and knots in 1225's wood enclosure. He quivered in the gust, pops and cracks audible from his aching back. A gutter piece on his left side snapped and came tumbling down, leaving a chasm of open space, like a bridge torn down over rumbling water.

An admittedly painful loss, yes, but he had endured worse over his time. During a storm nearly four-and-a-half decades ago, a lightning bolt descended from the heavens and struck a fir in the yard behind him, bringing it crashing down upon his back and carving a deep gash into his body. The repairs took weeks and, from then on, House 1225 never felt quite the same. Leaks still penetrated through the wood in those areas, making his insulation itch terribly.

Not long after those events, the last inhabitants took refuge within his protective embrace. For a while, a warm fire filled his heart every evening, and delicious scents invigorated him to the point he felt several years younger. This did not last, of course, for the humans then produced children, and later grandchildren, taking a toll on him much greater than the boost he felt for a short time. Maybe his age exponentially increased his irritation at this disturbance. Maybe he was senile. Needless to say, when they decided to vacate his premises for a property in the warmth of the south, it more than pleased him.

Excited young voices echoed in from down the street, and shoes clicked in near-unison as they approached the gate to the large red house at the corner

of Thirty-Second and East. If House 1225 could have gotten up and shooed these miscreants off of his land, he would have. He could only sit and patiently watch them come up the cobblestone walkway, making a beeline for the plastic box full of papers.

"Jessica, it's perfect. Don't you think? We could fix it up and make it what we want. It would be ours." The male pulled the female in closer, as if to shelter her from the chill.

Face flushed with cold, she reached forward and pulled a flyer out from the container. Her lips opened up as she smiled, her dimples exposed to the searing wind alongside her red cheeks.

"Yes. I think we should do it. It could be ours; we'd be able to have a home with character. A home, John."

The two humans laughed and touched their lips together gently.

House 1225 wondered at the odd custom. He would never consider fraternizing in such a way with House 1227. The house shuddered at the thought and watched intently as the couple sauntered away, still whispering and laughing excitedly. They seemed so much like the earlier tenants in their youth. Perhaps they, too, could fill his heart with fire. After all, he still had some years left in his boards.

The wind picked up as a stinging rain fell. The small drops of water multiplied into the millions and intensified, berating him with leaks in every pore of his existence. The rain escalated with each passing hour. As it strengthened, so followed the wind. A swirling, freezing gust stripped shingles from House 1225's roof and spider webbed several more glass panes. A flash lit up the sky, followed by a loud rumbling sound. He braced himself for a hell-storm.

House 1225 felt scared, overwhelmed with anxiety for the coming night. A single thought ran through his mind,

repeating itself to no end. I don't think I can survive this.

...

Footsteps echoed up Thirty-Second Street for the second day in a row. John and Jessica took their time, excited chatter emanating from both of them. They commented on the brightly painted Edwardian homes on their left, the Victorians on the right with their perfectly manicured lawns, and the prospect of owning one of their own. It might not be as fabulous as the rest of the avenue now, but with their help it could become one of them. Better than them, even. Their words came to an abrupt end as the pair jolted to a halt on the corner of Thirty-Second and East.

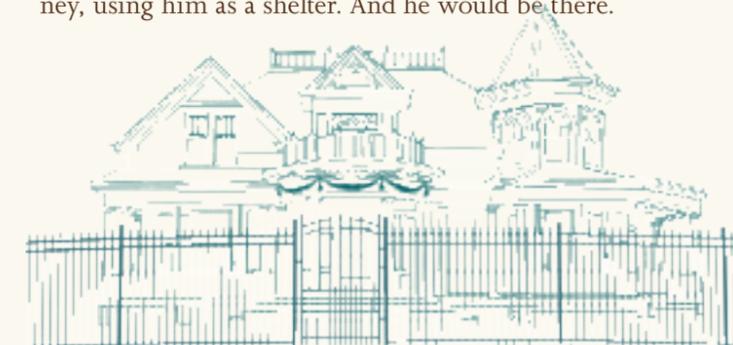
"John," the female whispered softly.

Their eyes wandered up the cobblestone path, seeing broken glass and stray shingles intermingling with leaves and strewn flyers at the entrance to the grounds. Farther and farther they looked, finally settling on the center of 1225 Thirty-Second Street.

The house stood, battered, wet, and leaky, yet still strong. Shingles gone, gutter hanging by a thread, and the burned red paint now totally absent.

"It's going to take work, Jess. But we can do it. Let's buy it."

House 1225 allowed himself a moment of hope as he endured the racking pain throughout his body. Another generation would now embark on their journey, using him as a shelter. And he would be there.





Massive talons pounded the soil with the concussion of Titans at war, churning the ground with every lunge Kloud made. The old dragon charged forward with blurring speed, one shoulder lowered as he powered his sinuous reptilian body through towering tree trunks, his breath coming in great ragged gulps.

Nearby, running a parallel course behind the dragon, Theldar Greyrock, a not-so-young, stout dwarf and Kloud's companion, huffed in disgust as he leapt past a row of gnarled stumps, his feet stomping hard as he grabbed a limb to propel himself ahead. Calf muscles flexing, thighs pumping, the dwarf emitted an earth-rumbling shout.

Kloud craned an ear to hear Theldar, and let loose his own thunderous roar. He neared an impossibly high cliff and tore into the earth with vigor, sailing out from the edge and down to the next ridge; Theldar kept right along. Both dwarf and dragon plunged forward, sending a boom of sound ahead of them.

"Keep running, Dragon!" the dwarf taunted, planting one booted foot against a rock and muscling through an oncoming oak.

The two exploded out of the forest and onto the wide plain lands of Mivelariod, where miles of flowing grasses and small hillocks opened invitingly before them. Any other time, Kloud could have flown to the other end of the plains overnight. The dwarf could have trekked it in three days. They both pressed on, knowing their current speed would carry them across in minutes.

A haze rose up ahead, a brief heat shimmer, then

seconds later the outline of the wicked human city, Del-Ded. Kloud wished he could stop and thrash the vile populace properly, but they had an experiment to finish, and Kloud suspected the dwarf might yet catch him. Kloud ran, the dwarf following closer still.

Five miles away, Del-Ded fuzzed in and out of focus as dragon and dwarf crested one mound, falling with the next, drawing rapidly closer. Kloud narrowed his focus on the weaker walls of the city, not wanting to injure his wing any further. A good blow to their soft walls shouldn't be so bad, he thought, letting his huge hind legs send him faster. Just don't want to hit that gate.

"You're not going through that, are you, you stupid dragon?" shouted Theldar, but Kloud ignored his friend's taunt.

Del-Ded came into full view, less than a thousand paces away from Kloud. Normally, the main gate would open with ponderous clockwork precision, the three-story timbers parting like a slow mechanism counting down a full two minutes. Their pivots sat on massive iron chains pulled by four oxen on each side. Travelers and local children, animals and peddlers all passed through with measured deliberation.

The gates splintered into a hailstorm of lethal tar-coated timber shards and metal bandings as Kloud rushed through them. With one wing still pulled to his sore side, the dragon hit harder than he thought he would, and his shoulder gave out, sending rippling pain through his long wiry body. He landed with sonic death, shattering life as he tore through flower shops, churches, and luxuriant homes, uncaring about the wake of terror as he thrashed to right himself. Theldar slowed momentarily.

"Don't get lost," shouted the dwarf.

"No matter what that fool wizard says, I will not be outpaced by a dwarf," Kloud snarled, whipping his

great head around and seeing the dwarf rush past, his blond beard a blowing frenzy behind him, heading for the far side of the city. Kloud leapt after his guffawing rival, and they emerged from the wreckage of Del-Ded in a flash.

As with all dragons in Mivelariod, Kloud possessed the natural ability to breathe fire, using any material he could fit into his mouth to produce a wad of lava-like waste. Since dragons have fire-resistant hides, younger whelps played tag by volleying well-aimed chunks of flaming matter at each other. Kloud had ranked higher than any of his mates.

Kloud gained ground on the dwarf, and it seemed to him that the little creature, who felt more comfortable below the ground than above it, ran even faster. Unhinging his lower jaw, the dragon dipped his head and let his momentum carry a ton of earth into an eagerly waiting maw. Just the fuel he would need.

Let's hope that wizard brewed extra protection, Dwarf, thought Kloud, and let loose a fireball. Kloud knew Theldar had heard the scrape of earth, could have felt it in his soul like any dwarf.

"You're not that good a shot," bellowed Theldar. The old dwarf curled into a tight ball and spun around as the fireball clipped him.

Another scraping of Kloud's precious dirt, and the dwarf caught the next fireball square on the chest, but it didn't slow him in the least. Theldar sparkled each time a fireball connected, like speeding moths exploding into a candle flame.

The dragon threw one more ball, hitting Theldar clean, and for the briefest of moments Kloud feared Theldar had stopped. The wizard said the test subject might explode if he or she halted while under the elixir's influence. Concern rose in Kloud, something that seemed to happen more and more in the otherwise gruff dragon. It bordered on panic when Kloud could hear nothing of the rumbling of the dwarf's feet. The lack of motion befuddled him. Then his head cleared, and Kloud heard the sharp bark of the dwarf laughing.

"I heard that, Dwarf." But Kloud could not entirely take the concern out of his voice.

With movement so powerful it compressed the air with a clap, the dragon heaved, his one bad wing tucked to his side, streamlining him. The two hit a new line of forest as they crossed the plain, leaving Del-Ded and its broken residents behind. Dwarf and dragon alike dodged and tumbled into the trees, colliding with snarls of whipping branches and towering trunks. Nothing could withstand their brute force; Kloud's size let him wreak such havoc most times, and the dwarf had the elixir. They slammed through the other side, toward the oncoming foothills.

"You went through town, Dragon. You think I can go through a mountain?" said Theldar. Kloud looked to see the perpendicular mountain face and could only guess what the usually negligent dwarf might be plotting.

"I'll go up, then," screamed the dragon and unfurled one good wing. The leathery membrane snapped open with shuddering force and Kloud beat once, then twice, launching him into the air and up the mountain side.

To Kloud, it looked as if the back side of the mountain had vomited Theldar out of its bowels, puking him onto the next plain, a disgorging of

But the dwarf went through.

To Kloud, it looked as if the back side of the mountain had vomited Theldar out of its bowels, puking him onto the next plain, a disgorging of super-heated rock and flaming dwarf. He tucked his good wing, speeding like a comet towards the dwarf. But the dwarf had not slowed; in fact, he seemed to move with increasing speed.

Kloud watched as Theldar pulled out the elixir one last time, draining it in one rebellious gulp. The words of the wizard rang in his ears: "One sip, you damn fool."

The distance the two covered before paled in contrast; suddenly, it seemed not even light could move so fast. One plain became like the last, one obstacle a vague impression of the next. The lines they wore into the Earth grew deeper, hotter, riddling the mantle of their planet with rows like a plowed field.

Kloud could feel the magic imbued in the potion radiate out to him in waves, like a pull on his own heart. The strength of their master's potion worried him. He worried for the dwarf, who knew about the danger of such magic, who knew their master would be furious if they failed another test.

But Kloud felt old in a way that belied this exhilarating jaunt with Theldar, an old that hurt his bones. He would not fail his master, because the punishments left Kloud feeling as if he stood closer to death's gate. Digging deeper into his own magic, he put off the ancient creaks and let the running wash over him.

Then they stopped. The potent effect of the potion reached its apparent limit, and both Kloud and Theldar felt the air around them grow thick, as if it had turned to paste.

Kloud came to rest in an avalanche of piled dirt, his bad wing tattered and bleeding, and the state of the

good one not much better.

He didn't get a chance for any self-pity. From far down the rut their running formed came a subterranean rumble, snapping up the dragon's head.

"Move, Dwarf. Now," he called, setting his front legs over the lip of dirt and scrambling with his burned hind ones.

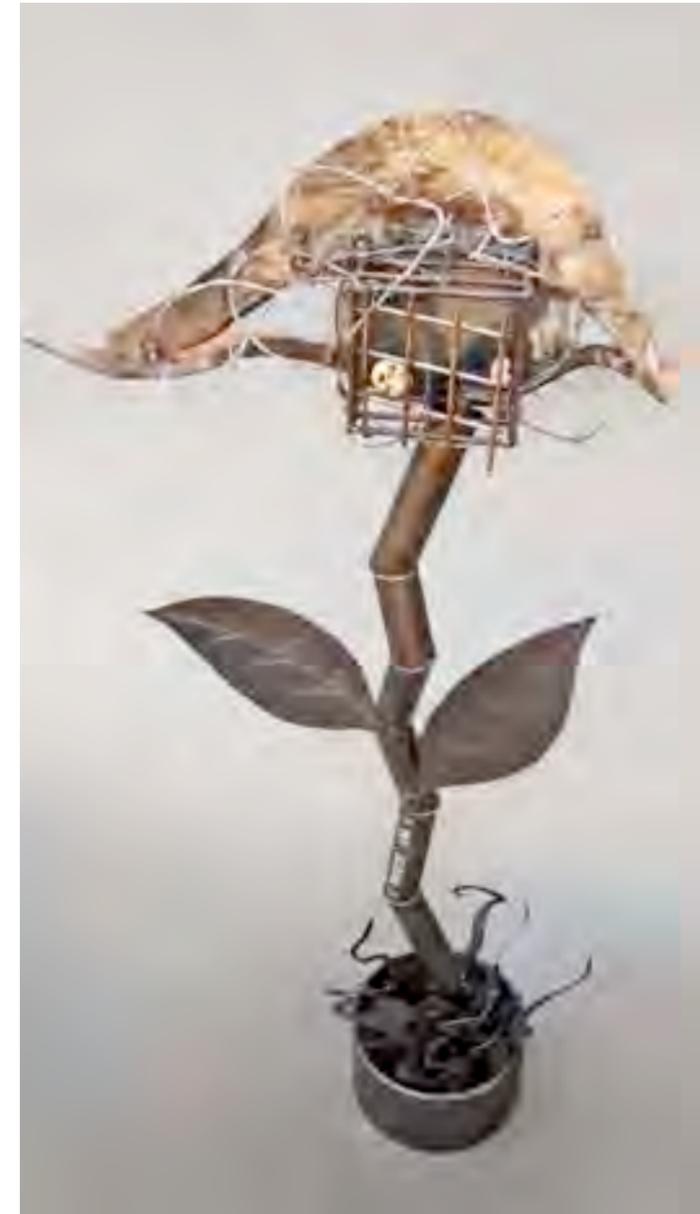
The sound moved the dwarf before the dragon's warning could. The softer topsoil, all the debris they churned, came bellowing from behind, a delayed reaction from the force of their passing; it washed over them like a sea of mud. A ripple of laughter floated up as the backwash settled and the world stopped oozing.

"You should see the look on your face, Dwarf," said Kloud. He rolled onto his back, legs in the air, his spiny ridge plates thumping gently on the ground.

Suddenly serious, the dragon's giant blue eye fixed the dwarf, now a steaming, mud covered nugget. "Tell me you didn't drink it all?"

A fist-sized ball of sludge hit Kloud in his very top head spike. "I wish I could curse you in your own tongue, you stupid lizard," said Theldar, splattering mud all over as he shook his fist. He pulled a stump out of the muck with a pop and sat down on it. "The point was to see if it lets you run faster than a dragon."

"And you beat me," said Kloud. He knew the master would approve the result this time.



THE PICTURE of Dorian GRAY

Wintermute Graham {Leather, Metal, Bookmaking}



LETTERFORMS

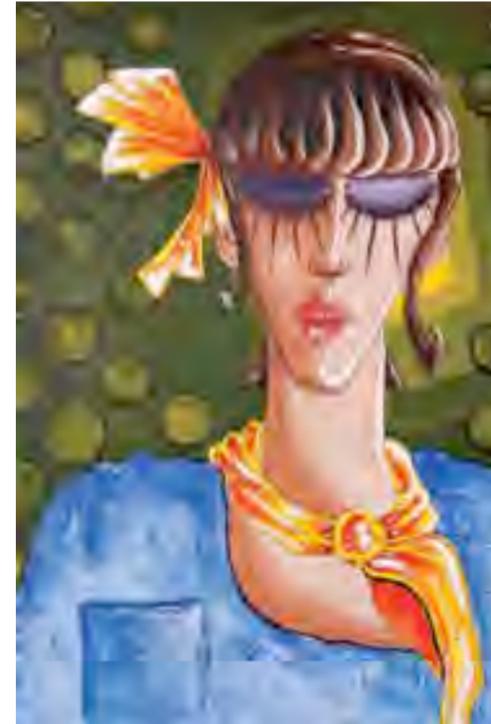
WINTERMUTE GRAHAM { ink on paper, adobe illustrator}



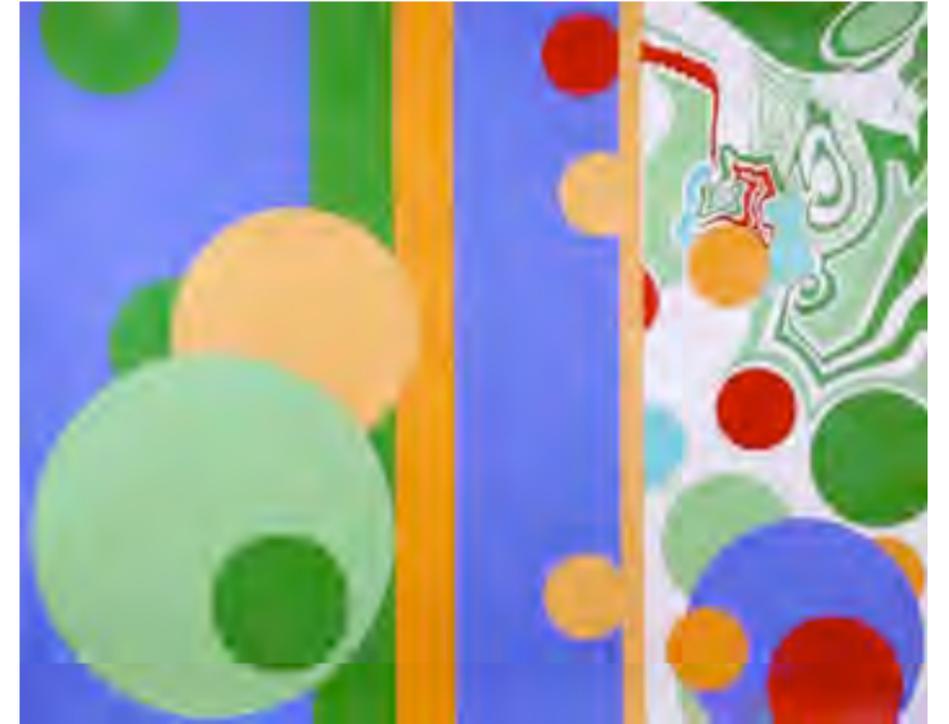
Bubbles
Katerina J McCann {Sterling Silver}



CARSON'S TRIUMPH
Mark C. Moore {Medium}



Brian Sutherland





Spirits of the Mountain
Eric J Zuaro {forged and welded steel, fir round}



NEED THE NAME
Kelly Chastain {Digital Photography}



Fort Stevens Powder Magazine
Paul E. Peloquin {Digital Photograph}



Fort Steven's Call Box
Paul E. Peloquin {Digital Photograph}



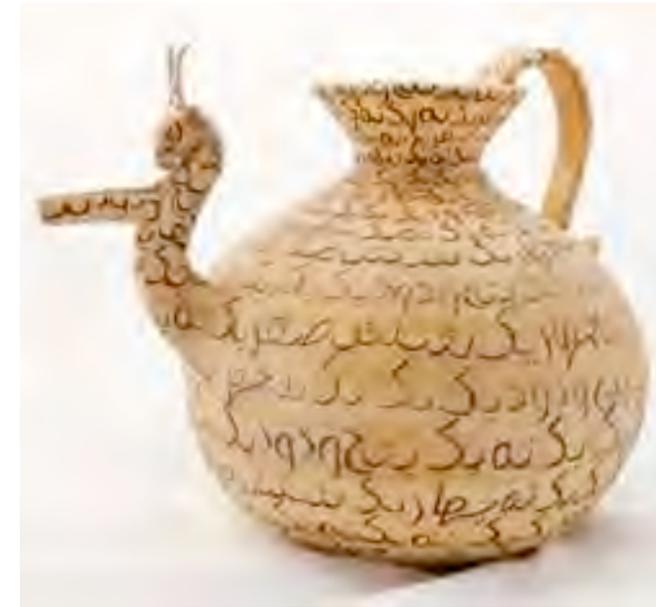
Fort Steven's Corridor
Paul E. Peloquin {Digital Photograph}



House Salt and Pepper Shaker
Julie Jacobsen {Ceramic}



Untitled Melted Figures
Sturgis Houston {Ceramic}

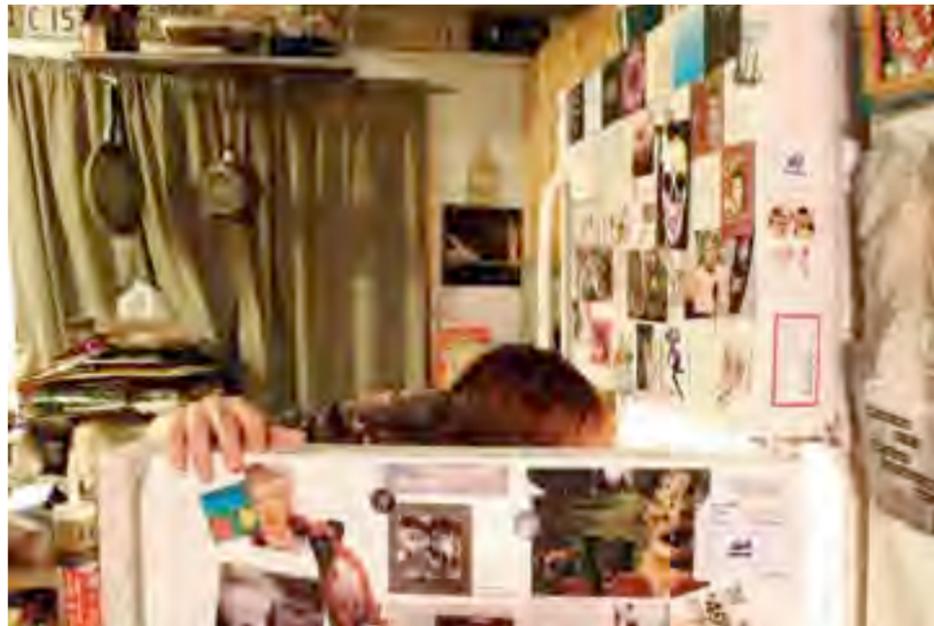


PERSIAN COIL POT
Alyssa Willard {Ceramic}



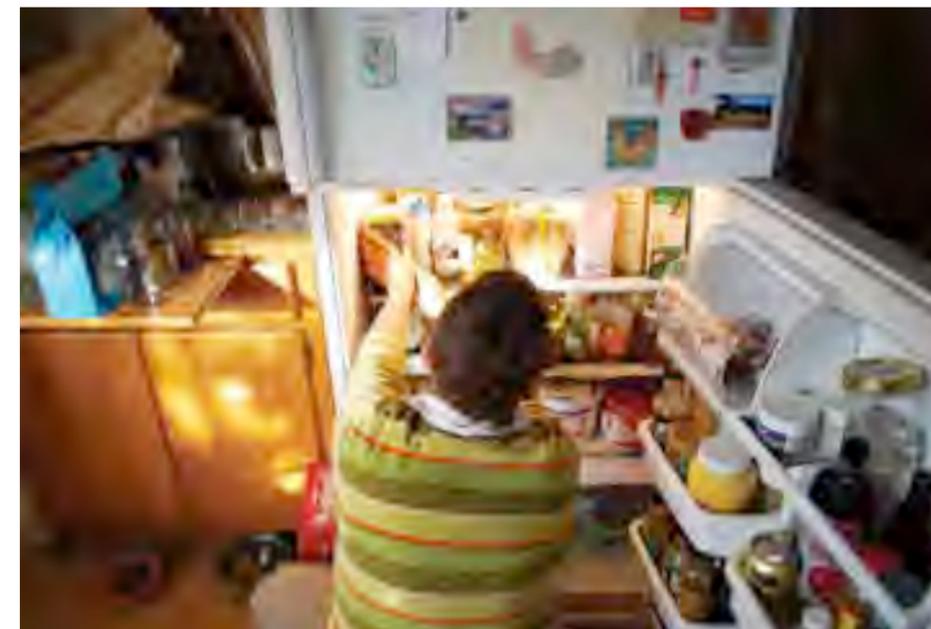
YELLOW
Allen G. Anderson {Pencil & Watercolor on Paper}

MY KITCHEN
Kelly Keigwin {Digital Photography}



OLD LADY ACRE #12
Kelly Keigwin {Digital Photography}

THE GREEN CHAIR
Kelly Keigwin {Digital Photography}



OLD LADY ACRE #11
Kelly Keigwin {Digital Photography}



Untitled
Octavia Tetreault {Silver Gelatin Photographs}



13 Seconds of Powell's
Samantha Martin {Silver Gelatin Photographs}



Shannon Baugher



gli Splendidi Sentieri
Susan Hather { Acrylic on Canvas }



Tiger Tiger
Michelle C Raymond { Tissue Paper, Watercolor paper,
Sharpie }

TEXT ART



Whitney Anderson
You Are Getting VERY Sleepy
Acrylic Painting



Isabella Valderrama
The Mural of Life
Digital Photograph



Isabella Valderrama
Medellin
Digital Photograph

Mia Kalabina
Postcards (Carnival Swing)
Digital Photograph



Tina Tran
Digital Photographs



Kevin Smith
Mucus



Chapter: Catalyst

From The Gatekeeper's Daughter

Leah Thomas

Jen, it's really important.

Not now, Timpin.

I brush the voice away and build up a barrier in my mind, effectively shutting out Timpin. Instead, I focus on Shawn. He leans against the white goalpost, muddy and sweaty, yet somehow still looking gorgeous. Water drips from his charcoal-black hair, ruffled into a spiky, wind-swept mess. He wipes flecks of mud from his spattered cheeks, his eyes still shining with victory, unable to keep the grin off his face.

Not that I'm self-deprecating or insecure, but I still find it hard to believe I'm dating someone as perfect for me as Shawn. We've been friends for almost two years but only started dating seven months ago. Shawn understands my sense of humor and doesn't mind me when I'm sweaty and dirty, as I am now.

"What are you doing tonight?" he asks, proving this once again.

I mentally review all the responsible things I'd planned on doing. "Nothing," I tell him.

"Great," he replies, juggling my soccer ball before volleying it into my waiting hands, the confident grin still in place. "I'll pick you up at five."

"Where are we going?" I ask as we slowly make our way across the field, towards the parking lot.

He shakes his head, eyes glittering mischievously. "Not telling."

I plead with him all the way to my car, but he refuses to tell me. Leaning on the doorframe, I try one last time. "At least tell me what I should wear."

Shawn considers this for a moment, blatantly looking me up and down. "Jeans are good," he says, smirking at my frustrated expression.

I climb into my little red Acura, closing the door in his smug face. He laughs at me as I start my car, and I stick out my tongue in return. Once safely out of Shawn's sight, I smile broadly, loving his sense of adventure. Guesses and theories about his plans whirl in incoherent circles in my mind.

Jen! Timpin's voice is faint through the walls I've constructed, but insistent, beating at them.

What? I snap, annoyed at being interrupted halfway through planning my outfit for tonight.

Letting Timpin into my head, I struggle to concentrate on the road. His wild panic floods my senses. Jen! Jen, something's happening! I feel his presence hovering around my head. His tiny wings clip my ear more than once.

What? What's happening? Chill out for a second, Timpin! I give up on driving, pull onto the shoulder, and close my eyes.

I'm not like most people. I see better with my eyes closed.

Shapes assume indefinite, less solid forms behind my eyelids, but I can see Timpin fluttering before me; his miniature body is shades of blue, purple, green, and red. He is a spirit. A ghost. Four years old and too young to understand what I was doing, I summoned him accidentally. He hasn't left in the fourteen years since. Despite his obvious attachment to me, he has never explained why he took the form of a hummingbird. He's the only animal spirit I've ever seen, although

I've heard of others. Whenever I ask him about it, he refuses to acknowledge the question. My current theory, following several others over the years, involves witches. My mother claims they don't exist, but I'm less skeptical since I talk to ghosts.

What's happening? I repeat.

I'm not sure, Timpin admits. Everyone is all worked up about something. They called it a ripple aura.

The name seems familiar, but my education on the subject is rather lacking. My father was a powerful gatekeeper. I'm sure he would have taught me how to use the powers I inherited from him, but he died just a few months after my birth. That left my education to my mother, who carries only traces of gatekeeper blood through her family line and isn't considered one herself. My father's gatekeeping friends didn't stick around long enough after he was gone to see if I'd turn out like him, so Mom didn't get any help with my education.

Schools exist for people like me, where I can learn about my powers and how to use them, but there aren't any within fifty miles of Waretown, Pennsylvania. My mother didn't want me to go so far from home.

I contemplate my limited pool of gatekeeping knowledge. Ghosts are a representation of someone who died and never passed into Heaven or Hell. Most are simply lost. Either they don't understand how to get to the next world, or they don't understand that they have died. Some spirits decide to stay. Although their reasons vary, often ghosts will stay for someone or something they can't stand to be parted from.

As interesting as I find this, is your panic really necessary? I ask Timpin, pulling back out onto the road. No one ever wants to involve me, anyway.

...

I toss the clip down in frustration, unable to make my hair fit correctly beneath it. I brush my drying auburn locks, settling with its hanging loosely at my shoulders. I wear jeans, as Shawn suggested, and a deep purple blouse. Pausing in front of the mirror for a moment, I smear on a tiny bit of lip-gloss before checking the time. Once again, I wonder if I should tell Shawn tonight, but I don't think I'm ready for the whole I-talk-to-ghosts conversation.

Hurrying down the stairs, I grab my Converse on the way. "Bye, Mom!" I call out, already at the door. I step out into the weak October sunshine, shrugging on my jacket. As I do, Shawn's black Taurus pulls into the driveway. He parks the car, getting out to open the passenger side door before I can get there. I laugh as he sweeps into an exaggerated bow.

"So, where are we going?" I try.

"What do you have against surprises?" He closes the car door.

I treat the question rhetorically. Instead of answering him, I reach out and turn on the radio, searching for a song I like.

Jen? Timpin's voice enters my mind again as Shawn and I walk into the restaurant.

Seriously, Timpin? I'm trying to enjoy some alone time with my boyfriend.

I can sense his chagrin and reservation, but he doesn't leave. I know, but things are happening.

Yeah, I'm going to dinner, I respond in exasperation. I push Timpin out of my head for the moment, glaring at the waitress, who eyes Shawn a little too

appreciatively. It's understandable; not many people can pull off plaid the way Shawn does, and the navy shirt he's wearing tonight looks particularly flattering on his athletic form.

As we take our seats, I feel a new, unfamiliar prickling sensation. I know what ghosts feel like. I've met several, not including Timpin, but this one feels different. I'm not even sure it's a ghost. Its presence is so dominating, and I can feel it just as strongly as I feel Timpin sulking nearby.

Shawn and I order sodas. I push the spirit forcefully from my mind and stare down at the menu, a pleasant tingle of butterflies dancing in my stomach. I glance up to find Shawn looking at me.

"So," he begins, a smile pulling at the edges of his lips.

...

Shawn and I walk side by side across the sand, holding hands. The low gray clouds blend with the ocean, making it impossible to see the horizon. I pull my jacket in tighter around me.

"Eerie night," Shawn comments.

Normally, it wouldn't bother me, because I've always felt the night opens me up to all the possibilities the world offers. But the presence of that unusual spirit remains. I can't pinpoint its exact location, but I know it's too close for comfort. I search experimentally with my power, opening my mind.

Jen, bad idea. Timpin's warning comes too late. I touch something with my mind. It almost feels like when I speak to Timpin, before a gust of wind causes me to stumble and my mind is bombarded. The spirit attacks my consciousness, clouding everything with a haze. Wind and sand whips around Shawn and me, tugging at our clothes and hair.

"You're quiet," Shawn teases, squeezing my hand. "I'll keep you safe, you know."

Agh! I cry out mentally. My attempts to throw up barriers around my mind seem useless. I can't pull full thoughts together, let alone get a good hold on my powers. Left to learn as I went, I stumbled through teaching myself to sense and speak to ghosts with only occasional help from Timpin.

As I struggle, I sense the spirit's presence strengthening. Who? it asks.

Shawn squeezes my hand, seeing my face and assuming I'm merely frightened by the strong winds. "What? Scared of a little breeze?" he asks, grinning as we're buffeted by strong gusts spraying sand into our faces.

I try to respond, but find myself unable. To my horror, I feel the spirit force its way into my memories, searching. I double my efforts, managing to block partially its access to my mind.

Jen, fight it! Timpin adds his strength to mine, and slowly we push at the spirit. Suddenly, the pressure in my mind and the winds decrease significantly. The opposing spirit regards me with newfound curiosity. It hovers at the edges of my consciousness, brushing it occasionally, but no longer trying to invade. I keep my mind hidden from it, trying to pay attention to Shawn at the same time. He shields me from the wind, mentions something about going back.

The spirit deliberately touches my mind again. Who are you?

Jen Stavene, I reply, cautiously. Who are you?

I am Letio, the strongest being on Earth.

Words from my past come to haunt me. Now I remember what a ripple aura is. One of the few things my mother did warn me about is that not all ghosts are



good like Timpin. Demons exist that chose to stay on earth in order to create havoc in the world, or enact revenge on their enemies. The most powerful demons possess abilities so strong they create palpable rifts in the world. The rifts, known as ripple auras, resemble a black hole, draining the world of spiritual energy—the same energy that gives gatekeepers their powers. Gatekeepers can easily sense these rifts, but sealing them proves much more difficult. For centuries, Letio's name has come up in concurrence with these rifts. So, when he claimed to be the strongest being on Earth, he may not have been lying.

This is bad, this is very bad, Timpin frets beside me. "Jen? Let's go," Shawn insists, towing me across the sand, heading off the beach.

Letio starts up a stronger wind again, and I feel his presence before us. Not so fast, Jen Stavene. I'm not finished with you, he growls.

I try to ignore him, staying close to Shawn as he leads me up the sandy incline, but a wall of wind knocks both of us back a step or two. Timpin? I ask, is there a way to get rid of him?

Timpin clings to my hair to keep from being blown away. You can only force ghosts into the afterlife if you're stronger than they.

I nod grimly, filing this information away before asking my next question. Who was talking about the ripple aura before? Can they help us?

Timpin lists several respectable names in the gatekeeper community, people my father knew, but neither of us can think of a way to call for their aid.

Now, Letio commands my attention, do you know

how I gained so much power? I shake my head, having no choice but to cooperate with him. I stole it from those of your kind who had less. I started small, with the dying lines of gatekeeper families, but now I can take from whomever I want. I'm going to take your power because you have so much; it's so young and undeveloped. Later, I'll leave you empty and broken in the sand. Once again I feel the constricting power of Letio's closing around my mind. I fight, not really sure what I'm doing. I block him like I blocked Timpin out earlier, but he resists more strongly than Timpin ever could.

Shawn wraps his arms around me, trying to protect me from the wind, unaware that what I'm really fighting is much worse.

Jen! Timpin continues to battle alongside me, but Letio just lets forth a deep echoing laugh that resounds in my head. I sink to my knees, hands digging in the cold, damp sand.

Shawn drops down beside me. "Jen, are you okay?"

I'm suffocating. I can't think clearly, and I lack the strength to stand. Shawn and Timpin's voices act as constant reminders of why I need to keep fighting, but I feel my strength draining. Soon, Letio will break through my armor. Once he does, he'll be able to strip me of my gatekeeping power. I'm terrified of what that might do to me.

All at once, the pressure lessens. I sense the other gatekeepers now, attacking Letio as one. I sigh in relief as Letio's attention pulls away from me. Taking in some deep breaths, I steady myself.

I think they were hunting Letio, Timpin says, brushing his wings across my face as he struggles to

remain close to me.

With renewed energy I join their attack, knowing we need to banish him now, before he slips away, leaving a ripple aura behind. I tremble uncontrollably, my body unable to take the strain.

Suddenly everything changes; all around me, action freezes. Beside me, Shawn kneels, motionless, eyes open, hand outstretched towards me. The other gatekeepers—the ones who'd chased Letio here—all stand in battle stances, unmoving. They wear looks of severe intensity and appear as if resisting some unseen pressure.

The smallest breath of wind in the stillness alerts me to his presence. Timpin still clings to my hair, though he moves just as much as the others at this point, leaving only one possibility who it could be.

I close my eyes, wanting to see him now that the sand has settled. Letio crouches before me, his face no more than a foot from mine. His dark pants, black shirt, and cropped haircut are so classically villain that, from behind, he'd be almost comical. It's his eyes that send jolts of horror down my spine. So sunken in their sockets that all I see is darkness where they should reside. I can't help my reaction. Shuddering violently, my teeth chatter and I can only stare, waiting for him to speak.

"Jennifer," his voice comes out low and soft, sounding like sand falling in a slow trickle through an hourglass.

"It's Jen," I surprise myself by snapping.

Letio ignores me. "I nearly lost my power because of you, Jennifer Stavene. You merely needed a little help. A distraction," he gestures to my fellow gatekeepers.

I watch him, transfixed. He doesn't smile, but I get a

sense that, behind his stony face, a self-satisfied smirk lurks.

"I will return for you soon, Jennifer Stavene. I will come to finish what I started." He pats my cheek. "Death will take you soon, Child." With that, he stands and, before my disbelieving eyes, implodes on himself.

I am already reaching for my power when the ripple aura forms. Like a seam in the fabric of the world, an opening appears where Letio stood just moments ago. Immediately, I feel it draw on my power, stealing it from me. I pour all the power I still hold into the fight. As the strain lessens, I realize the others have joined me once again. Timpin's warm body presses against my cheek as he fights beside me, and I hear Shawn knocked backward by the sheer energy of our efforts.

Painstakingly slowly, the aura stops growing. Then, with the same resistant speed, it shrinks until it disappears completely. Collapsing alongside Shawn, I attempt to catch my breath.

"Jen?" Shawn pulls himself into a sitting position, looking down at me, concerned. Biting my lip, I stare up at him, not sure how I'll be able to bluff my way out of this.

"What was that?" I ask him, purposely making my eyes wide and scared. Out of the corners of them, I'm thankful to see the rest of the company, except for Timpin, slipping off into the night.

...

Once sitting in Shawn's warm, lighted car, I feel much better. He drives with the heater on, holding my white fingers in his, trying to return some circulation. Looking at the clock, I find it hard to believe I was excited for this date just a couple hours ago. It seems

"It's his eyes that send jolts of horror down my spine. So sunken in their sockets that all I see is darkness where they should reside."

like a lifetime has passed.

The car idles in my driveway as we sit in silence. Shawn rubs my hands between his, until I can feel the tips of my fingers again. “Better?”

I smile gratefully, and he uses my captured hands to pull me closer. Hugging me tightly, he kisses my forehead.

“Thank you,” I tell him, content to just stay in this moment, forgetting the world forever. He kisses my forehead again. “Good night, Jen,” he whispers.

I hesitate before opening the car door, my hand paused inches from the handle. Guilt tingles in my entire being as I consider all the things I’m keeping from him.

Jen, you can’t tell him, Timpin interrupts my thoughts, anxiously. It’s against the rules! He flies fearfully around my head, darting back and forth. I close my eyes in order to see him and he comes to a halt in front of me, trying to keep my attention.

I can’t keep lying, Timpin. How can I have a relationship built on lies, knowing that something like tonight could happen again? We could have died. I think he should decide whether I’m worth the risk. I take a deep breath, making up my mind. When I open my eyes, I see Shawn staring at me worriedly.

Filled with concern, his eyes meet mine.

I have no idea where to start, but I force myself to begin anyway. Shawn listens, his face giving nothing away. He sits silently through my entire explanation, contrasted by Timpin, who flits annoyingly around our heads, never shutting up. When I finish, Timpin grows still as we both await Shawn’s reaction.

He shakes his head in disbelief, trying to wrap his mind around it. “You talk to ghosts?”

I nod mutely, scared of what he’ll say next.

He opens his mouth and closes it, searching for something. He tries again, “I don’t know what to say. How... how do I believe that?”

Disappointment and hurt overwhelm me, and I struggle to keep a straight face. My shoulders sag as I close my eyes in defeat. Timpin suddenly launches himself across the space between Shawn and me. Colliding with Shawn, his wings slap furiously against my boyfriend’s face. He ignores Shawn’s shouts and swatting hands and continues to bombard him.

“Timpin, stop!” I cry, reaching out and snatching him from the air. As a gatekeeper, I can maintain a hold on his tiny body, but he’s struggling violently.

When he speaks, Shawn’s voice is shaky. “That was a ghost?”

“Timpin is my best friend and way less scary than the other ghost you felt tonight.” I open the car door, needing to leave before things get worse.

“Wait. Jen!” Shawn grabs my arm, stopping me halfway out the door. “I—” he struggles, sounding thoroughly freaked out.

He swallows and I can tell he still doesn’t believe me—doesn’t want to believe me.

“I won’t force my company on you,” I say, meeting his eyes, heart breaking. “I’ll stay or go. It’s your choice.” I remove myself from his grip and slide out of the car.

“Jen—” Shawn’s voice sends shards of agony through me. He sounds upset, but that’s nothing compared to how I feel.

I close the door and turn away.



I, The Balloon Chaser

Aaron Jones

“Prof. says we’re nearing burst altitude, Captain, and we’re being knocked off course. We’re going to lose her,” a voice rang out from the crew.

August Finch dug his fingernails into the gunwales, anxiety coursing through his veins and clouding his judgment. The dirigible swayed heavily in the increasing wind, and the sun’s rays beat into his eyes. The old cutter ship, fastened to the immense balloon overhead, creaked and groaned as gravity fought to bring it back to earth. August ran his hands through his chestnut-colored hair and watched as their quarry steadily pulled away from them. Captaining his first mission, he was already not proving up to the task. August heaved a shaky sigh and pushed away from the gunwale. If he failed here, the crew would lose hope, their whole operation would dissolve, and August would bear the shame for the rest of his life. He wouldn’t allow that to happen.

August sprinted towards the long mast fastening the helium-filled canopy to the boat, grabbing one of the ropes lying on the deck. He wrapped the lead around the mast and tied it off securely, before fastening the other end of the rope around his waist. August tugged at it several times, making sure the knot wouldn’t give in the slightest.

“August, what are you doing?” Jenn called out from the helm. The wind howled around her, making her words nearly inaudible.

August ignored his sister and bolted back to the port side of the dirigible. As he pulled himself onto the rail

and stood up, the rocking of the vessel caused his courage to falter. It unnerved him to look at the ground, thousands of feet below him, but he pulled his flight goggles from the leather band around his forehead and brought them over his eyes regardless. He shifted them until they fit snugly, before fixing his gaze upon his target.

By this time, the crew noticed him upon the gunwale and rushed frantically toward him. August took one more deep breath and leaned out into the open skies.

“August, don’t!” Jenn screamed as she ran towards him, her dark brown hair whipping in the gale. Her hands closed on thin air where his leather jacket had once been.

August’s hands stretched out ahead of him, his fingers reaching toward the sun where a lone silhouette hung. Just as gravity pulled him down, his fingers grasped the thin string clinging to the red latex balloon.

August Finch’s leap of faith proved successful. The Faraday’s crew hauled their captain back on board with the red balloon bouncing loftily above his head. Jenn took the wheel, but not before giving her brother a light smack



on the shoulder and steering the dirigible back over the skies of Bordentown, New Jersey.

Many citizens of Bordentown still remembered fondly the day when the airship descended on the small community. A strange looking man with a flight jacket and goggles hopped out and gave a little girl a bright red balloon.

The Legend of the eccentric Balloon Chasers soon spread, garnering media attention all across the country. Sightings of the dirigible came in from all over, and they became front page news wherever they were seen. August and the Faraday crew became overnight celebrities with their odd adventures in the sky, chasing after lost balloons. August and the rest of the Balloon Chasers could hardly believe the attention they attracted. Jenn even posted news articles of their adventures in the galley.

“Bad news will bring the vultures. Just you watch, my boy. They will come. They always do,” Prof., the Faraday’s physicist and balloon tracker, told August one day while they traversed the skies.

August could only place his hands on the old professor’s small shoulders and smile. “You worry too much in your old age. It doesn’t suit you.”

“Bah!” Prof. huffed in his thick German accent before knocking August’s hands aside. “You sound like that old man of yours, and look what happened to him.”

August knew not to take much from Prof.’s sour moods, but the words weighed heavily upon his mind. As the warm air wafted around him, he felt himself lost in thought upon the gently swaying deck.

“What’s going on in that head of yours?” Jenn asked from beside him.

August started, looking at his sister in surprise.

Just wondering what we’re going to do with all these people watching our every move now, you know?” he replied with a carefree smile fixed on his face.

“Come on, August, the only time you ever brood is when you think about Dad.”

“Do you think he’s happy, Jenn?”

“Well, he’s dead, so he better be,” Jenn shrugged, turning her attention out upon the clear blue skies around them.

August contemplated her words as he adjusted the new safety harness she made him wear for his dives. Moving his flight goggles over his eyes, he sprinted towards the rail. The Faraday’s engineer cupped his hands together and crouched low by the edge of the deck as August approached.

The crew cheered as he boosted August over the gunwale. August flew out into the sky like a kite, snatching the bundle of multicolored balloons and pulling them in tight to his body. The harness jerked him to a halt, and he swayed like a pendulum underneath the dirigible. As the crew hauled him back up, August looked out at the white peaks of the Wasatch Mountain Range, towering above the dry desert valley, and wondered if his father had ever seen them before.

With Prof.’s calculations, the Faraday descended upon a quaint neighborhood in Provo, Utah, where a single mother was holding a birthday party for her twin, six-year-old girls. When August and Jenn showed up with their hands full of bumping balloons, the children gave a great cheer of excitement. They cried the Balloon Chaser anthem in unison: “Onward, Onward, Faraday Finches; Onward, Onward Balloon Chasers!” August and Jenn joined in with bright smiles on their faces as their voices floated into the open skies above.

“Her hands closed on thin air where his leather jacket had once been.”

Jenn was three years younger than her brother and equally cheerful. Since she was a young girl, Jenn had always been very trusting and naïve, with an affinity for taking out the family sailboat. She had been a light in the family, and August always enjoyed his sister’s company over anyone else’s because of it. She joined August’s campaign first as helmsman for the Faraday.

...

The Finches, along with their balloon chasers, enjoyed a full season aboard the Faraday until the turn of October. On the day of their first flight over New York City, a transmission came over the radio, ordering them to land their vessel immediately at JFK Airport. Suddenly, two Apache helicopters appeared alongside the airship, their blades thrashing wind across the deck. The crew threw their hands into the air as their coats and scarves whipped around them like living creatures trying to flee. Even Prof. climbed from his hole in the ship’s belly to inspect the commotion.

August stared at the camouflaged Apaches in shock as the balloon overhead undulated in the pulsing air, causing the cutter to pitch and roll. As the pilots gestured angrily for the Faraday to descend, August turned and nodded towards Jenn at the helm. Her eyes were wide with fear, but she obeyed and cranked the wheel around.

The minute they landed on an empty airstrip, federal agents seized the Balloon Chasers. August and his crew were thrown onto the hard tarmac, handcuffed, and then hauled into a windowless van which quickly sped away from the airport. The Balloon Chasers found themselves imprisoned in the Bayview Correctional Facility where they learned they faced charges of flying in restricted airspace and suspicion of terrorist activity. Both Jenn and Prof. assaulted the agents with such a flurry of swearing that even an old maritimer would

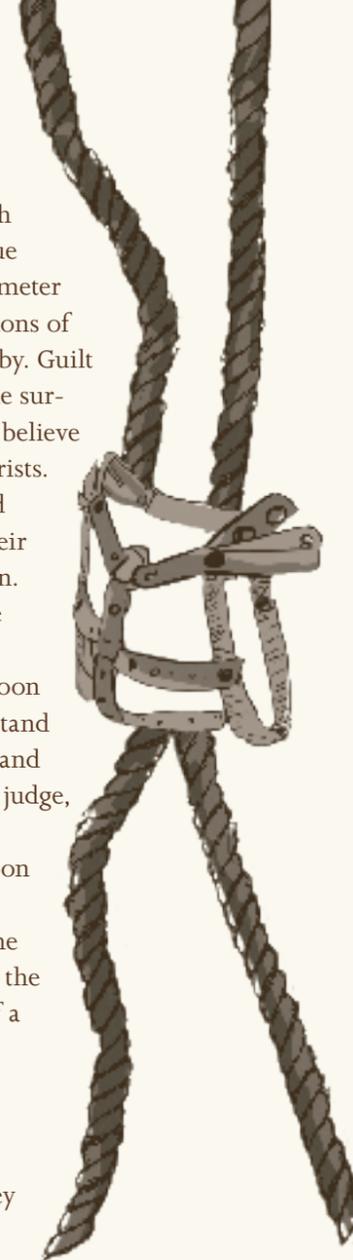
have cringed.

August looked at his team with concern brimming in his sky-blue eyes. His crew sat along the perimeter of the cell, all in different variations of worry as the hours passed them by. Guilt weighed heavily in his heart as he surveyed each face. August couldn’t believe they could be mistaken for terrorists. All of them had jobs, homes, and families, yet they volunteered their lives for August and his campaign. They were hardly enemies of the greater good.

Weeks passed by, and the Balloon Chasers knew they would soon stand trial. Before the Faraday Finches and their crew even set foot before a judge, however, they heard news from the outside world. Thousands upon thousands of American citizens flocked to New York to protest the wrongful imprisonment of what the papers called “The Tarnishing of a National Treasure.”

It didn’t take long before the Federal Bureau of Investigation relented to the mounting pressure. In an official statement, they claimed to have found no evidence on the Faraday to support the terrorist accusations. The Finches, along with their Balloon Chasers, were released on the condition that an agent monitor their activities onboard.

Agent Frank Towers was assigned to this position. At first, Towers made a foreboding figure, seldom moving



from his position on deck where he scrutinized every aspect of the Balloon Chaser's operations. Even so, August befriended the tall, stocky man in no time at all.

After reviving the New York City flyover, August convinced Towers to help commandeer the catchpolls due to the sheer multitude of balloons pouring from between the skyscrapers. Towers displayed such a zest for the job that he soon turned into the first man at the rail, his catchpoll waving in the air like a child's hand reaching for a cookie. The crew took such a liking to Towers that a competition soon started to see who could wrangle the most balloons during a flyover. It proved quite a sight for August to watch his crew push, run, and laugh as they fought for each trophy bouncing through the air.

In celebration of their newfound freedom, August decided to take the crew to Glenwood Springs, Colorado, a city well-known for its relaxing hot springs. He determined it would do wonders for them all.

The skies were heavy with dark clouds, and an icy chill pervaded the air like a phantom as the Faraday slowly descended upon Glenwood Springs. August's breath came out in large puffs as it froze in the stirring wind. He looked down upon the Hot Springs Lodge with its red brickwork slightly covered by a soft coating of snow and sighed. He could already imagine the warm water lapping at his body, encasing him in a second skin of heat. As he gazed at the steam billowing off the large, natural pool outside, a cry came from the portside rail.

"Captain Finch," a voice called out against the hum of the wind.

Above the Faraday hung a single balloon, its latex and string black as night. Towers brought it in with a catchpoll and held it away from him, as if it were a coiled rattler about to strike. The crew stared at the

gloomy balloon for what felt like an eternity before someone recommended giving the coordinates to Prof., to determine its origin.

The triangulations of the balloon's flight pattern led August to the Rosebud Cemetery, two miles south of the Hot Springs Lodge. As he passed beneath the large, bare trees, he felt uneasy. He wandered the cemetery for a short while before he found the remains of a freshly-deserted funeral. Only a fresh mound of soil and the coffin lying in the ground remained, along with a young boy between the age of nine or ten. As August drew near, with the black balloon bouncing above his head like a disembodied grim reaper, the boy looked up. Shock registered across the child's face at the sudden appearance of the Faraday's captain.

"You're August Finch, the captain of the Balloon Chasers," the young boy gasped.

August nodded and flashed an unsure smile. "I believe I have something of yours."

The boy looked at the dark shape striving to pull itself from August's fingers. August shifted his eyes nervously between the boy and the grave before the words finally came to the surface.

"Was that someone you knew?" he asked cautiously. The child tore his eyes from the balloon and looked at the hole with empty eyes.

"That's my dad," he replied, numbly.

August's heart fell as the boy continued.

"He was a fan of yours, you know. He always used to say 'Look here, Kaleb; these are real people living out their dreams, just like in the movies.' I told him that someday I would be a Balloon Chaser, just like you Captain Finch."

The child couldn't continue, and he began to cry. August knelt down beside him, with the balloon held firmly in his grip. He placed his free hand gently upon

the boy's shoulder.

"You know," he said, "when my father died, I felt as if my whole idea of the world had been ripped away from me. He used to be a CEO for this really big bank, and he told me that all he saw was misery, unpaid mortgages, and foreclosures in his line of work. When he died, he left my sister and me a lot of money. Too much money, really. That's when I decided to create the Balloon Chasers to show my father that happiness still exists in this world. I like to think he sees the smiles on the faces of those I help. I did it to make him proud."

The young boy rubbed away his tears and looked at August through shimmering brown eyes. August gave the child a small smile before gesturing to the balloon still in his hand.

"Now, what do you say we let our dads chase this one?" he asked. With that, August relinquished his hold on the string, and the balloon floated off into the grey clouds above them. August and the child watched its steady climb.

"Onward, Onward, Faraday Finches," the child declared softly.

August let a smile creep onto his lips as he stared out into the endless sky and replied, "Onward, Onward, Balloon Chasers."



BLOODHUNT

CHAPTER ONE

Keani K. Gifford

“Laird, I need you to promise me something,” Lorelei said quietly to Laird McDougal. The summer celebrations were well underway, and the castle’s courtyard overflowed with tables covered in all manner of foods. Fragrant flowers accented the banquet and doorways as the torch posts blazed in the early evening light.

“And what would you have me promise?” the Laird asked, eyes narrowing. Lorelei stood taller than many women, but not as tall as he. Her night-black hair contrasted with blue eyes more pale and clear than the summer sky. Dark gloves covered her hands, while a light cloak of deep red lay over the unladylike trousers and shirt she always wore.

“Whatever happens in the next few minutes, please, do not allow any of your men to interfere,” Lorelei said very carefully.

“What is about to happen?” asked the Laird sternly.

Lorelei remained still as she said, “I need your promise. It is of extreme importance.”

The Laird regarded her for a moment before nodding his consent. Lorelei placed the cloak’s hood over her head, concealing her face. She moved quickly into the crowd, heading toward the Laird’s only daughter, Sarah, who sat laughing and talking with five men.

As Sarah stood up from the table to walk away, a bald man grabbed her arm. “Let me go, Sebastian,” She said with amusement. A merry smile rested on her angelic face, and her unusually light hair shone brightly in the light as she laughed.

“That will not happen.” Sebastian pulled her back down to the bench roughly, his eyes filled with a cold intent that made Sarah suddenly nervous. Her laughter retreated as he twisted her arm, forcing her closer. He took a two-part bracelet out of his pocket. Each piece consisted of a single silver dragon, twisting slightly around a golden half-circle. Nine fin-like scales made of emeralds protruded from each dragon’s back while two rubies served as eyes for each beast in the mesmerizing piece.

Inexplicably, something about the small treasure captivated Sarah’s complete attention. Suddenly, nothing but the bracelet mattered. Both dragons animated as Sebastian placed the tail of one dragon near the head of the other. She inhaled sharply as each tiny dragon moved to swallow the tail of its fellow, welding the two pieces together into one immovable band.

Lorelei sprinted forward, only to stop short. Dread rose within her when she saw the glint of shiny metal encircle Sarah’s wrist. Although no visible changes occurred, the bracelet forged a tight, inseparable bond between Sarah and Lorelei. Lorelei’s heart dropped with disappointment; she had failed to reach Sarah in time.

Lorelei immediately closed the distance to Sarah.

“Let her go,” Lorelei said loudly, forcefully removing Sebastian’s hand from Sarah’s arm. She pulled the girl to her feet and said firmly, “Go inside and take as many women with you as possible.”

“Lorelei?” Sebastian said, recognition ringing in his voice. “Remove your hood,” he demanded.

Lorelei vaguely heard the Laird order his men to stand down. Sarah stood motionless, overwhelmed by

new feelings she did not understand and shocked her father did not come to help.

“I said go,” Lorelei demanded between clenched teeth. Sarah backed away, loudly requesting all the women to join her inside.

“And I said ‘remove your hood,’ Woman,” Sebastian commanded, standing up.

Lifting the hood of her cloak over her head, Lorelei’s eyes met Sebastian’s with a calmness she did not feel. The other four men at the table gasped. Shouts erupted from the small group of strangers only Lorelei recognized.

“Run!” a short man cried, tripping over his gray-haired companion as they ran for the gates.

Lorelei’s knife punctured Sebastian’s abdomen before he knew she had a weapon. The light in his eyes faded, and death overtook him. She pulled the string on her cloak and swung it around her, covering Sebastian as he sank to the ground. Lorelei removed the knife from his stomach, took a step onto the bench, and flung it with deadly accuracy into the back of the retreating gray-haired man.

Another step brought Lorelei to the top of the table. She removed the bow hanging on the quiver strapped to her back. With smooth grace, she pulled an arrow and shot the short man before he could reach the gate. Shouts of surprise erupted from the Laird’s men.

Only two men remained alive from the small group of outsiders: a redhead and a black-haired man with a scar on his face. The scarred man removed his sword from its sheath and stepped forward, slicing the air near Lorelei’s shins. Before the sword could reach her legs, she jumped, narrowly avoiding the weapon. She used her bow to club him on the side of his head before he could swing again.

Lorelei removed her own sword from its scabbard with ease, and kicked the approaching redhead directly in the face. With her distracted, the scarred man jumped on the table. She swung with precision to stop his blow, forcing the point of his sword to the table.

Lorelei’s weapon looked like a typical broadsword, save for a basket of gold and precious jewels surrounding the hilt with the intricacy of a rapier. A soft click sounded as the sword separated, becoming two thinner blades. One of these continued to hold the scarred man’s sword to the table, while the other removed the tip of his nose as he attempted to lean away from her strike. Her attack sustained a clear course around her, blocking the redhead’s sword. A kick from her black-booted foot sent the bloody scarred man tumbling off the table.

The three rivals circled and attacked for what seemed like an eternity, though the battle lasted only minutes. Lorelei stymied assault after assault until one of the men’s swords sliced through her arm.

She hissed and locked the two blades together again as the weapon rounded toward the scarred man. The sword appeared to slice through his neck, but he did not fall to the ground. Instead, he stood eerily still. The sword continued its course through the air in a seamless pursuit for blood. Lorelei stopped it abruptly just a breath away from the redhead’s throat, and the man dropped slowly to his knees. The intensity of Lorelei’s eyes overshadowed the crushing fear and panic now rising in his own.

“Take this message to your Master,” Lorelei said tightly. “I grow weary of the Bloodhunt. Stop sending your minions to do your dirty work and have the courage to kill

“Stop sending your minions to do your dirty work and have the courage to kill me yourself.”

me yourself." She spat her words maliciously.

The redheaded man's voice shook when he answered. "I can't tell him that. He'll kill me."

"You can and you will," Lorelei returned flatly. She removed her sword from his neck and took a step back. "Now get out of my sight," she snarled. As she turned to walk away, she found the scarred man before her, staring with glossy eyes. After a brief pause, she stepped around him and walked toward the Laird.

"Come on, Leonard. Let's get out of here," the redhead whispered to his associate. He grasped the scarred man's arm to pull him toward the gate; instead, the redhead pulled his friend apart. Leonard fell to the ground in two pieces. The redhead stumbled backward, screaming as he ran from the castle.

The Laird said nothing about what he had just witnessed. Lorelei never elaborated on her life prior to her arrival. Now he could deduce why. He regarded her carefully.

In the year since she arrived, Lorelei had worked her way into becoming a necessary member of the clan. No one would allow the Laird to replace her. Surprise showed clearly on people's faces at her fighting prowess, yet he could still see the unwavering loyalty they felt toward her in their eyes.

He wondered what would possess someone to hunt her. Not once had he seen her break an oath to one of his clan, though to see her capable of the violence he beheld baffled him. Lorelei bested five seasoned and well-armed men with a grace some of his own men had yet to achieve. The beauty of her techniques, though unconventional, proved she had the near-flawless skill of a master.

The Laird stood silent when Lorelei began. "When they come for me, tell them the truth. You were

deceived, and I am no longer welcome in your home. Do not allow any woman or child to be seen; otherwise, offense will be taken."

Lorelei walked into the hall. Remorse filled her heart for what she had to do next. The Laird quietly followed while his internal struggle continued. Sarah ran forward when she saw Lorelei and her father enter the hall, only to stop abruptly. Her face went white with horror from the blood trickling out Lorelei's wounded arm.

"Sarah, we must leave immediately." Lorelei kept her voice measured in an effort to reduce the panic she felt rising inside. She had to get Sarah away from the clan as soon as possible. They would not understand and probably shun the girl if they knew what she had become.

"Leave? But you are bleeding!" Sarah said, confused. Lorelei gave no indication of fear in her outward appearance, but Sarah could feel her mentor's internal panic. The Laird stepped forward, his stance making it clear his daughter would go nowhere without him.

"Her flirtatious manner was considered an invitation, and she is now marked," Lorelei said, holding up Sarah's wrist. "They will make every effort to kill me and hunt her. You cannot remove the insignia, so don't try." She tore off a glove and pulled up the sleeve of her shirt. A bracelet identical to the ornament Sebastian placed on Sarah encircled her wrist. The flesh on her arm twisted with scar after scar.

"My whole body is riddled with marks like these. These barbarians are merciless, and your daughter will suffer the same fate if she does not come with me now!"

The Laird forced himself to put his feelings aside and consider the situation carefully. Making a decision he hoped he would not regret, he nodded reluctantly.



John Wirth
Pod IV, Patina Series
Copper



Jillian A. Baker
Celtic Knot Plate and Mug
Ceramic



Nicole DA
Green Plate and Bowl Set
Ceramic



Rebekah Altig
Fishtail Lace
Handknit Gloves



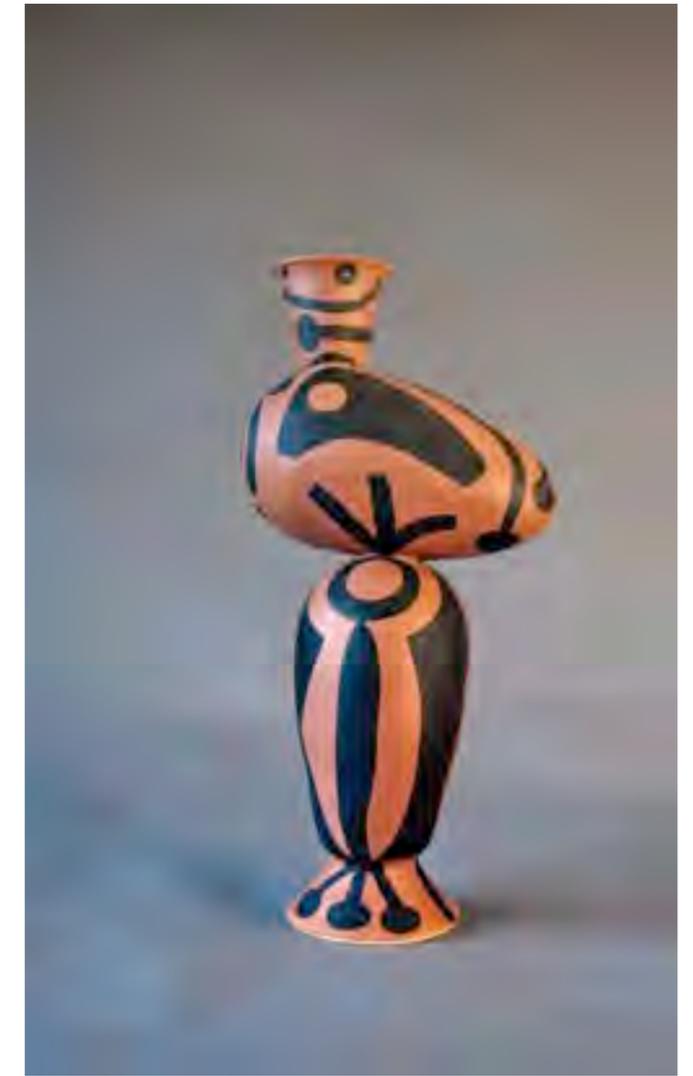
Ryan L. Williams
The Fall Collection
Graphite and Ink on Marker Paper



Katerina J. McCann
Drops
Sterling Silver and Brass Pendant



Gwendolyn Stickney
Eve de Guerre
Copic Marker on Paper



Alyssa Willard
Picasso Remake
Ceramic



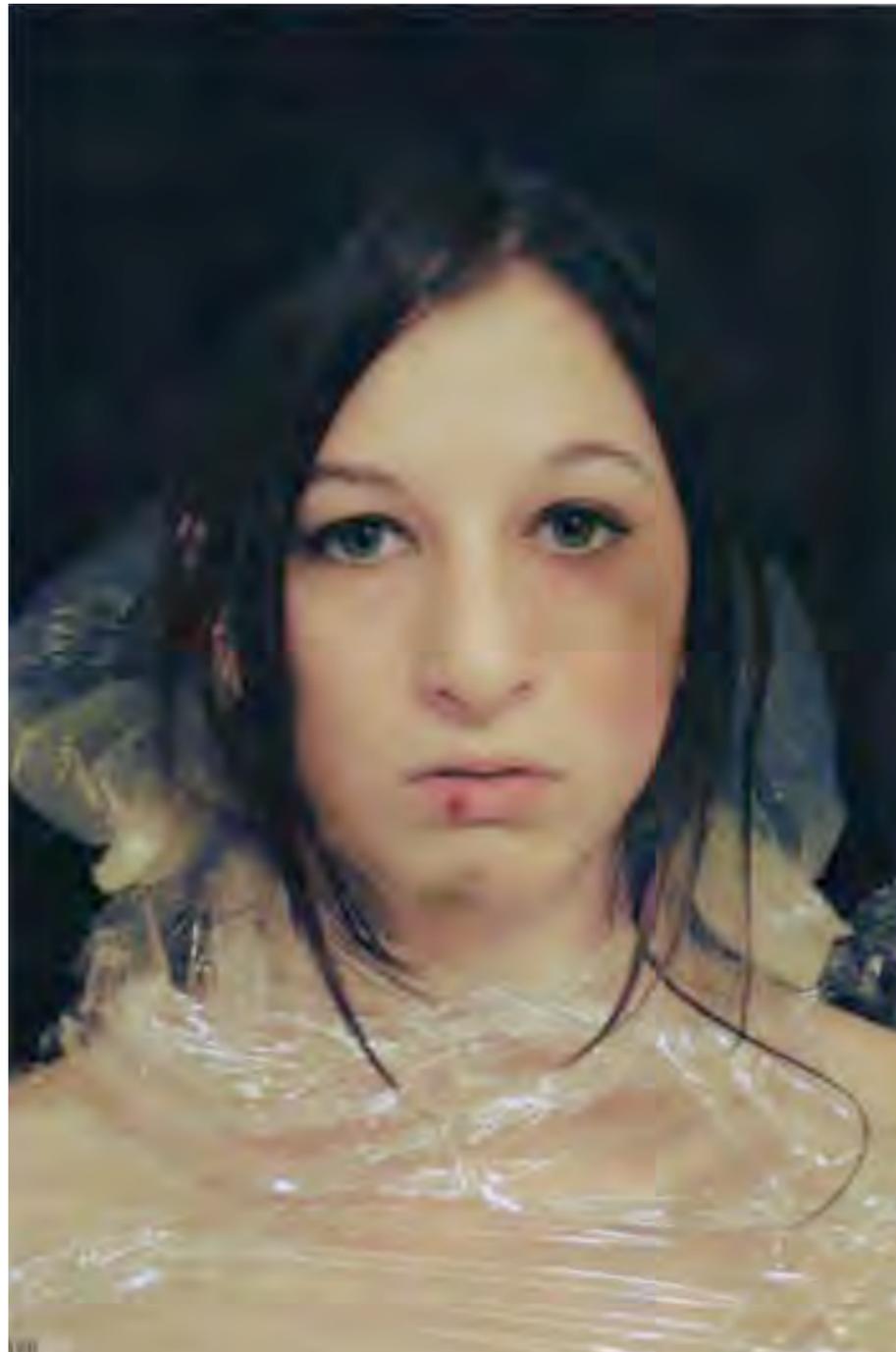
Katelyn Marie Spangler
Inked Wasteland
Ink on Bristol



Stephen Rice
Ultimatum Prison Cell
Ink on Paper



Inahlee P. Bauer
Fas-Neuro
Pencil on Paper



Emily Waters
Plastic Pain
Digital Photograph



Tina Tran
Unders 1
Digital Photograph



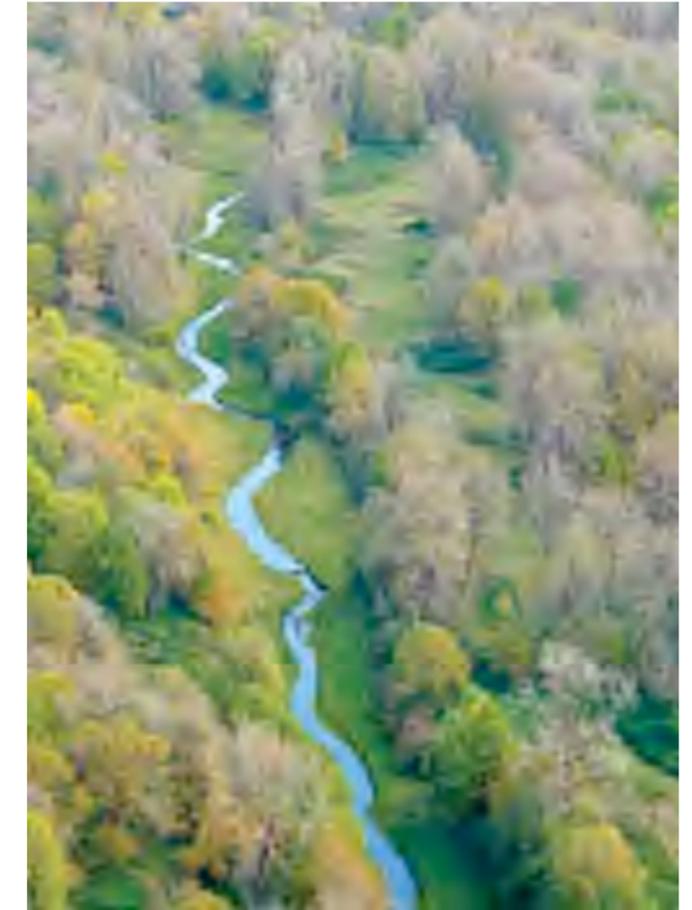
Mitchel



Bethany R. McCamish
Frog Out of Water
Digital Photograph



Terri Lunde
Digital Photograph



Lauren Dwyer
View From Beacon Rock
Digital Photograph

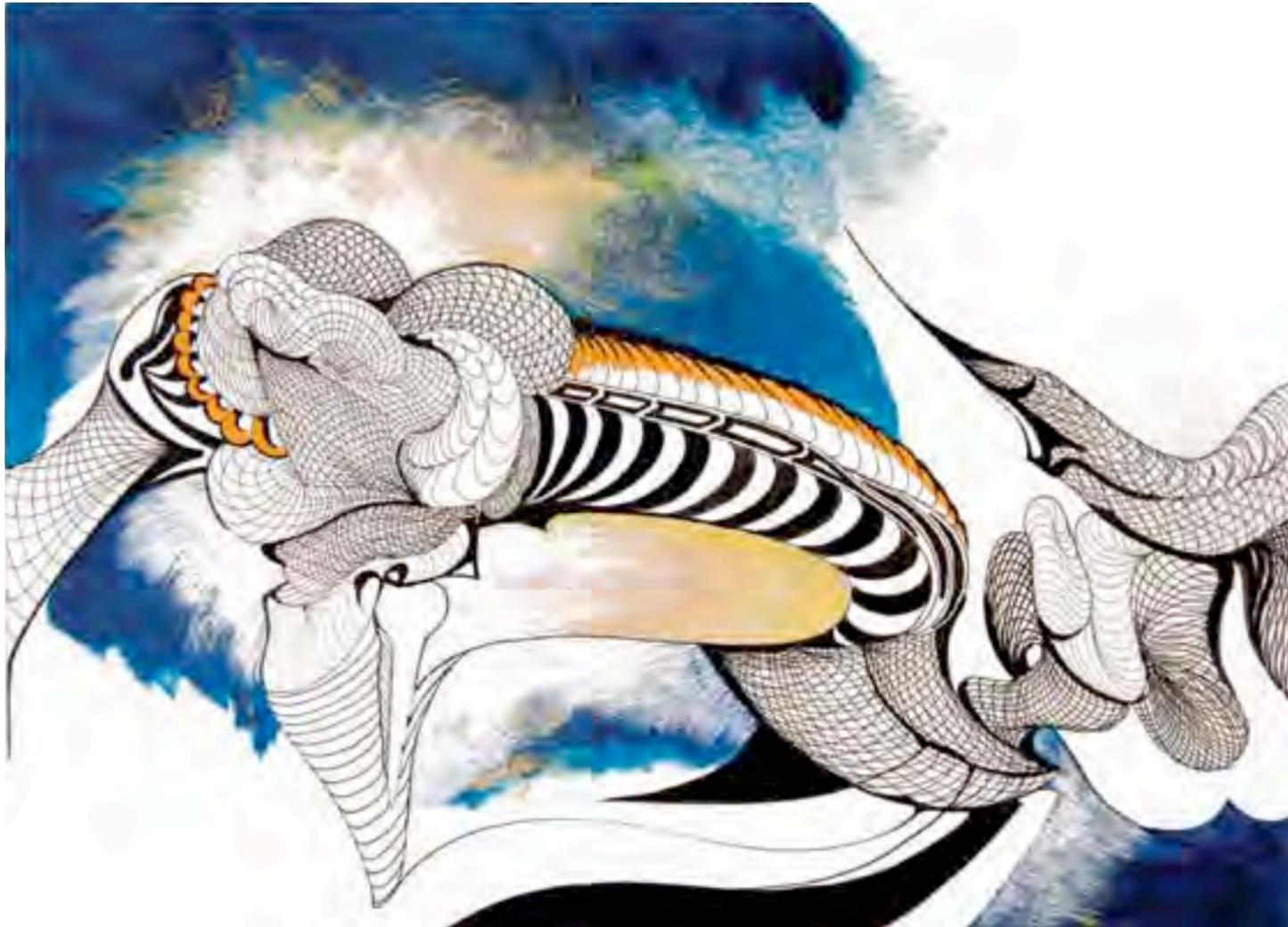
Heather R. Nashif
Portrait



Lauren Dwyer
Horse and Rider on Covered Bridge
Digital Photograph



Ryan Marsh
Below the Surface
Digital Photograph



Kevin Smith
Portal
Ink, Gouache and Acrylic on Illustration Board



Jerry Max Taylor
Strings in Pieces
Acrylic on Canvas Board





Greg Bee
Apocalyptic Yuppies
Acrylic and Collage on Canvas



Sheila Rae Henrikson
COX
Ceramic



Shaver



Eric J. Zuaro
Mysterious Vessel
Forged and Welded Aluminum and Copper



Tanner Casey
Tawny Owl
Ink and Watercolor on Paper

DREAMS

Savannah Schillinger

I've many times dreamed of you
in your stone cold
indifference
and laughed at it as
such a silly notion.
You, me, we're invincible.
Every trial that comes
is followed by apologies
and forgiveness.
Such amusing dreams now
only harbor wells of
fresh warm tears.
Whoever said dreams
don't come true
is a liar.

The Highwayman

Chris Phillips

Stars lit the sky overhead, illuminating the moor with a murky light that fought to break through the night clouds. The cobblestone road shone white in the dark, the full moon's reflecting light a stark contrast to the drab grass and low shrubs edging the route on either side. The picked-over remnants of blackberry bushes liberally covered the small meadow marking the edge of the nearby village. All seemed still, the village unremarkable and the hour late—the moon had almost reached its zenith—and the howling wind nearly covered the sound of iron-shod hooves on the stones of the highway. Only an especially watchful person would have noticed the mounted figure guiding his steed cautiously down the road, his eyes alert under a French tricorne hat. His riding posture appeared casual, even though two elaborate flintlock pistols sat loose and primed in their holsters.

The tall rider picked up speed as he approached the town, noting the lack of any sentries or other signs of imminent danger. He pulled his coat in tightly, an extravagant affair of claret velvet and silver brocade, to ward off the chill of the late October breeze and shield

the ornate handles of his pistol butts from peering eyes. But there was no hiding the elegant scabbard hanging from his saddle, its silver pommel twinkling in the crisp moonlit night. The man exuded an aura of expensive tastes, his clothing and traveling gear offering a teasing glimpse of money. Most who saw him took him for a roving merchant or a well-to-do nobleman. Few had the courage to meet his cold stare, to look past the jeweled rapier hilt and the gold filigree, and notice the scars and calluses marking his hands or the soft doe-skin breeches, well-worn after long days of hard riding.

After a final look around, the man urged his chestnut steed down the cobblestone road, coming alongside the weather-beaten inn on the outskirts of the little town. The inn was closed for the night, the landlord asleep in bed behind the closed windows and barred front door. Whistling a quiet melody, the highwayman stopped beneath a particular ledge on the second floor of the inn, and rapped his crop against the shutters. A few long moments of silence passed before the window opened and a woman's face appeared, a wide smile hiding her anxiety at the covert rendezvous. A teasing hint of perfume wafted through the air as she leaned down toward the rider, her long, black braid tumbling over the casement. The man on the horse gazed up with relief and adoration at the innkeeper's daughter,

Bess, and met her smile with a grin of his own.

The highwayman was not the only one looking on Bess with yearning in his eyes. Unknown to either of the clandestine lovers, a third party watched them that fateful night. From the shadows under the inn-yard's stables, Tim, the innkeeper's white-haired old ostler, witnessed the meeting with pangs of intense jealousy. Convinced fleas infested his straw pallet in the back room, he chose to try his luck sleeping among the inn's horses that evening and had seen the innkeeper's daughter and the stranger on horseback. Keeping to the pools of inky blackness along the walls of the stable, he crept closer to the couple, eager to hear their conversation. His stomach churned as he drew near, and the sound of the stranger's quiet, yet firm, voice froze him in his tracks.

"Only time for a kiss tonight, my dear," he heard the rider say. "A prize awaits me to the west, a caravan simply waiting to be plucked like a berry from your bushes."

The highwayman looked back along the route from which he'd come, as if imagining the riches waiting to be plundered, before whipping his head back around to his beloved. "If all goes well, I'll return by morning's light with a stash of gold you cannot imagine!"

Bess smiled down at him, asking, "And if all doesn't go well, my love?"

The highwayman laughed under his breath, as if this were an absurd notion. "If I'm pursued, I'll do as I must, but I will be back at this window under tomorrow's moonlight. Hell itself could not keep me from you."

At this, he stood upright in his stirrups and took her briefly by the hand, blowing a kiss through the fragrant night air. She giggled, and he dropped back down to the saddle before spurring his horse quickly on to the west, casting a parting wave back in the direction of the inn. Two pairs of eyes watched him go, one gazing after him with desire, the other staring daggers into his back. The galloping figure grew small in the clear moonlight, the autumn wind once again muffling the sound of hooves on paving stones, until he vanished entirely.

Tim remained rooted firmly in place, not daring to move, hardly daring to breathe, for several long minutes after the mysterious rider departed, even after he heard the shutters close quietly and the distinct metallic sound of the window latch being thrown. Scarcely believing what he'd just witnessed, he deftly saddled a horse and tore out of the stables, charging into the east, toward the nearest city large enough to warrant a proper military barracks. The innkeeper's daughter was already asleep and dreaming of her valorous rider; no one in the sleepy little village noticed his flight.

The rising sun broke the eastern horizon, burning



away the lingering mist from the treetops. The highwayman had not yet returned to the inn. Bess awoke with a start and went about her daily routine, keeping an eye always to the western road. She hoped against hope that her charming rider would come galloping into town, canvas sacks heavy with gold bars, and coins weighing down his saddlebags. Midday came and went, the sun moving slowly across the sky, and still she had yet to hear the burnished stallion's hooves rapping along the worn cobblestones outside the inn.

The afternoon hours dragged on without a sign of him. With a soft sigh, Bess concluded she would not see him until nightfall. Surely, if he were still out in the broad light of day, he'd be lying low, not charging at full speed back to her little hamlet. She steadfastly refused to imagine her heroic highwayman lying in a pool of his own blood, his horse wandering without rider through the brisk English countryside.

The sun continued its westward trek and finally began to set, the fiery orange light casting long shadows across the floor of the common room. The aromas of roast venison stew and baking bread permeated the inn as the cook prepared dinner. Patrons started flowing into the establishment, seeking out space at the long oak tables and eagerly passing time with liberal amounts of ale and gossip. Before long,

the air in the dimly lit room was full of half-informed talk of the labor riots in Lancashire and unlikely rumors of impending war with the American colonies. Bess heard none of it as she drifted through the evening in a daze, her anxiety growing with each passing hour until the sun was only a sliver of light emanating from the western sky.

As dusk settled over the moor and shrouded the town in darkness, the customers paid their bills and migrated back home to their wives or stumbled to their rented rooms. The night wind picked up again, wailing loudly enough to mask the approaching footsteps of the dozen men making their way unerringly toward the inn. They marched through the center of town in their woolen scarlet coats and scuffed black boots, muskets at their shoulders; none who saw them summoned sufficient nerve to ask their business, and they would not have answered even if someone inquired. King George's soldiers entered the nearly vacant common room without comment, offering pointed stares at the few remaining patrons until they wisely decided to depart.

The room seemed to shrink in on itself as redcoats ransacked the dining area, knocking tables and chairs about and leaving them where they lay. They seized the innkeeper immediately after the search, and escorted him to his quarters, barricading him inside with a

“Closer, the shadowy figure came, ever closer to the inn.”

dining table. The majority of the men took up seats at the bar, breaking open the inn's ale kegs to pass the time. Three others made their way to the upper floor, barging into Bess's room and promptly binding her wrists and ankles without explanation.

Her protests were answered with a gag and mocking laughter as they dragged her bed before the window and tied her legs to the frame. One of the men surrendered his musket and bound it vertically before her, the muzzle lodged beneath her breast, her hands tied firmly over the mechanism, forcing her to look out the same window she'd gazed through after her highwayman the night before. The other two guards took up positions at the casement, eyes on the cobblestone road. Their fellows found similar spots on the ground floor, ale passing among them freely, as dusk moved into true night.

Bess could not help but recall the highwayman's last words to her. I will be back at this window under tomorrow's moonlight, he'd promised. Hell itself could not keep me from you. Indeed, Hell was trying its best.

The small clock on her wall announced the passing of each hour with a low chime. What began as a sharp and precise ambush deteriorated with time and alcohol, the soldiers slowly becoming less intent on the pale, winding road, and more focused on their drinking

and jesting. By ten o' clock, Bess began working her wrists slowly, testing the knots, confident the inebriated soldiers would not notice her efforts. Painstakingly she rubbed her wrists against the rough ropes, freezing every time one of the damned redcoats looked in her direction. She could not escape. She knew this and accepted it; even if she managed to free her hands entirely, she'd be overcome immediately by the men in the cramped confines of her small room. Freedom, however, was not her intention.

Another hour passed, and still the highwayman had not come. The guards were now fully occupied with a high-stakes game of dice, only occasionally looking out the window, and relying on the sound of iron-shod hooves to alert them to their target's approach. Bess's fingers were slick with blood, the coarse ropes having lacerated her wrists, as she shifted her hands lower and lower on the musket. In the darkness she kept on, ignoring the pain and mind-numbing horror that grew steadily as the hours passed without a sign of him.

Bess could hear occasional shouts of laughter and accusations of cheating from down the stairs. She wagered the scene in the common room looked much like the one before her eyes. As the clock struck twelve, she finally reached her goal. Her hands were half-numb through exertion and poor circulation, but, clearly, she



could feel the cold trigger of the musket beneath her fingertips. Elated by her success, she stopped for fear of discovery. The soldiers at the window showed no sign of concern; Bess was fairly sure one of them slept next to his gun while the other two complained to each other in low tones.

Outside, the wind continued to howl, and the open shutters banged against the wood panels of the inn. Off in the distance, on the cobblestone road brightly lit under the starry night sky and full moon, Bess could make out the familiar silhouette of a man on horseback, his tricorne hat sitting atop his head. She watched in agony as he approached the town, guiding his chestnut mount cautiously down the winding route, branches swaying over his head in the October breeze. All lights were out in the inn; he surely could not see the danger waiting for him. The wind ebbed momentarily, and the rapping of horse hooves echoed quietly along the moor. Two of the redcoats perked up and looked out, seeing him clearly. They slapped their snoozing comrade awake before shouldering their muskets and sighting down the barrels. The distance was still too great for their smooth-bore weapons; they could not risk firing so soon.

Closer the shadowy figure came, ever closer to the inn. Now Bess could see the faint glimmer of light on the silver hilt of his rapier, the soft tapping of hooves

on the cobblestones growing louder with each passing moment. Soon, she thought, they would have to fire. If he grew too close before they took their shots, he would make out the thin barrels of the muskets protruding from the dark threshold of her window.

Nearer still, Bess realized he didn't sense danger as he pulled his wine-red velvet coat in close, deciding his pistols would not be needed. She saw the soldiers tense, not just watching down their barrels, but actually aiming now. He was out of time. They were both out of time.

Bess drew in one final breath and squeezed the trigger of the musket for which she'd worked so damnably hard. The blast was deafening in the deathly silence of the little space, sounding less like a musket and more like a cannon. A paying boarder screamed in a nearby room, her cry dwarfed by the ringing gunshot. Bess felt a moment of jarring shock as the ball fired into her chest, shattering her ribs and piercing her heart. Ribbons of warm dark blood instantly drenched her rough-spun dress and splattered across the backs of the shocked soldiers, as powder smoke drifted up lazily from the red-soaked muzzle. She managed a last sorrowful look, seeing her rider instantly turn and spur his mount hard back to the east, musket balls flying around him without effect, before she gave in to the darkness that rushed to claim her.

The rising sun broke again on the eastern horizon. Even at that early hour, the gossip moved along the highway in full force, as fresh gossip will do. A striking man in a claret velvet coat, his saddlebags heavy with coins, and a rapier slung from his hip, led his russet stallion through the morning market. He hoped some breakfast would help offset his lack of sleep, when the news spread through the crowd like wildfire. It was said the King's men had waited in ambush for a villainous highwayman, holding his own beloved as a hostage while lying in wait for his eventual return. What exactly went wrong, no one could say; the highwayman was sighted, a shot rang out, and the innkeeper's daughter was no more.

Upon hearing the news, the man screamed aloud. He mounted his horse and tore out of the market, dodging stalls, carts, and people, his pastry falling forgotten to the flagstones still damp with morning mist. Charging back to the west, he galloped straight through the little town and out the other side, passing the inn without pause.

His chestnut horse raced down the highway, hooves clattering on the pale cobblestones. The group of thwarted redcoats appeared in the distance, heading back from where they'd come. The highwayman let out a passionate cry for vengeance and drew his rapier,

thrusting it into the sky, the duelist's blade gleaming under the midday sun. The King's men hurriedly shouldered their muskets, closed ranks in a panic, and fired a thunderous volley at the enraged rider. The impact of the musket balls knocked him clear off his mount and onto the highway. His exquisite velvet coat was pierced numerous times, his creamy lace cravat and brocade shirt stained with pools of blood blossoming from beneath. The highwayman still clenched the rapier firmly in his deathly grasp as he tumbled to a stop on the worn stones.

It is said that on a chilly autumn night, when the leaves rustle in the wind and the full moon lights the sky, iron-shod hooves can be heard on the cobblestones approaching an old inn, and a scent of perfume and the sound of a melody linger in the air.

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Author's note: This story is based on Alfred Noyes's terrific 1906 dramatic poem, "The Highwayman." The full original poem can be found at the following website:

<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-highwayman/>



Burnt Earth

Chapter 5: Down-

Erik Hansen

Morning arrives over a dry lakebed in the desert. Under the overhang of a large boulder, Cobar's eyelids split open. The fire built the night before has left behind a black scorch on packed earth. Though the flames are long gone, somehow he's still warm. Stretching the sleep from his limbs, he finds his body and thick tail curved around the warm mass of the human girl. He freezes, unsure what to do. One of them must have moved in sleep to cope with the nighttime chill. Torn between enjoying the body heat and pulling away before she wakes, he simply stares. Before he can decide, her eyes blink wide open.

The human girl's startled scream sends Cobar's head up and away, only to meet the solid rock overhang with a thud. Clutching his aching skull, Cobar realizes a painful downside to the human's warmth. As she scurries to put some space between them, he looks upward to know the sun's position. This place is different than the open flats around his shelter. Here, the land has jagged rises all around and, though the sky shines its earliest blue, the sun hides behind the cliffs to the east, casting a huge shadow on their campsite. At home he would have been warm and active by this time of day, but here in the shade he finds he is still cold and sluggish. As his mouth opens wide for a quiet yawn, he sees her take uneasy heed of his sharp teeth.

At times, he seems to make significant progress with her, and then there are mornings that start with screaming and head injuries. He'd fix the scare he gave her with some vulture meat. Food rarely

fails to make things better, he reasons. Reaching for his satchel, Cobar senses something on the air that catches his attention. The scent of the meat inside the bag is stronger than it should be. Cobar's brow tightens, going from tired to tense, and his leathery frills expand off his neck. He produces a sloppy grass-wrapped package of meat from the bag. The grasses used for dressing wounds also mask the smell of the meat when thoroughly wrapped. To his dismay, the grass hangs off the tough strips in tatters. Well aware that he is not the only creature with a nose for meat in the desert, the reptile hurriedly ties the long green blades around the white strips and shoves them in the bag hanging off his shoulder.

With no idea how long the scent traveled on the breeze, Cobar rethinks his steps. Images of packing the meat the morning before play over and over in his mind. He knows for certain the shoddy work isn't his doing, but he doesn't want to believe his human charge could be stealing behind his back. A few short steps away from her, Cobar can smell the bird's meat, but still he second guesses himself. The longer he stares and smells, however, the less likely the other explanations become. Although he hopes he's wrong, it is absolutely necessary he knows for sure.

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To Jan's horror, the agitated reptile takes some unusually aggressive steps towards her. Having watched him go through his food, she has a good idea why. The short screams which seemed to deter him before no longer have effect and, before she can turn to flee, the agross has her by the arm. She struggles frantically against his cold grip, convinced she would miss a limb in a few seconds. He doesn't need to exert himself terribly to bring her closer to him, but in his agitated state he gives Jan a solid yank which pulls her off her feet.

The agross grasps her arm with both claws at her elbow and wrist, bringing her hand unbearably close to his mouth of razor-sharp teeth. Her eyes squeeze shut. She hears the rushing of her blood and the reptile's deep inhalations. The end of his snout presses into her quivering palm as it sucks the air around her fingers in and out of his nostrils in warm gusts.

The grip on her arm disappears, only to be replaced by scaly hands wrapping around her head and over her ears. Jan's eyes fly open, feeling his thumbs on her brow while his longer fingers clasp behind her head. She can't move, or even scream, as the reptile places its snout against her mouth. Through the distorted blur of Jan's watering eyes, the reptile's nostrils flare and narrow. He inhales so hard the rushing air actually chills the tear tracks on her face.

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Cobar grows sick to his stomach reading the recent handling of vulture meat on her hands and mouth. He has felt anger before, but this is different. No number of cold nights, no injury he accidentally inflicted on himself, and no animal that escaped his ambush had ever felt as though it went out of its way to hurt him. Only through Cobar did this human have a chance to survive, and she reciprocates by stealing from him. He looks the human in the eyes, his hands still clasped around her head and his thoughts curling like thornvines. Her neck will snap like a twig with the correct twitch of his muscles.

A growl near the campsite distracts Cobar from the petrified girl. His head swings around to see an animal twice his weight skulking around the overhang they slept under. The thresher is a wingless bird, built like the stump of a large tree. A thin covering of brown, hair-like feathers covers most of its body, sparse enough to see the pale gold tone of its skin underneath. The

hind legs are disproportionately large compared to the front pair, which skim the ground with long claws rather than support the weight of the creature. A very short but thick tail counterbalances the forward half of its body. Its head is mostly beak, a flat spade-shaped instrument perfect for cleaving flesh and crushing bone. The corners of its mouth extend back to its thick neck just below its beady eyes. The creature releases low pitched croaks from deep in its vibrating throat.

Cobar releases his grip on the girl's head at the sight of the desert beast. A part of him finds relief that the creature stopped him from harming the girl, returning him to better judgment. The creature's deep braying, however, reinstates his fear. Cobar has no desire to fight off this animal, as scaring it away would be far less dangerous.

With frills open wide, the reptile whips around to face fully the snarling menace. It holds its ground some ten paces away, while Cobar barks and jerks his head upward, trying to emphasize his height. He kicks some sand to dissuade the thresher further, but the creature is glued to the scent of meat. Persisting with his display of red shaking frills and loud barks, Cobar notices the thresher's eyes don't stare at him. Instead, the beady orbs peer past him to the human, frozen on her rump in the sand. This will not do.

Showing no sign of submission, Cobar reaches behind himself as far as he can. He must get the girl on her feet quickly to do away with the image of sick or injured prey. He feels her clothing on the tips of his claws a second before she does the unthinkable. She's on her feet, dashing away full speed behind him. Control of the situation slips like sand through the reptile's fingers as the thresher's urge to chase overwhelms it. Cobar growls

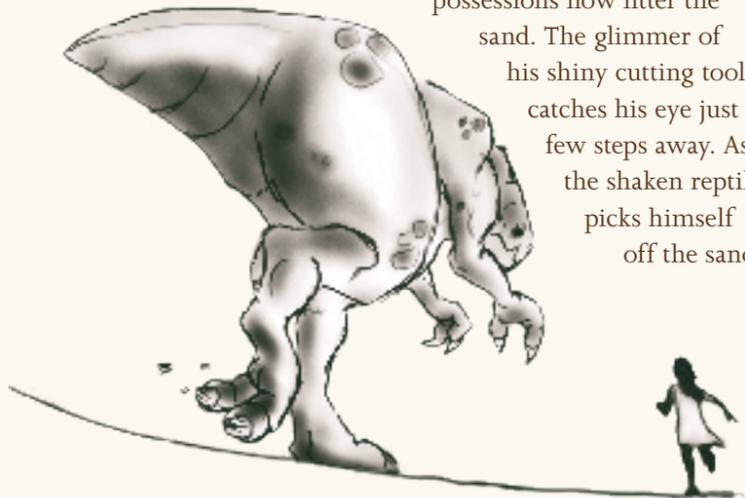


tensely, sidestepping to block the charging animal's path, and bracing for the impact.

Wise to Cobar's movement, the thresher tries to weave around him at the last second. If he were just a bit warmer, Cobar could have reacted quick enough to get his arms around the creature's neck. Instead, he grapples the thresher over its ribcage, digging his claws into its thick leathery hide to hold on to the creature. The loose dirt provides less-than-favorable traction to slow down the creature as Cobar attempts digging his heels into the quickly passing ground. Ahead, he sees the human girl still running, though the thresher rapidly closes the distance. To bring it to a stop quickly, Cobar throws both his feet at the creature's pumping legs. He kicks again and again until he throws out the thresher's next pounding step, causing it to topple to its side on top of him. The animal's weight knocks the wind out of the reptile's chest and expels his claws from its hide. The thresher and Cobar roll separately, kicking up thick swaths of dust in their struggles.

When he finally stops rolling, Cobar snaps his vision back to check on the girl. They're much closer to her than he thought they'd be—only a couple meters. His satchel had flown off his shoulder and many of his

possessions now litter the sand. The glimmer of his shiny cutting tool catches his eye just a few steps away. As the shaken reptile picks himself off the sand



to reach it, the thresher viciously mauls him. Two thick curved claws sink into the reptile's shoulder and rip down his back. Shrieking in agony, Cobar worms his hands to the creature's face, hoping he can catch it before it opens its mouth.

Cobar knows a thresher's jaws are geared for clamping down instead of opening up, so he would easily be able to keep the thresher from biting by holding its mouth shut. Having twisted to face the attacking animal, he finds its mouth already open wide and primed to clamp down on his throat. Desperately the reptile grabs the beast's upper and lower beak, using all his strength to keep them from closing on his neck. It is a losing struggle, however, as his legs are pinned under the creature's weight, leaving his torso at the mercy of its slashing claws. Blinding pain digs deep into Cobar's stomach, and the strength of his arms quickly diminishes. All he can see is the slimy pink interior of the thresher's mouth inching closer and closer.

Without warning, the creature jerks as metal, speckled with red, plunges out of the roof of its mouth. Muscles shudder before the blade slips back up into its head and the thresher collapses, dead, off to Cobar's side. Relief, bewilderment, and agonizing pain take their turns as he tries to make sense of what just happened. From behind the slain beast, the human girl creeps into his vision. His cutting tool is in her hands, stained with the thresher's blood. Her face contorts as she looks upon Cobar and the thresher lying on the ground. Looking down his own body, he sees the bloody mess. The gashes on his chest go clear down to his ribs, and the sight of his torn stomach makes his mouth run dry. All too well, he knows how creatures don't survive wounds like these. Meanwhile, the girl stands over him with pursed lips. Right away, he recognizes the opportunistic expression in her eyes from

“He feels her clothing on the tips of his claws a second before she does the unthinkable.”

when he first presented her with cooked vulture meat. It doesn't come across as comforting, especially with his knife clutched tightly in her hand.

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This is the chance Jan longed for since waking in the agross's home. With the thresher dealt with, she could simply kill the overgrown lizard and make her way to New Telfer on her own. She's definitely close enough, and the reptile would prove an easy kill in his condition. One less monster in the world and more human lives saved. Jan figures she'd be perfectly justified sinking the worn knife into the agross's neck. Her experience with his species taught her that they are mindless killing machines, devoid of mercy or compassion. She hates every last one of them, without exception, and for all she knows, this is the alien who killed her sisters. Despite this, the sun flickers off the blade in her shaking hand. If killing him is the right thing to do, she struggles to understand why she stays the knife.

A few days ago, this agross found her on the brink of death. If he were a mindless killing machine, she would have died there in the sands; but here she is, alive and well. Jan tugs at an itch under the grass bandages on her arm. Underneath the dry blades is a crooked pink ribbon that used to be an open gash. A being devoid of mercy or compassion wouldn't take her in and heal her wounds, nor would he share his precious water with her. The knife in her hand grows heavier the more she thinks of the gasping alien at her feet.

Jan knows almost every action he commits is undertaken with a clear and simple purpose: the door to his

shelter opening and closing to control the temperature, a bird killed for food. He stood close by to shield her from the sun. His only unclear and complicated act was saving her life and, now, leading her across the Outback. Jan can plainly see he knows many things about this desert. It's possible he is aware of a human settlement in the area and wants to see her off safely with her own kind, something very risky for him to try as New Telfer's sentries would shoot him on sight.

Jan realizes his sole act of aggression toward her was justly made, considering she stole from him. He could have done a lot worse than scare her, but he didn't. After putting up with her, he still risked his life to save her from the thresher, evoking a terrible guilt in Jan's gut. Distracted, she tosses the blade into the sand. Falling to his side, she works to heave the stinking beast off of his legs. Jan tries a couple of positions, finally getting it to roll off by digging her heels into the dirt with her back against the creature. Shakily, she tries to think of what she should do next to help him.

Shouts from behind catch Jan by surprise. Twisting around, she sees three men holding rifles running towards her and the agross. Mistaking them for raiders, she recoils at first, but one look at their maintained gear and she knows they are New Telfer Scouts. They will kill this alien if she doesn't stop them. As they draw near, Jan forces aside her hatred of the agross race to make room for one exception. Throwing herself over her reptilian guide, she shouts to the armed men.

“Don't hurt him! He's with me.”

EASY TARGET

Katherine Fisher

Mae runs a rag over the barrel of a twelve-gauge Remington. A cigarette with half an inch of ash clinging to the end hangs from the side of her mouth. Streams of smoke curl from her nose and lips as she leans back in her chair, coaxing a moan from the sun-bleached boards of the porch. Other than the clinking of ice in her brandy, the only sounds are the whispering of the trees and an occasional snort from a bloodhound sprawled out in the late afternoon sun.

Every few seconds, Mae's eyes rise from her work and scan the scenery, lingering on the dark patches in the foliage. She might be waiting for wild game to approach and give her an easy target, sooner or later, she figures, and Mae's got all the time in the world. Her eyes flicker from the gun to the woods, and the ash at the end of her cigarette accumulates. She senses time going by as only you do when the seconds and minutes have ceased to mean anything, and time's purpose becomes simply preventing everything's happening at once.

A shadowy figure pushes open the screen door, and a man's gruff voice calls out, "Clint's called. Someone's

asking after you at the fill station. Sent him here."

"Thank you, Lee," Mae says, still focused on the woods, the gun.

The figure grunts and nods. The door slams shut, slapping loudly against the frame, and the shadows in the doorway go still again.

Though Mae hadn't seen Lee in years, he'd taken her in, no questions asked. He hadn't even seemed surprised as she stepped past him into the house. He'd only squeezed her shoulder, said, "It's good to see you, Mae," and fixed her some supper, chatting idly about the damage the last windstorm did to his toolshed. Thing about Lee was, he never asked questions; he was wonderfully detached. Hoping to keep her mind from whatever troubled her, he gave her one of his shotguns to polish, and pretended not to notice when she loaded it immediately -- the same way he pretended not to notice the bruise blossoming under one of her eyes and the asymmetrical way she held her shoulders.

A hint of movement, the snapping of a twig, and Mae's up with the shotgun pointed at a man partially concealed by a birch. Instantly, he knows he's been

"She pumps the gun again, the used shell casing clattering across the porch and rolling to where the bloodhound twitches and snores in his sleep."

spotted and throws his hands out in front of him.

She guessed he might go about it this way; he was a coward, underneath it all. He would want to coax her to him without Lee's getting involved, afraid to be revealed for what he really was. He will have realized, now, that Lee wasn't the one to fear.

"Now, now, Mae, Honey, why don't you point that thing somewhere else?" the man says, waving his hands. Mae knows those hands. She knows the dry, rough skin and the bony knuckles. She knows how much pressure they exert after six, ten, twenty cans of beer. Seeing them, she can feel the ghosts of bruises and cracks.

The man steps away from the trees so he's in full view and takes a couple of steps towards the porch. Without hesitation, Mae pumps the shotgun and fires straight into his chest. The recoil knocks into her shoulder, but she doesn't feel it. He falls, dead before he hits the ground; Mae knew she was always a great shot. She thinks she saw fear, and maybe retribution, ripple across his face before he crumpled to the dirt. Maybe if he would have shown it sooner, she would have hesitated. But anyone who needs a slug headed for a chest to dig up some guilt "ain't really a person at all," far as Mae's concerned.

THE DEVIL'S ANGEL

Jacob Gamble

The brown upholstery burned black from the cigarette butts of a two-pack-a-day habit. Empty paper coffee cups lined the dashboard where smudges of raspberry jam had hardened. The old pine tree air freshener smelled less forest fresh and more like an old urinal cake.

Officer Tulley glanced at the driver. "Josie's leaving me." The ash of his cigarette glowed red with a final drag.

"She say why?" Sheriff Riggs asked between drinks of coffee.

"Something about I don't listen to her or some shit." Tulley flicked his cigarette butt out the window. "I don't know. I wasn't paying attention," he shrugged. His big gorilla brow pushed down over his wrinkled nose. Having known Tully for the last fifteen years, Riggs could only laugh.

As Riggs recalled, Tulley was the first guy he arrested after he returned to the rural Georgian town where he'd grown up. Tulley got into a fight at church, a dispute over the word of God, he claimed. "If wine is the blood of Christ," he wanted to know, "then why can't I drink in church?" Riggs took a liking to him and gave him a job as a janitor at the station house. He soon began filing paperwork and jailing the few drunkards each week they had come to know by name. In such a small town, deputizing Tulley consisted of nothing more than a handshake and a promise of integrity over a Coors Light.

Tulley stared out the window, his deep brown eyes lost in the emptiness of the rainy night.

"Think she'll ever take me back?" he asked, throwing his black hat into his lap, his shaggy brown hair clouding the sides of his rugged face.

"Sure." The word came from behind the cage of the backseat. "She's probably blowing some guy she just met and crying over you right now."

"Fuck you." Tully's words were a hot brand. The plastic of the doughnut box tore apart under his feet as he kicked it around, punching hard against the metal chicken coop behind him.

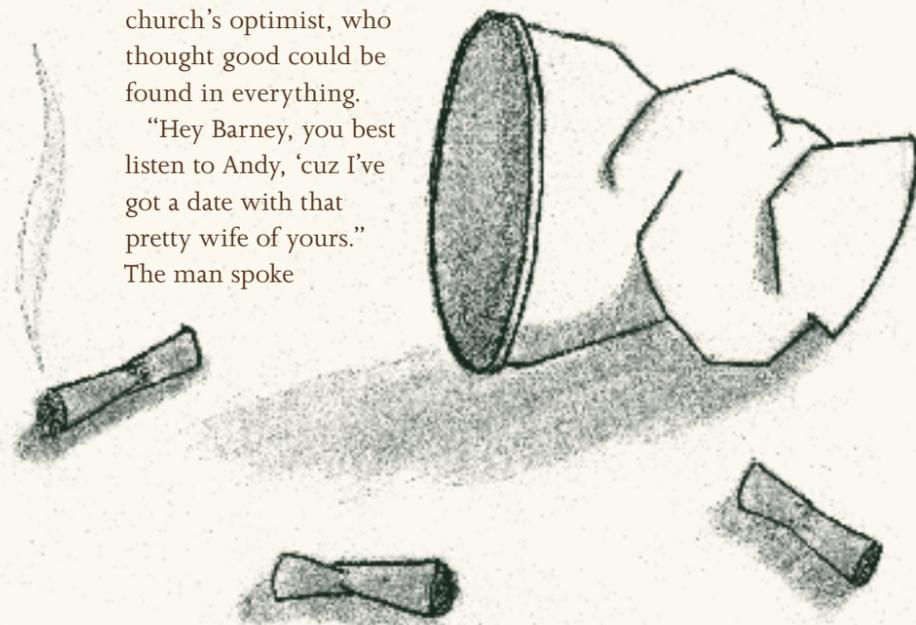
"Calm the fuck down, Barney Fife," the man laughed, sitting back against his seat, rattling the shackles of his chains.

"Pull over, and we'll dump this son of a bitch in the forest with a bullet in his head," Tulley said as he elbowed Riggs in the side of his sugarplum belly.

Riggs scoffed off the notion, not giving the idea but a moment's interest. "Just relax. We'll be in the city in about thirty minutes," he said calmly. He was a passive man by nature, a church's optimist, who thought good could be found in everything.

"Hey Barney, you best listen to Andy, 'cuz I've got a date with that pretty wife of yours."

The man spoke



mockingly in a slow southern drawl.

"Let me do it." Tully pulled out his state-issued nine-millimeter from his side holster.

"Put it away. The city boys would skin our asses if we killed him." Riggs firmly pushed down Tully's hand, his curly red hair waving like a kite in the wind. Tulley looked upon the steady, unbreakable face of his longtime friend. He had never actually seen this side of Riggs, this stern, authoritative, "I got a bigger badge than you" attitude.

Tulley slid his firearm back into its button-over holster. Leaning back against his seat, he retrieved his hat from the floorboard. "Sorry," he murmured, lifting his hat and fitting it to his head.

With the apology, Riggs lost his concrete stare and turned back into the guy who'd dressed up like Santa Claus for the past ten years. "It's okay," Riggs said.

"You fags aren't going to kiss now, are you?" the man in the back asked, his wrists locked together, his dirty hands folded over the lap of his torn-up pants.

Riggs reeled around, his face an angry red. "Look out!" Tully grabbed onto his arm, his shout piercing Riggs' ears.

Riggs jerked back around just in time to see a '78 Ford pickup stopped in the middle of the road. His foot slammed the brake pedal too late. The front of the squad car crunched under the truck's bumper. The seemingly slow motion of impact turned the seconds into minutes, as the twisted metal of the two vehicles melted into each other.

The hood of the squad car folded up like an old pair of blue jeans as the wheels bent forward over the

broken front axle. The windshield burst like a balloon as the engine block pushed back into the dashboard, collapsing it over the men's knees. When the radiator blew, it sent a geyser of steam into the trees toward the fleeing crows.

With its emergency brake on, the old truck only skidded a couple of feet forward. Its bumper pushed up under its rear axle, and the O and R in Ford were no longer legible. It would, however, still drive.

Riggs lay docile over the bent steering wheel, wheezing from a broken sternum. His eyelids flickered like a diabetic with low blood sugar, as blood from two deep lacerations on his forehead poured over his face. He could make out the silhouette of a person slowly manifesting from the dark hedges of the roadway.

In his delirium, Riggs thought it to be a saving angel with the redeeming rod coming to see him through his death. The blaring of the car horn on which he lay sounded like the calling bell of Saint Thomas. He lifted his weary arms over the dashboard, reaching for the figure.

She stood about five-foot six, one hundred-pounds, wearing ripped-up jeans and a white tee-shirt. Her heavy boots were muddy and her hands smudged black with engine oil. She pulled back her long brown hair into a single tie. No earrings or necklace. She was a natural beauty, with doe-like blue eyes.

Looking across the way, she could see the man in the passenger seat face down on the dashboard. With a hurried step, she moved around the car, putting a hand over her face as she passed the steam of the radiator. Wrapping her little hand around the handle of the door, she pulled with all her strength. Finally, on her third

"'FUCK YOU.' TULLY'S WORDS WERE A HOT BRAND."

attempt, she managed to pry open the broken door.

“Can you hear my voice?” She got close to Tulley’s ear, her tone honeysweet, a cherub in the church choir. He lifted his head back slowly. Three of his front teeth remained buried in the dashboard.

“Can you move your legs?” she asked, looking down at him. Tulley’s scream was inaudible—just an open mouth, like a drowning victim. He leaned over in his lap and vomited down his legs, passing out from the trauma. The woman bent under the dashboard, finding that his fibula punctured his flesh. She ran her hand up his right thigh, moving around his waist. Her fingers curled up under the set of keys he carried on his belt loop, and she pulled them free.

Standing up with the smile of the Devil’s angel, she moved around the car with a playful gait.

“What are you doing? Save him,” Riggs gasped out to her as she neared his window once again.

“What about the guy in the back?” she asked, her voice innocent.

“Forget him. He’s a murderer. He killed a judge with the help of his wife.” He coughed blood onto the steering wheel.

“Did you ever catch the wife?” she asked, reaching a hand into her waistband.

“No,” he said, narrowing his eyes as he pondered the oddity of her questions.

The pieces came into focus, aligning with the clarity of an epiphany as he saw the long barrel of a forty-five caliber revolver slide from her belt. Riggs watched the slow cocking of the hammer.



VERTIGO

Maggie Mccarney {silver gelatin photographs}



Artwork Title
Name Hedburg {Medium}



Artwork Title
First Wonser {Medium}



Onlookers
Jessica Ek {Acrylic on Bristol}



Wishy Washy
Rebecca Rodela
{Watercolor on Paper}



Side Handle Downspout Teapot
Anthony Criado {Ceramic}



Fortunes
Heather N. Williams {Ceramic}

TYPE STUDY





Abstract Colors
Bethany R. McCamish {Digital Photograph}



Cityscape Accordion Book
Kendall Fear {Illustration}



Liz
Katie Fennelly {Charcoal, Conte, Colored Pencil}



Looking Glass
Hannah L. Dawson {Graphite and Mixed Media on Paper}



Nude
Sophia Haro {Acrylic Paint and Oil Pastel on Canvas Board}



Braided Ring
Jeremy Winkler {Sterling Silver}



Oak Leaf Ring
Jeremy Winkler {Sterling Silver}



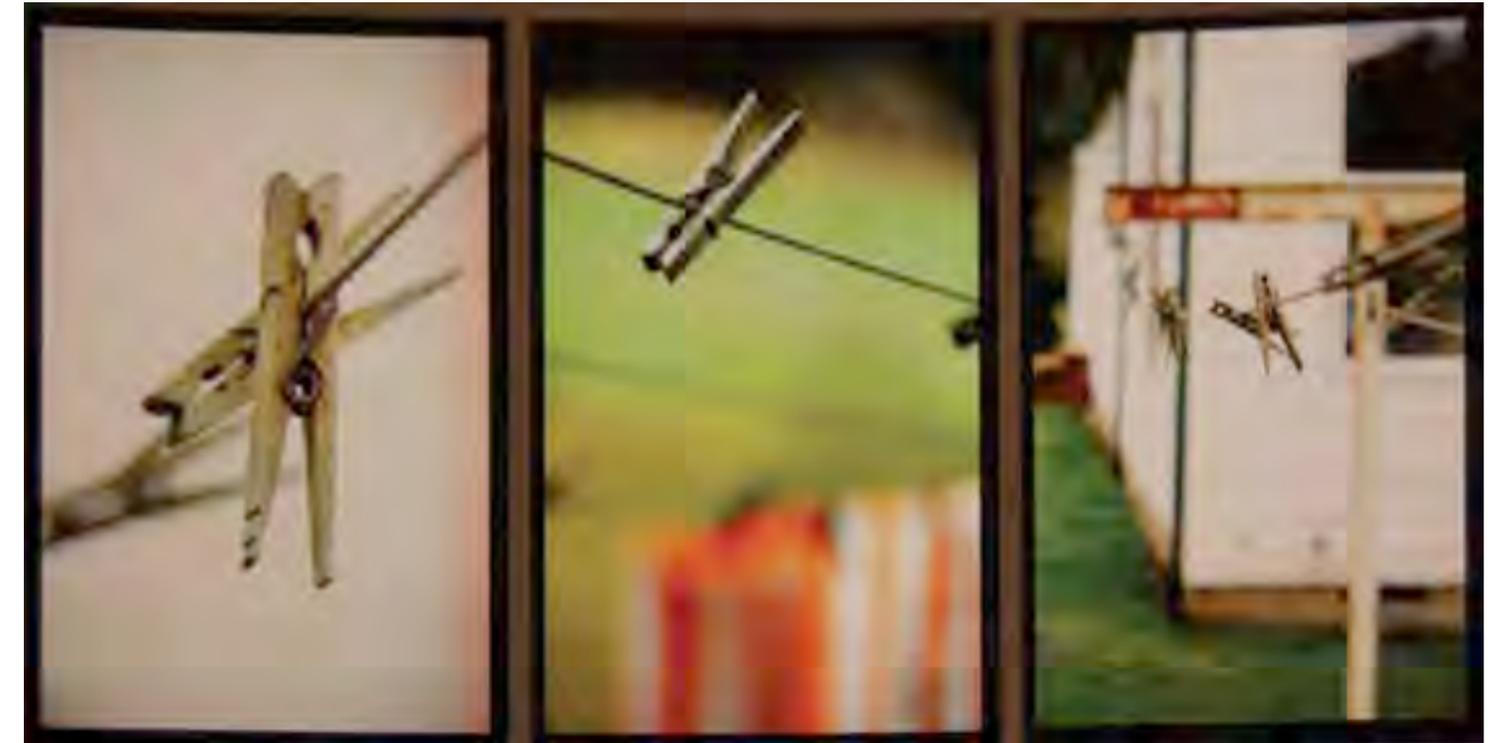
Mobius Strip
Michael Meske Sr. {16 Gauge Sheetmetal}



Ladybug Ceramic Set
Brenda Pereboom {Ceramic}



Golden Tent Caterpillar Moth
Paul Peloquin {Digital Photograph}



Clothes Line
Melissa Mitchell {Digital Photograph Triptych}



Artwork Title
Mia Kalabina {Medium}



Nautilus
Anthony Criado {Metal Sculpture}



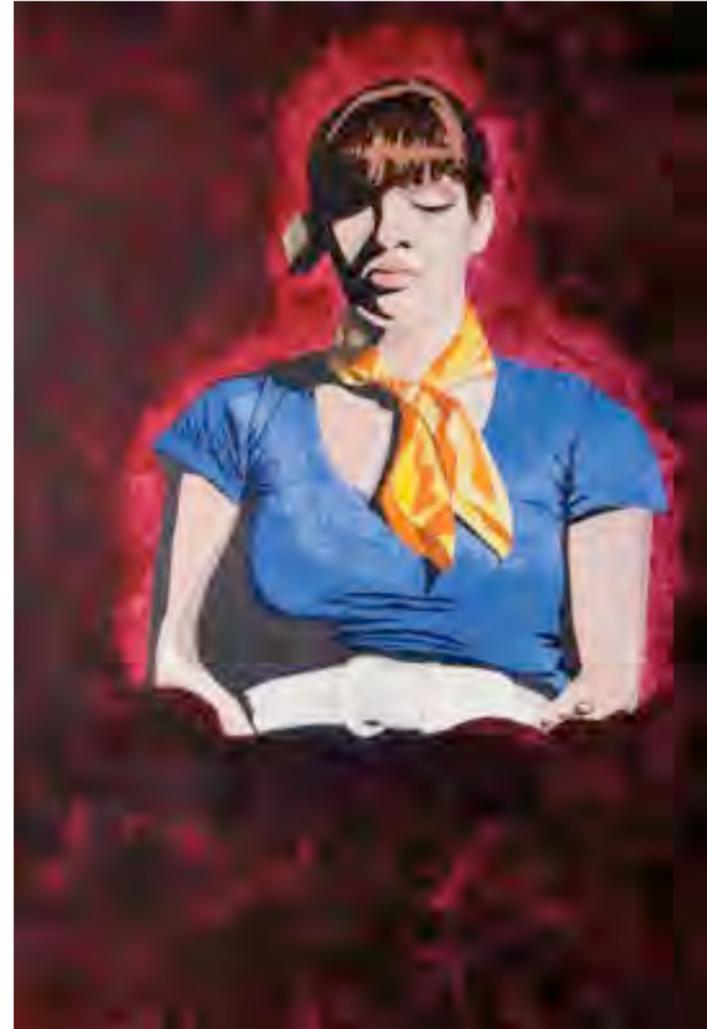
Recumbent Female Nude
Doug Kessler {Pastel on Paper}



Stone Woman
Brian M. Sutherland {Venetian Plaster on Cement Board}



Heart's Pain
Rebekah Altig {Medium}



Portrait of a Girl
Brian M. Sutherland {Acrylic on Canvas}



Squoshy
Whitney Anderson {Acrylic on Canvas Board}



Loves Me Not
Tara Omnes {Cyanotype}



Page 15, Page 19, Page 20, Page 29
Chau Truong {Pencil and Watercolor on Paper}

Legend of the Sakura

by Rachel E. O'Dell

Pink petals
Their beauty not betraying
The blood of men slain
Pooled among the roots
The crimson liquid
to the blooms
Lends elegance and vibrant hues
passers-by admire
Never knowing
the impurity
That has brought life
To withered limbs.





Phillip Englund

Wilson shuffled down the dusty main thoroughfare of the small desert town, looking at his brown, square-toed, leather shoes. Although they made his feet hurt, he considered them worth it. He spent a lot of time looking at his feet. At least they could look nice.

He arrived at the town's only café in due course. Far and away the most popular place in New Anchorage, Alaska, it served as a bookend of sorts, overlooking the rest of the settlement; every road invariably seemed to lead there. A tiny bell rang as he pushed open the door, but nobody ever paid any attention to it. Taking a seat at an empty table, Wilson lay down the satchel he carried. All the most social individuals gathered in this place, and he prided himself on being one of them. The various intense conversations going on would have filled the room with deafening noise if anyone ever actually spoke. Nobody, however, said anything aloud; nobody ever did.

Oral communication had passed out of use generations ago, much too inconvenient. People could already write what they wished to say on their computers and send it to anyone, anywhere. Messages and replies went

between individuals instantaneously. Inevitably, there came a point when people started asking questions like "Why do I actually have to go out and find the person I want to talk to before talking to them?" and "Why do I have to worry about interpreting a complex system of nonverbal messages through body language when I can just slap on some of these handy emoticons?" The wisdom inherent in such questions heralded the death of the spoken word, now a lost form of language, and the instigation of a new age dominated by a more practical and reliable method for communicating.

As it happened, many of the people in the café were having conversations with each other. This didn't mean any of them actually cared about the outdated social customs dictating you were usually in the same room with the person with whom you conversed. They just came to eat. The place specialized in sandwiches, the roast beef with Swiss cheese and grilled onions a particular customer favorite. It started as a full-blown French Dip, but people found the au jus far too messy. The café also boasted excellent coffee.

After dumping sand out of his shoes, Wilson took his laptop out of the satchel and used the wireless network to log on to the remnants of the Internet. He ordered a cup of coffee and a Roasted Turkey Club, and then started chatting on his favorite surviving social networking site.

Hours drifted by, entirely unheeded. At round, wooden tables, customers sat on plush chairs with dark-blue cushions, typing away. Large windows on either side of the front door let in a flood of natural light and sweeping view of the rest of the town. A sign taped to one of them greeted any arriving customers with a single, warm word: Welcome. All of it was absolutely wasted. None of the patrons ever

"They overtook a lone pedestrian and tore him to pieces, munching on various parts of the unfortunate fellow as they shambled along—a few produced Ziploc baggies and saved bits of him for later."

looked anywhere, except down at the laptop screens. Everyone ordered what he or she wanted and paid via the café's website. Employees delivered everything silently and professionally.

Wilson considered himself a pleasant, genteel man but, every once in a while, even a pleasant, genteel man needs to kick some serious ass. On this particular Saturday, he soon found himself deep in an argument, between bites of delicious turkey, bacon, and tomato, with some presumptuous so-called "scientist." Just because, Wilson thought, this fellow happens to have gone out and conducted thorough, legitimate research, and I never heard about the thing until today, he actually has the gall to think he knows more about the subject than I do. Well, he's got another think coming.

Wilson's eyes narrowed as he exhaled with vigor. Irritated, he typed, "I don't care *how* much evidence there is to the contrary. It's all a big myth. You panicky alarmists were all over the global warming thing a hundred years ago. Now, when that didn't harm the planet," he stopped, thought about it, deleted the last bit, and carried on. "Now when that didn't completely destroy the planet, you've found another perceived disaster to crusade about." His eyes ablaze with triumph, Wilson hit "enter" and sent the message.

As he tossed back the last of his coffee, he waited eagerly for his opponent's attempt to come back from

such a crushing blow. No reason in the world existed as to why he should look up, especially at such an exciting moment; Wilson never took his eyes off his screen under any circumstances. But this time, some instinctive impulse, some primeval danger warning, made him glance around for an instant.

As soon as Wilson's gaze went by the window, it immediately arrested. He could see somewhere between twenty and thirty individuals shuffling down the street, headed right for the café. They didn't look to Wilson like the normal pack of extroverts coming down to have lunch, join in conversation, and become lost to the world, although this observation turned out slightly incorrect. They were coming for lunch.

Flies swarmed around these figures. Their decomposing flesh rotted off their bones, and their clothes were torn, filthy, and smeared with what looked unnervingly like blood. They overtook a lone pedestrian and tore him to pieces, munching on various parts of the unfortunate fellow as they shambled along—a few produced Ziploc baggies and saved bits of him for later. The thing that really tipped off Wilson, however, was the fact he couldn't see a single person carrying a laptop.

Wilson quickly abandoned his conversation (Really, he thought, what more was there to say? He had won.



He always won), then ran an image search with the keywords “ravenous zombie horde.” Wilson looked out the window. Wilson looked at his screen. Wilson tried to discern any difference between the two and failed utterly. Crap, he thought.

Wilson slowly comprehended the scientist had been right, probably by mistake. For a moment, his brain tried to reconcile this irrefutable fact with the equally irrefutable fact he had won the dispute and, therefore, zombies could not possibly exist. Fortunately, it decided to abort the effort before it destroyed itself. The dead were rising, and hungry. They constituted a lethal reality, sweeping throughout the still-habitable regions of the earth like a plague and killing indiscriminately. And some, Wilson thought, had found their way to New Anchorage.

He became tremendously excited. Even though they didn’t look too pretty, this proved beyond all doubt the dead could live again; it would forever change people’s perspectives on religion and science, and heralded the definite possibility of finding immortality. Then Wilson remembered the practical implications of a flesh-eating undead multitude lumbering right toward where he happened to be sitting. His elation dampened considerably.

Regardless, he knew just what to do: he would warn everyone. People would believe him, and they would present a united front against the zombie menace. Once unified, they would be unconquerable. Hope could not be extinguished!

Wilson’s computer went dead.

Wilson knew just what to do. He freaked out, shaking his now-blank screen in a

sudden burst of rage at the unfairness of it all. It didn’t help. Rapidly, he rummaged through his satchel, but failed to find a pen, a pencil, anything. Wilson’s fingers futilely tapped out some unsavory words on his dead keyboard. He knew he needed to warn people, fast, but what could he do? An idea found its way into his head, one he didn’t like at all. Still, there wasn’t any other option. He had to be brave.

Thrusting his useless computer aside, Wilson awkwardly hauled himself up onto the table, stood up, and gave his best inept attempt at an interpretive dance. He waved in large, sweeping movements, he lurched about with outstretched arms, almost falling off the table in the process, and he desperately pointed. Everyone relentlessly ignored him. Wilson forced himself to dance harder, exaggerating his jerky motions, pantomiming being devoured, flailing his arms in the direction of the outside. To their credit, everyone managed to ignore him even more relentlessly. He sat down again, exhausted and embarrassed. His feet hurt like hell.

Wilson looked out the window again with growing dread, seeing the undead mob dragging their feet inexorably on, shortening the gap minute by minute. His life, and the lives of everyone else, might very well rest on what he would do next, and the overwhelming pressure almost incapacitated him. He concentrated, forcing himself to try and focus.

Even though spoken English had become a dead language, Wilson remembered reading somewhere about how a person’s vocal cords still remained perfectly intact; evolution had yet to get around to eradicating them. Once Wilson determined he would do it, he didn’t need to think about how to work the mechanics

of the process. His scream came through instinct, and he channeled all his growing terror into it. The noise was loud, jarring, and incessant.

Instantaneously, most people diverted their eyes from their screens. Unfortunately, they looked, slack-jawed, directly at Wilson, remaining completely oblivious to the approaching doom outside.

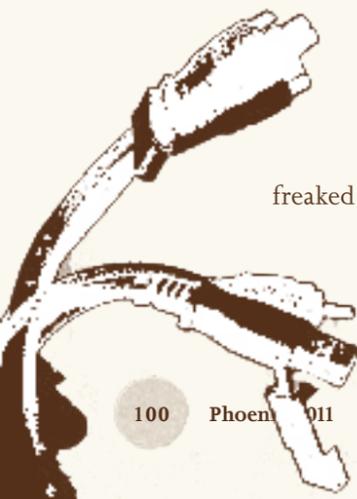
As Wilson screamed, he renewed his pointing and arm flailing. Still, nobody seemed to get it. They stared at him as if he were losing his mind, something which Wilson now considered a very viable possibility. A noisy minute passed. Wilson continued, stopping to breathe only when on the verge of passing out, and then starting right back up again. The disrupted patrons composed themselves and went back to their typing. A few even managed to produce earplugs. Having gotten over the initial shock, they simply would not tolerate this irritating intrusion on their normality.

As much as they appeared to want to die in ignorant bliss, Wilson wouldn’t let them. Acting on a sudden impulse, he ran over to a nearby woman and grabbed her, physically forcing her to pay attention. Unfortunately, he seemed to have picked out, at random, the lady with the best reflexes in the place. The moment he took hold of her sleeve, she lashed her foot out at him with an extremely well-timed kick, never taking her eyes off her screen. Gentleman that he was, Wilson assumed she had been aiming for his shin. If so, she wasn’t a very good shot. Wilson’s legs gave out from under him. A throbbing pain gripped his groin, his stomach felt queasy, and he wanted to throw up. All the strength seemed to have left his limbs. Placing his head on the cool tile floor, he squeezed his eyes shut.

A short time passed. Wilson imagined the poor people in the café being devoured in graphic detail—he could see those poor horrible, horrible people being torn to bits. He found he enjoyed it considerably. With an effort, he switched gears and imagined himself being devoured in graphic detail. It worked. Forcing his body to get up, Wilson looked out the window and saw death almost at the door. He estimated about a minute before animated corpses entered and devoured everyone, and he knew his guess could very well be overly optimistic.

Looking around in desperation, Wilson noted a backpack propped up against one of the chairs, its owner immersed in typing something. Running over, he grabbed it. Taking the pack to his table, he unzipped it and rooted through the contents, hoping to find something to write with. He saw a wad of tissue, some thick books, a notebook stuffed with loose papers, a thick black permanent marker, and something far more interesting. After taking the marker and putting it in his pocket, Wilson slowly reached back in and withdrew the revolver. He felt the weighty, cold metal in his hand, along with its implications. He could stick someone up, take their computer by force. He glanced back out the window. A zombie, having only a few more feet to shuffle before it got to the entrance, waved at him.

Wilson realized he was out of time. He needed to try and blockade the door as fast as he could, buy some more. Putting the gun down, he grabbed the table and pulled with all his might. It refused to budge. He looked underneath. Someone had bolted all the tables to the floor. Apparently the owners of the establishment didn’t want any ne’er-do-well delinquents trying to sneak off with them. It was too late anyhow; behind



him, Wilson heard the ting of the little bell as something pushed open the door.

Wilson knew only one option remained now. He scooped up the revolver, gripping it tightly, and his fear evaporated. Years of playing first-person shooters on his computer were about to pay off. No one possessed a better purely theoretical knowledge of firearms than Wilson. Aim for the head, he thought. You should have about six shots. He realized he couldn't get anywhere near all of them, but he could hold the zombies back for a moment. Perhaps, with a gun going off, people would realize what was happening. Perhaps, Wilson thought, he could still save everyone. Breathing deeply, he swung around.

Taking extremely careful aim at the nearest approaching zombie, Wilson squeezed the trigger with a steady hand. The gun roared. A patron, just about to warn everyone after looking up in surprise to find everyone nearly in the clutches of the hungry undead, went down with a beautiful shot through the head. One or two people looked up, but hungry corpses immediately made short work of them. The rest just hunched over and typed faster, in an angry, staccato manner. These the zombies ignored for the moment. Wilson fired again, and a second bullet imbedded itself in the doorframe as all the zombies headed straight towards him.

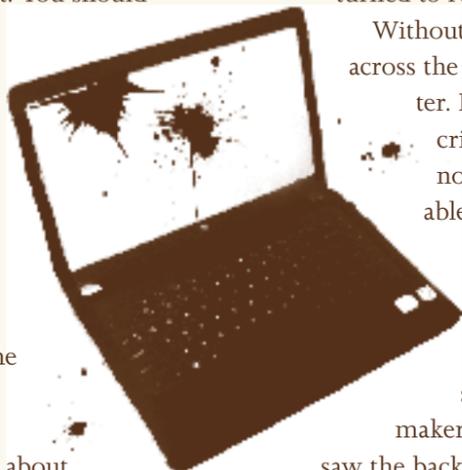
At that moment, Wilson thought of something; there might be a way for him to save himself. He looked at the others in the café. He disliked them, but in his

heart of hearts he knew they were people. These people lived. They had hopes and dreams, fears and flaws. He wouldn't be able to live with himself if he just left them. Taking a few quick strides to the nearest occupied table, counting on the fact zombies moved slowly, Wilson took the marker out of his pocket and scrawled "good luck" in large letters on the wooden surface. Then he turned to run.

Without a backwards glance, Wilson sprinted across the room and scrambled over the counter. Pain shot through his ankles, and he cried out, mentally cursing himself for not thinking to wear footwear suitable for running for his life. He forced himself to move, fleeing into the area meant strictly for the staff. Wilson's mind only registered brief impressions: startled faces, half-eaten sandwiches, dishes, and cheap coffee makers lined up on counters. At last he saw the back door he hoped existed, his salvation. Wilson dropped the revolver and scrambled for the knob, twisting with both hands in desperation. The door flung open, letting the oppressive heat and dry air rush in.

As he stumbled outside in blind panic, something changed. The incessant clattering from the multitude of keyboards in the café slowly tapered off, finally halting entirely. For an instant, the sound of the unnatural silence was deafening. Then the air filled again with terrible noises which Wilson's brain would not allow him to comprehend fully.

He made his way around to the front of the building and hobbled back down the main thoroughfare of the



small desert town. Quiet here, Wilson thought, there's time to think. He risked a look back at the café, and the events transpiring within it. As his peripheral vision picked up lots of red, he focused on a pair of rotting, maggot-ridden hands taking the "Welcome" sign out of the window. In its place, they put a new sign, letters scrawled out in a dark reddish-brown hue on a piece of cardboard. The letters spelled out the simple, sincere ideals of the latest owners:

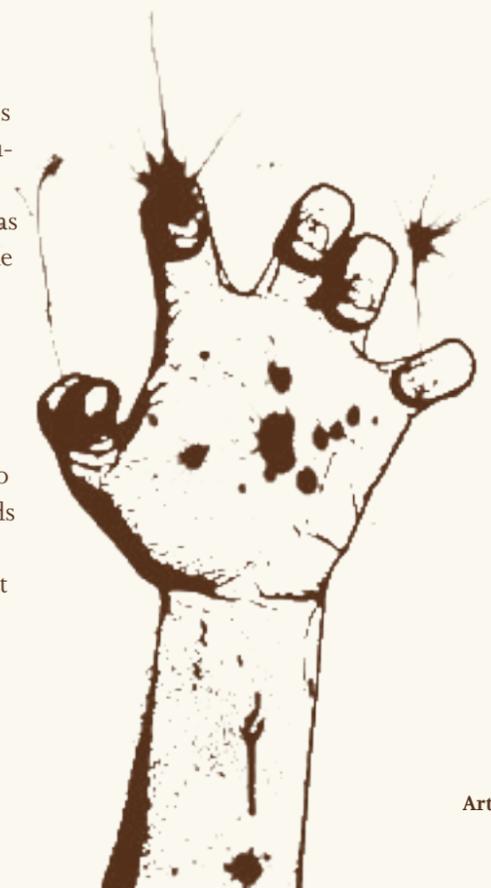
want u 2 eat

Wilson closed his eyes and willed it all to go away. He stood there for a minute or two, and then reopened them. Through the limited sight offered by the windows, the place seemed devoid of anyone. He could see nothing in the immediate front, the tables stood empty. Looking harder, he noted discolorations he knew would be easy for him to fancy as blood. He didn't let his mind go there. They were subtle enough; one would have to be looking fairly observantly to see them, and nobody ever looked at all. Perhaps, he thought, they were just a figment of his stressed imagination. Perhaps it all had been. The sign, however, remained. No hallucination this; it seemed to stare at him. Wilson turned back around and started once more to walk. As much as he loved the old café in his own little way, he knew the new management was going to drive it right into the ground.

Wilson noticed someone moving toward him at a brisk pace. The man held a laptop under one arm and walked in a straight line, not wasting any of his precious attention on his surroundings. There could be no doubt about his destination; he headed directly towards the ill-fated café. Something, however, gave the unknown pause. He stopped for a moment, glancing at

the seemingly deserted place. The sign in the window must have reassured him, helped him blot out the inconvenient little things, which seemed out of the realm of normalcy and given the impression someone was in control. The man proceeded on, coming within arm's reach of Wilson.

Wilson came close to grabbing the man, almost tried to give him some sort of a warning, but decided against it. It wasn't his business anymore; things tended to be much simpler if he just ignored them. The man passed him, and Wilson looked back at his shoes.



Rain

Fallon Hughes

Why do you always come when it's dark,
Crying down my window making your mark,
Making me think of what I've lost.
And after he is gone, what it cost.
Raining down my cheek, hitting my writer's pad,
Focusing on who was right or wrong -- so sad.
All the arguments in instant replay
Reminding me of what I just had to say.

Alyssa Woodward

It looked like three in the afternoon. My little brother Connor and I hung upside-down in a large tree, making funny faces at each other. We swung back and forth, laughing, until we heard her scream. I immediately dropped out of the tree and stood in the long grass, motionless.

"What was that?" My brother landed on his feet next to me.

"Shhh." I put my finger up in the air and continued to listen. We stood there for a moment, until we heard another scream.

"Come on!" I ran as fast as I could, the long grass whipping my bare legs. Even though I'm seventeen, my seven-year-old brother didn't have a problem keeping up with me. The screaming continued as we followed her voice all the way to a creek in the back of the woods. I've never been here, I thought. The sky grew ominous, and the sounds of animals became silent. Only our staggered breaths and the crunch of twigs beneath our feet could be heard. In a patch of grass next to the creek lay a girl, about my age. She wore a long white dress, covered in mud and dirt. Running towards her, I could hear Connor slowly following me.

"Are you okay?" I asked her, my voice squeaking out. She turned to me, and her dark green eyes glared directly into mine, making me light-headed. I dropped to my knees as she laughed furiously.

"Ellie, what's going on?" Connor asked.

I didn't want him to be scared, so I tried to get up.

The way her eyes focused on mine made it so I couldn't avert my gaze. After a few minutes, the girl finally looked away from me and turned back on her side. Quickly, I got to my feet and stood by Connor, confused. The air became dry, and my eyes watered from the pain in my head.

"What's your name?" I asked, irritated.

She laughed again and lay there without answering me. I felt like asking her a second time, when, suddenly, she whipped her head around.

"Irrelevant. Get out of these woods! Get out of here!"

Connor looked up at me with wide eyes, but I had nothing to say. Just as I was about to ask her another question, she screamed again. Simultaneously, Connor and I threw our hands up to our ears, masking the noise.

...

I awoke to my alarm beeping loudly at me. I slammed the top to make it turn off, and lay there for another three minutes, thinking about the dream. I've never been one to have interesting dreams, and most nights I can't even remember them. This one seemed burned into my mind, and something about it gave me a weird feeling. Getting up, my bare feet trudged across the carpet as my sleepy body scooted to the bathroom. I decided to try and forget about the dream for the rest of the day. I had more important things to think about: this would be our last week in Vancouver, Washington.

After showering, I let my long brown hair air dry and dressed in a plain V-neck and dark jeans, throwing

on my jacket and school bag. As soon as I raced downstairs, I noticed my mom had already made breakfast and Connor was rapidly eating it—eggs and toast.

“Guess what, Ellie?” he asked with a mouth full of food.

“What?” I sat down at the table while my mom put a plate in front of me.

“Today’s our last day in school!” he sang.

“Yeah, I know that, Connor.”

“Well, just letting you know. You excited? I am. Are all your friends going to miss you?” He shoveled more eggs into his mouth and stared at me, waiting for answers.

“I don’t know. I’m actually excited about leaving

Washington.” I

looked up at Mom

to see her reaction.

My mother

decided to move

my brother and me all the way to Sunnyvale, California because she’s depressed. Like sit around all day, eat enough to survive and barely talk: depressed. She said getting away from the city and the rain would make her feel as if she’s starting over.

The next week consisted of packing up the rest of the house and making it all fit into our little U-Haul truck. Finally, on Monday, we had everything ready to go. Connor bounced up and down the whole morning, singing songs about California he obviously made up on his own.

“California is our new home! I can’t wait to roam! We’re going to have fun! In lots and lots and lots of sun!”

I stumbled downstairs, holding the last box of things from my room in my arms. Mom stood at the bottom of the stairs, tapping her foot, with the last of her room in her hands as well. Connor had run outside already,

singing of course.

“Why the hell are you wearing that? We’re going to California.”

I looked down at my black Columbia raincoat and dark jeans.

“Mom, it’s raining. If I wore a California outfit, I would freeze here.”

I got no reply.

Walking outside, I opened the car door and slammed it a little too hard. My mother’s eyes narrowed as we fastened our seatbelts simultaneously and backed out of the driveway. While Connor sang his California song, I looked out the window at the neighborhood passing us by. As we stopped at a stop sign at the end of our street, I saw a girl in a dirty white dress gardening in her front lawn and almost choked. She looked up as we passed, and slowly shook her head before turning back to her vegetables. Why did she do that?

When we arrived in California, the sun shone down with more warmth than I’d ever felt in Washington. Our car pulled up in front of 1468 North Balboa Drive. It was the first time I’d seen our new house besides on a computer screen, so I jumped out of the car to explore. Connor unbuckled his seatbelt as fast as he could and ran after me. The white Victorian house didn’t look as if it belonged in California. It wasn’t my mom’s style; she always had a thing for contemporary.

“Whoa!” Connor gasped while running around towards the back.

“Mom, it’s way bigger than I thought. I didn’t even know you got property in California,” I said.

My mother just shrugged. I followed Connor around to check out the backyard before we went in to look at the inside. Stomping across the grass and flowers, I

stepped through the gate and into the backyard to stand next to Connor.

What the hell?

Looking around, I saw the same setting as the dream I had just a week ago: the big tree Connor and I swung on, the short grassy field that led to the woods.

“Isn’t this awesome?” Connor smiled.

I mumbled something even I couldn’t understand and strode towards the woods. The long grass whipped my legs, just as it did in my dream. A sick feeling washed over me and I grabbed my stomach in pain, but I kept walking. All of this was too weird for me just to drop.

“Where you going, Ellie?” Connor called.

Once I entered the woods, it took only a few more steps to realize the creek was about to come into view. The trickling sound of water interrupted the silence and, sure enough, a creek appeared. I stood there in shock, not knowing exactly what to do. No girl lay in the grass, but I looked at the exact same place. A place I’d never seen before. Finally, Connor’s unsteady breaths came up behind me.

“What are you doing?” he asked. Mom wants us to come get our stuff.

I took another look at the spot with confusion and then followed him. It took only about a minute to get back to the house. Mom lifted boxes out of the U-haul with no expression on her face, confirming my belief that this move wouldn’t change her. Until the sun came down, I helped her unload more boxes, without saying a word.

My room, bigger than my last one, had dark purple walls. My furniture fit perfectly with the style of the house, and I loved the way everything looked. I climbed in bed, looking up at my plain ceiling and

thinking about the day. My white comforter was almost too heavy for the warm weather we had here, but it still felt great to lie down.

I awoke the next morning to find Connor in my bedroom. Groaning, I looked at my clock and saw it was only eight.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

Connor sat on the floor playing his Gameboy, shooting sounds coming from it. The look on his face made me nervous; he looked as if he wanted to cry.

“Mom,” he replied, still playing his game. “She woke me up this morning. She was standing over me and she was all dirty. I thought she was gardening or something, but she looked really mad. Then she screamed at me, but she didn’t say anything. Just screamed.” He closed his eyes.

I lay there, looking at him. More confused than ever, I didn’t move. I had no idea what was going on, or if this had any relevance to my dream last week. In my dream, the girl screamed and I found her dirty, just as Connor described our mother.

Rubbing my head, I tried to get rid of the confusion. I brushed off my covers and kicked out of bed, heading downstairs. Despite the cold hardwood floors on my feet, I could tell it would already be warm outside. Rushing down the steps, I grabbed hold of the railing to make sure I didn’t slip. As I entered the kitchen, I saw Mom sitting on a stool, wearing the white dress I saw in my dream. Mud covered the bottom, and the lacey white sleeves crawled up her arms. It looked as if it were going to rip down the side because of its inappropriate size. Slowly, I approached her.

“What happened to Connor? Why is he scared?” I asked.

Her body slumped over, and her eyes had dark

circles underneath. I'd never seen her look so bad. Shrugging, she turned away. I didn't want to ask her again, but now I wanted to know.

"What happened, Mom?" She didn't move. Instead, she just sipped her coffee in silence with her back to me. I walked in front of her, my eyes widening. On the countertop next to her lay a large butcher knife, covered in blood. My mind raced as I continued to look at her. Each time she raised the coffee cup to her chapped lips, she revealed her cut, bloody knuckles. I backed up as I watched her hands put the cup down and slowly move toward the butcher knife. As soon as she grasped the handle, I turned around and ran upstairs to my bedroom. Slamming and locking the door behind me, I threw some necessary items into my blue duffel bag.

"What's going on?" Connor begged. I looked down at his wide eyes and wondered where my mom was at this point. We had to hurry.

"We have to leave, Connor. I don't really have time to explain what's happening, but when I'm done in here we're going into your room and grabbing only what you really need. Okay?"

"Is this because of Mom?" My head ached as I continued throwing things into my duffel bag.

Thinking back to my dream, I wondered if the words the girl spoke were important. "Get out of these woods, get out of here!" Maybe my subconscious was telling me to get out of this house and away from my mother. I loved her, but I knew something insane had brewed up inside of her. I could hear banging coming from downstairs. My eyes widened, wondering what she could be doing.

"Stay here," I ordered. I walked down the hallway and peered down the stairs, only to see my mother breaking all of the dishes in our kitchen. Her bare feet cut into the broken glass lying all over the floor, causing

blood to smear over the tiles. Her coffee mug lay in pieces. I raced back into my room, grabbed my duffel bag, and rushed Connor to his room to pack his things.

"I don't want to leave Mom, though," Connor whined. "Where are we going?"

"I'm sorry, but that's not a choice anymore."

I pulled Connor by the arm, keeping him as close to me as possible when we walked down the stairs toward the front door. Realizing where the car keys were, I felt a sick feeling washed over me.

"Wait here," I whispered. I tiptoed over broken glass, not seeing my mother in the kitchen. As I grabbed her keys from the far wall, I heard the sliding glass door creeping open. I whipped my head around to see her in the dirty white dress, holding the bloody knife.

I said nothing as she looked at me, her eyes a deep red. She took a step closer, holding the knife a foot in front of her, pointing it towards me. I ran through the dining room and swung open the front door, not needing to pull Connor anymore.

We heard her scream as the door slammed behind us.

We ran towards the car, duffel bags in hand. I didn't know where we would go, but I was listening to my subconscious. I was getting us out of here.



BROWNIES IN THE FLOWERBED

Chapter One Kelly Chastain

If only the truth had gotten to me sooner, I could have spared the Brownies an agonizing week in the dirt. Late Thursday afternoon, I answered the door to a mob of ten-year-old girls, all sporting braids, bright eyes, and dashing little uniforms. Every year, to support their troop, they sell raffle tickets for a tropical vacation. I won the trip last year, but this year I wasn't in the mood to deal with the guilt-inducing faces staring back at me. Too much innocent charm makes me nauseous.

I cast my famous double wink instead, a harmless mini-spell I formulated in college when door-knocking Jehovah's Witnesses flooded our dorm. Normally, the lot of them would come down with a mild case of laryngitis. Today, I inadvertently burned an entire troop to a crisp. The roll of tickets landed in a pile of ashes on my porch, resounding with a hollow thunk. Looked like my odds of winning the trip to Hawaii again this year were now infinitely better than old man Trunkett's.

Before grabbing the broom from the fireplace, I stood for a moment, thinking about the events of the past week. On Tuesday, the paperboy narrowly escaped transformation into a bullfrog. Imagine my relief when a squirrel from Trunkett's yard dashed in front of the

boy's bike, absorbed the misdirected spell, and morphed into a massive frog mid-hop. I simply wanted to turn my paperboy's arm into a throwing machine that could lob my paper all the way to the front step, past its usual resting place, the sidewalk. Instead, he nearly crashed his bike at the alarming sight of the spell, and my paper bounced off the curb and back into the street.

Then, on Wednesday, I backed my car into an elderly woman at the grocery store. I hardly noticed over the roar of the stereo. When the tennis ball flew from the leg of her walker and bounced off my windshield, I knew something was awry. My distress disappeared when I found her lying on the ground with nothing more than a few scrapes. Then she threatened to sue me, so I quickly patted her forehead and chanted a few words. An old spell aimed to give her amnesia for events that happened in the previous hour. I used it all the time on my husband Paul; but when I pulled back my hand, a knot with tiny black hairs protruding in a line formed on her brow, a telltale sign of a third eye about to emerge.

Thursday came, and I found myself sweeping the Brownies into the flowerbeds. I figured it would be easier to reconstitute them if I confined them to one



place. What a week. I strolled back into the house and rested the roll of tickets on the mantle by the fishbowl. The Brownies' debacle hurt the most. Ten years ago, my own daughters sold raffle tickets on porches all over town, and it never occurred to me that someone such as I could have fried them to ashes. I had to get to the bottom of all this weirdness in order to make things right again.

"Mom, you're a sorceress." Emma sounded perturbed. "Look up a spell to reverse your own curse. Duh."

"She can't cast spells, you dummy. That's the whole problem," Phoebe interjected. My daughters squabbled for a few more minutes over speakerphone from their apartment across town.

"Girls," I broke into their spat. "Come over for dinner tonight, and we'll put our heads together. We have to act soon, because an entire troop of Brownies can't just disappear without someone's snooping around."

They agreed. Not only would they come over early, but they would bring along their friend, Stella. All three girls graduated with Mastery Certificates from the Alternative Arts Center in Salem, Massachusetts, just three years ago. While both my girls followed in my sorceress footsteps, Stella honed her psychic abilities. At the Arts Center, she learned to cast runes and channel the spirit world. Her visions could come in handy.

Wanting to capitalize on our collective knowledge and talents, I consulted with my astrologer, who sighed upon hearing my dilemma. The situation was obvious, she explained. Mercury started moving retrograde through



my seventh house of Sagittarius three days ago, which simply meant all forms of communication would be fouled up for a few weeks. The Brownies would have to wait until the planets reorganized themselves. Unfortunately, that reorganization wasn't scheduled to happen for another six weeks. Paul and I would be back from Hawaii by then.

After dining on Paul's special chicken cacciatore, we retired to the living room to get started on a solution. When I told them the theory about Mercury's fouling up communication, Emma suggested we call on Aunt Tilly, the most powerful sorceress in our family. Instinctively, Phoebe and I looked at the goldfish bowl on the mantle, next to the roll of tickets.

We protested vehemently. Emma didn't want to hear it. After all, she brought up a valid point. If Mercury was the problem, Aunt Tilly's inferno of anger could catapult the planet forward and set things right again. But Aunt Tilly wouldn't just stop there.

That's what happened eight years ago with Uncle Duke. As they aged, Duke found the loss of his youthful vigor devastating and begged Aunt Tilly to restore his spirit and body to his twenty-year-old state. He argued there would be massive benefits for her, and finally, after months of pleading, she gave in. Unfortunately, the only one who ended up reaping the benefits of Uncle Duke's renewed dynamism was the equally spry young girl across the street. In a haze of trickery, Aunt Tilly bribed Aunt Claire to help turn Tilly's husband and his mistress into naked conjoined statues for her garden.

After successfully casting the two young lovers in stone, Aunt Tilly quickly turned on Aunt Claire. Convinced her sister had fallen victim to Uncle Duke's wily new nature, Aunt Tilly's rage escalated into pure wrath. This theory was, of course, ridiculous. Everyone

"...an entire troop of Brownies can't just disappear without someone's snooping around."

knew Aunt Claire headed the Salem, Massachusetts Lesbian Sorceresses Chapter with her long time partner, the treasurer. Regardless, Tilly, blinded by fury, battled her across town, caused a blackout, unleashed swarms of bees and, after three failed attempts to strip Aunt Claire of her sorcery, found herself cornered. Always kind, even in a battle to the death, Aunt Claire simply turned Aunt Tilly into a goldfish. Despite Aunt Tilly's being a little rough around the edges, it seemed only right to keep her on the mantle.

"Letting her loose is out of the question," Phoebe insisted. "Let's go over it again. What happened this week?"

Just as I started to recount the timeline, Stella stopped me and held my hand. Her jet-black hair hung down to frame her face, contrasting beautifully with her pale white skin. A vision caused her to close her eyes and concentrate. Silence permeated the room until Paul came clapping down the stairs like a Clydesdale.

"Will one of you give him diarrhea?" I huffed, impatient and irritated. "I would, but..."

Emma recoiled. Phoebe sighed and snapped her fingers twice. A moment later Paul stopped at the bottom of the stairs and, with increasing speed, the sound of his footsteps disappeared into the bathroom. The girls bickered until the hum of the fan crept out from under the bathroom door.

"Quiet, you two," Stella's stern voice silenced the room. "You sorceresses always have a tremendous amount of Astral Debris in your auras. Jane, you need a

detox; it's almost impossible to—wow." Stella's eyebrows arched as she concentrated.

Her eyes darted back and forth under her closed lids for an agonizing length of time. Our breath suspended in the air as we waited to hear what surprised her. The steady hum of the bathroom fan grew deafening as the seconds ticked on like hours. Just when I thought I couldn't take the agony any longer, she spoke.

"This has nothing to do with Mercury." Stella's eyes opened and looked each of us in the face. "Someone is conspiring against you, Jane, and it seems as if they have been for quite some time. It has come to a point where it's affecting your ability to cast."

As usual, Emma gasped and Phoebe stayed cool and collected. I dropped my shoulders from their hunched position and sighed. Undoubtedly, the question on everyone's mind was: Who?

"The only thing I can tell so far -- it's a man," Stella noted, sitting back on the couch.

A man. At least we could do something about a man. It sure beat the alternative of waiting for an alignment in the cosmos. We put our heads down and bit our lips, deep in thought about this mystery man who plotted against me. One by one, all the men in my life flashed before my eyes. The fan in the bathroom clicked off. Our heads jerked up, and we stared at each other, all drawing the same conclusion.

Who else would have a better motive? I promised Paul on our wedding night I wouldn't use any sorcery

against him. Since I used it against him on a daily basis, he had more reason to throw a wrench in my casting gears than anyone. Most of the time I considered the spells a favor, a way to keep him innocent to the greater goings on. The small bouts of amnesia kept our marriage happy and relieved him of carrying grudges against me.

Paul's footsteps clunked down the hall and into the living room. He appeared before us wearing a sober look, and we all bored holes through him with our eyes.

"What?" he asked alarmed, "What did I do?"

I felt incredibly guilty and, by the looks painted on the girls' faces, they did too. Of all people, Paul would never put it together that I was the force behind his occasional heartburn. He didn't even know he had the best motive of any man I knew. I could see Stella out of the corner of my eye. She shook her head back and forth, almost imperceptibly, but the message was clear. No, Paul was not our man.

"You look so tired, Daddy," Emma looked at him with a hypnotic gaze, "Maybe you should lie down."

Slowly, Paul nodded his head in agreement and plodded toward the staircase, his feet heavier with every step.

As soon as he left the room, Phoebe looked at Emma. "Not so hard. Last time, you almost put him in a coma."

Emma smiled and eased her stare in her father's direction. Soon, the footsteps on the stairs ended and the bedroom door closed.

"This is crazy." Phoebe paced behind the sofa. "We have to narrow this down before someone gets hurt. I was ready to freeze Dad in a block of ice. List the possibilities."

I listed men out loud. Uncles, brothers, college friends, our banker, the man at the carwash, and with every name Stella shook her head "no." She closed her eyes and concentrated again.

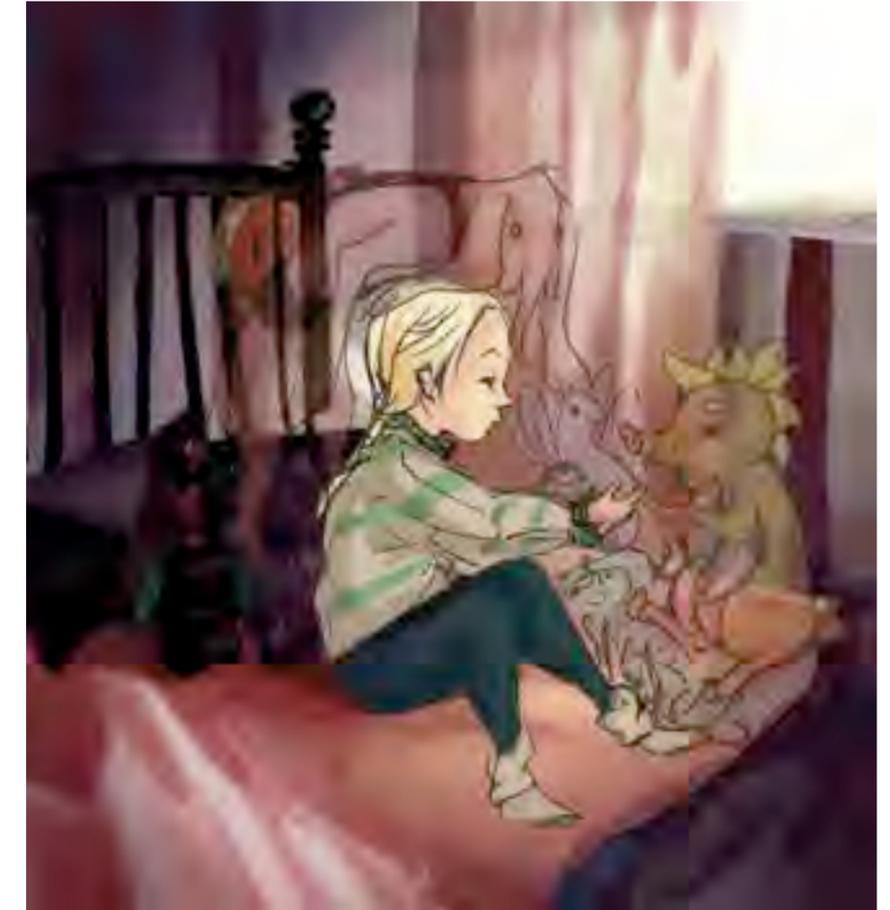
"It's not just any man," Stella added. "It's a man you've pissed off. Somebody close."

This didn't narrow it down. In fact, it made the list even longer. Emma's second grade teacher, Paul's best friend from college, Phoebe's ex-boyfriend with the motorcycle, no, no, no. The list continued. Stella kept her eyes closed and her head wagging a negative sway.

"Let me think for a second." I stopped the name calling. Most of the men we listed, I'd angered once or twice. I couldn't imagine a conspirator's hatching a tremendous plot against me over one little tort. Not to mention this man had to know something about sorcery himself. The odds of any Joe Schmo's interrupting my casting mojo were slim to none.

Events unfolded before me like a film. A pension check that came in our mail on accident and my failing to deliver it to the rightful owner for more than two weeks. The party in the backyard where we invited the entire neighborhood, except one person. Election signs and posters mounted in our yard in direct opposition to the views of the man across the street. The shouts about the girls' parking in front of his house and taking up all the spaces. Buying the winning raffle ticket from the Brownies last year right out from under him. Zapping his squirrel into a toad. His check, his invitation, his views, his parking space, his vacation, his bloody squirrel. Of course, it could be no other.

"Trunkett!" we all gasped like a choir of schoolgirls.





Sam Hinton
Urban Legend
Digital Photography



Sam Hinton
Organic Light
Digital Photography



Eric J. Zuaro
Spirits of the Mountain
Forged and Welded Steel, Fir Round

Terri Lunde
Sculpture at Turtle Place
Digital Photograph





Kelly Keigwin *I Will Never Be the Same*
Recycled Mixed-Media Collage



Kelly Keigwin
Synthesis
Digital Video Installation

Spangler



Trevyn Hiemann
How Do You Like Them Apples
Ceramic



Johnson

LITERARY

Allison Bock, “Hell Hath No Fury”

Who doesn't love a good revenge story? Because I prefer a happy ending, I rarely experiment with dark, tragic events. Writing this piece allowed me to explore emotion and issues of morality.

Kelly Chastain, “Brownies in the Flowerbeds”

When the tone of another novel of mine weighed me down, I wrote this chapter while on a mental break. Since I prefer lighthearted things, I fell back to writing a piece with a silly, ridiculous streak.

Phillip Englund, “Want U 2 Eat”

Many different ideas went into the making of this cynical little satire, and it took a long time to develop. With its bend of subtle social commentary, tasteful humor, and zombies with more personality than anyone besides the protagonist, it's become a personal favorite.

Katherine Fisher, “Easy Target”

I wanted to put a different spin on the often tragic outcome of domestic violence and abuse cases. In creating a tough-as-nails woman unwilling to continue living in fear, I wanted to show a victim taking her life back. Maybe Mae took it to extremes, but don't we all sometimes?

Jacob Gamble, “The Devil’s Angel”

I was a moment away from passing out, an idea away from a good story.

Keani K. Gifford, “Bloodhunt”

My initial intent was to write a scene that focused on justice for victims of abuse. It has since evolved, and I plan to expand it to novel length. For now, I hope to share a story others will enjoy.

Fallon Hughes, “Rain”

This poem is a reflection representing how, in arguments, people sometimes say things that seem important at the time, but they regret later.

Aaron Jones, “I, the Balloon Chaser”

Originally, I wrote this piece as a poem two years ago. I wanted to introduce readers to something considered absurd in this day and age and portray August as someone always on the lighter side of things.

Aaron R. Mathisen, “Thirty-Second and East”

I was encouraged to submit this piece based on the positive response I received from my fiction writing class. By creating a non-human protagonist, I hope to convey a sense of danger between two everyday elements.

James Pederson, “Run”

I wanted to capture a fast-paced chase scene between a super-charged dwarf and a dragon. And who doesn't like dragons?

Chris Phillips, “The Highwayman”

I wanted to write this piece because the original poem, *The Highwayman* by Alfred Noyes, has been a long-time favorite of mine. I hoped to convey the original work's feeling of old-fashioned romance and life-or-death adventure, two things that lend themselves very well to dramatic fiction.

Savannah M. Schillinger, “Dreams”

I wrote this poem out of fear, when I realized my dreams about my boyfriend and I were coming closer to reality. Our relationship was slipping. I wanted people to recognize dreams are important, and their materialization is within our control.

Leah Thomas, “Gatekeeper”

I decided to try something new and experiment with an unfamiliar genre. Mostly, I wanted to explore my writing options. While brainstorming, I created Timpin's character.

Leah Thomas, “Turn It Up”

I wrote this piece as a tribute to all the musicians to whom I listen when life gets hard. Sometimes, no matter how much life burns, the right song and lyrics can be exactly what I need to get me through it.

Alyssa Woodward, “Just a Coincidence”

I wanted to delve into a grimmer type of fiction, in a style different from what I usually write. “Just a Coincidence” shows the dark side of a seemingly normal family, and how quickly someone can change.

ART

Luke Acevedo, “Untitled”

I wanted to create a piece with texture that described Space as maps do. I enjoyed working with simple circles

to create a complicated design.

Rebekah Altig, “Fishtail Lace”

I made these wrist warmers with the intention of wearing them instead of displaying them as art pieces.

Allen G. Anderson, “Yellow”

A while back, I got the idea that colors might have multiple hidden “sides” to them. While each color has certain fairly consistent emotive associations attached, I wanted to see if one color, by itself, could convey a mood atypically associated with it.

Whitney Anderson, “Squoshy”

I wanted to place effectively a small object in a large space, as well as convey a sense of curiosity for the viewer as he or she watches this tiny creature creep across the abyss.

Whitney Anderson, “You’re Feeling Very Sleepy”

I wanted to make an abstract of a human form. The poor model had to sit still for three hours. No wonder she was dozing off!

Art 174 Typography class, “Type in the City”

Have you ever taken the time to notice all the type surrounding us? That is exactly what typography students did in this photographic scavenger hunt. This piece represents what they found.

Jillian A. Baker, “Celtic Knot Mug and Plate”

When I started to take an interest in my family's Scottish history, I found books about Druids and Celtic lore and fell in love with Celtic knot work. These knots are symbolic of the intricacies of the human mind. I love that there are so many variations of knots, and that they can mean so much, from the telling of a story to the bonding of relationships. I designed this to represent my heritage.

Greg Bee, “Untitled”

I wanted to replace the surfaces of this piece completely with new textures, while keeping their original shape to convey deliberation.

Tanner Casey, “Tawny Owl”

Over the summer, I visited the zoo and came face-to-face with some tawny owls. Captivated, I drew pictures of them for days. This watercolor and ink drawing is an idealized image of these birds.

Kelly Chastain, “Bus Stop” replace this

The idea for this piece happened rather organically. Opportunity knocked, and we ripped the door off its hinges to let it in. This piece is mostly about killing time when you're young with nothing to do and nowhere to go.

Anthony Criado, “Nautilus”

I have an intense fascination for the Fibonacci sequence and how close a nautilus shell's spiral is to that equation. I wanted to make a metal “abalone” nautilus shell that still held a very distinct metallic construction.

Hannah L. Dawson, “Looking Glass”

To me, self portraits provide insight into a person. I wanted to show myself as I am.

Hilliary Dawson, “Invisible Friends”

When I began this piece, I set out to create something entirely different. After adding a twist to the story, the piece represents a little girl's trying to regain the trust and acceptance of her imaginary friends.

Jessica Ek, “Onlookers”

Using grayscale, I had to create a design in which the shapes appeared to be transparent. I wanted to give an impression of crowding by overlapping human figures.

Katie Fennelly, “Liz”

I really enjoy doing charcoal portraits because the higher contrast always seems to intensify appearances. The color of her hair and her expression inspired me. This picture of Liz represents Portland in both style and attitude.

Wintermute Grey, “Letterforms”

In this letterform study, I tried to explore a writing system with the limitation of two or three strokes. The circular, modulating strokes assume a smooth writing surface and a writing tool with a flat tip.

Wintermute Grey, “The Picture of Dorian Gray”

This was my first book created from scratch; I wanted it to be durable and judged by its cover.

Sophia Haro, “Nude”

This is part of a twelve-piece series of nudes. I chose to do nudes at such a close view to bring attention and detail

to the lines, curves, and shadows that muscle and bone structure convey. I really enjoy capturing moments with painting I don't notice in real time.

Susan Hather, “Gli Splendidi Sentieri”

I found using color with intensity helped to create a pathway for energy and movement.

Sheila Rae Henrikson, “COX”

I altered a replicated piece into something of my own. It became a rooster from one angle and a phallic view from another.

Trevyn Hiemann, “How Do You Like Them Apples?”

By the middle of the day, I'm usually stuck in class and extremely hungry. It only takes me one quick look at my diabolical trio of apples, and I'm not so hungry anymore.

Sam Hinton, “Firewater”

I became interested in time exposure photography during fall quarter. I created this series by taking sixteen-second time exposure photos while drawing shapes with a small LED light source.

Justin A. Holdorf, “Drum Cover”

I thought it would be interesting to use one interpretation of art to discover new meaning in another artistic medium. When I am sitting in front of my drums, I look over occasionally at the detail of each piece. I mean to present an instrument defined anew; rocking a drum set with my heart racing carries a different weight than taking extensive time to paint it.

Sturgis Houston, “Untitled Melted Figures”

The idea that “all is change” gave me some poetic interest in sculpting a typical statue with consistent change and motion. Normal nude statues are single, still-frame figures which remind me of a photograph. Instead, I tried to capture the reality of a moving person.

Mark Hyder, “Sullen Youth”

I created this art while in an irritated, state, so I decided to focus on those emotions.

Kelly Keigwin, “Old Lady Acre”

This series of work documents life on Old Lady Acre, a small mother-daughter farm. Their daily responsibilities and bond as a family are things most people, including

myself, are unfamiliar with. As the newest member of this family, I wanted to capture and share their day-to-day reality and interactions.

Kelly Keigwin, “Self-Portrait Series 2010”

I created this series to document myself one year after enduring tragic circumstances that changed my life forever. I came out the other side having discovered who I really am, what my purpose is, and having found more love and happiness than I ever could have imagined.

Kelly Keigwin, “Synthesis Artist’s Statement”

Skin represents many things including protection, identity, vulnerability, sexuality and history. I chose to explore the use of skin as a medium for communication. I have never been comfortable in my own skin. I created this piece as a declaration of my stepping forward to reveal myself and share all that I am with another human being.

Doug Kessler, “Recumbent Female Nude”

With live models, there is more sense of immediacy and obligation on the part of artists to do something important for the model as well as for themselves. The intent was to convey as much as possible in thirty minutes. This particular pose had a strong central line along the torso and face where some vestiges of the layout lines can still be seen.

Mia Kalabina, “Postcards (Carnival Swing)”

I create because it is my way of communication and a method of venting. I focus on capturing the beauty we tend to bypass without noticing. I simply steal emotions of the moment.

I wanted to encourage others to go out, see, create, and open their minds.

Laura Leadingham, “Sam the Sassy Gnome”

I made Sam in my first ceramics class as my final project. I enjoyed hand building and wanted to make something that reflected my playful personality, creating him with my grandfather in mind. He is the perfect guardian for my lawn and a well-fed jolly old gnome.

Jeri Lee, “Life’s Journey”

This piece is a map of the places I have lived during my life. The textures represent places where I have roots and left seeds.

Miguel E. De Leon, “Mass Abstraction despite Linear Differences”

This piece is merely a study of small sculpture. My love for drawing Popsicle sticks sent me on an exploration from the artificial to the abstract.

Terri Lunde, “Sculpture at Turtle Place”

While working on an assignment at the new Turtle Place Park, I became inspired by a water sculpture made of recycled materials. It was a perfect subject, full of shapes, colors, textures, forms and lines.

Ryan Marsh, “Below the Surface”

I created this piece to help me combine all the skills I worked on one quarter. I intended to convey a rustic, isolated feel with the prop. The perspective of the shot contributed to this.

Samantha Martin, “13 Seconds of Powell’s”

I intended to convey a warped point of view of one of my favorite places, because I had access to a very cool camera, and I wanted to see what it could do.

Bethany R. McCamish, “Abstract Colors”

This abstracted piece is whatever you want it to be. I wanted people to look around, see the shape, color, and light reflected, and draw their own conclusions.

Bethany R. McCamish, “Frog out of Water”

I enjoy capturing the small parts of nature. This is a unique moment with a frog where I was able to freeze the little creature for all to see.

Katerina J. McCann, “Bubbles”

This was my first project in Metal Arts I. We were instructed to create an original, soldered ring band. I intended to make something I could wear myself.

Katerina J. McCann, “Drops”

This project includes multiple soldered joins, lamination, texture of my own choice, and an optional stone set. I strived for a look of flowing water in the design.

Maggee McCarney, “Vertigo”

As a Photo I final project, we were challenged to think outside the box of what the everyday photograph entails. I wanted to be different, but it was a stretch for me, and a

little “vertigo” crept in at inconvenient times. I got up as high as I could handle, short of being in flight. I hoped to challenge folks, in a metaphorical sense, to take time to see the world in as many ways as they can.

Michael Meske Sr., “Mobius Strip”

I love to work with metal, and decided to challenge myself to complete a difficult design. This mobius strip was created without the use of heat or rollers. I wanted to show a sculpture with balance and depth, yet able to show the various angles of the piece when rotated.

Melissa Mitchell, “Clothesline”

By creating this triptych, I intend to portray the use of the clothesline throughout the years and the weather it has endured. The colors of rust and dirt give a richness and bold quality to the texture of this picture. I also convey the element of line and shallow depth of field.

Mark C. Moore, “Carson’s Triumph”

I created this piece for my welded sculpture class to capture the free spirit of my young grandson.

Margherita Nicotra, “Mystical Nature”

I was inspired by artwork and colorful fabric from India. They make use of ceremonial symbols also used in henna tattoos. I tried to create a cohesive composition that is bright and colorful while conveying a sense of spirituality, all elements of the Indian culture.

Tara Omnes, “Loves Me Not”

I love the cyanotype process and did a series of floral prints; this one is my personal favorite. I wanted to convey an old-fashioned feel with the nostalgic blues of cyanotype and a daisy having its petals plucked.

Janet Peavey, “Swallows the Creative Builder”

I find swallows artistic and practical builders. I’ve always admired their nest construction. With this sculpture, I tried to convey the swallows’ creativity and community.

Paul E. Peloquin, “A Pine Board”

This image is a study in transparency, telling the life story of a wooden board from its harvest as a log in the forest to its construction as a fence.

Paul E. Peloquin, “Fort Stevens Call Box”

Although the Fort dates back to the American Civil War, new

equipment like the call box appeared as technology advanced during the facility’s active years. The call box symbolizes the isolation and loneliness of a soldier stationed there.

Paul E. Peloquin, “Fort Stevens Corridor”

By changing the image from full color to black and white, I attempted to capture the age of Fort Stevens. The unbroken history of the site dates back to the American Civil War.

Paul E. Peloquin, “Fort Stevens Powder Magazine”

I hoped to capture the ominous and threatening appearance of what constitutes the heart and soul of a coastal battery and military installation. This image captures a sense of history.

Brenda Pereboom, “Ladybug Ceramic Set”

I was asked to create a three piece set, so I did. Nothing in particular was actually meant to be conveyed.

Michelle C. Raymond, “Tiger Tiger”

I created this work as a way to express my love for tigers. I wanted to show them as beautiful animals instead of fierce predators.

Rebecca Rodela, “Wishy Washy”

I created a small collage using magazine clipping; then, I blew it up to a larger scale and transferred it to watercolor. I found this project really challenging, because I was working in a medium in which I wasn’t a hundred percent comfortable. I had fun experimenting with technique, and I definitely feel I’ve found another media to pursue.

Katelyn Marie Spangler, “Inked Wasteland”

I created this by playing with cross-hatching. It is intended to convey a wasteland.

Gwendolyn Stickney, “Eve de Guerre”

I felt like designing something steampunk. Eve is a character I created, but that’s a story for another day.

Brian M. Sutherland, “Stone Woman”

This is an abstraction of a female figure. I experimented with using Venetian plaster as a medium to push the boundaries between art and craft. I wanted to capture the beauty and elegance of the female form as a symbol.

Kevin Smith, “Mucus”

I created an organic molecular galactic expansion, portraying

elements of liquid, solid, gas, line, form, depth and texture.

Kevin Smith, “Portal”

I created this piece on the journey to understanding composition, compatibility, and design in mixed media application. I began from a single dimensional point expanding outward to expose the grandeur of the living portal.

Laren Swyer, “Horse and Rider on Covered Bridge”

I wanted to show good contrast between light and dark, while conveying the quiet solitude of a ride through the country.

Jerry Max Taylor, “Strings in Pieces”

I made this still life for my brother, who is a multi-talented music artist. I painted the many different dimensions that make him great.

Octavia Tetreault, “Some Kind of Story”

I created this work while experimenting with a simple toy camera. To me, multiple exposures create a story of sorts: many images combine to create one bigger picture/story. From there, the story of each image is further imagined by the viewer.

Octavia Tetreault “Untitled”

I wanted to convey the strange dream-like feelings of something very common. My hope is that seeing an image of something familiar, but altered somehow, can change our perception of what is possible.

Chau Truong, “Page 15, Page 19, Page 20, Page 29”

This is the story of a man who found all his lost words, but “T.” Those were kept by one’s shadow.

Isabella Valderrama, “The Mural of Life”

This photo is from my travels in Columbia. I wanted to capture a small glimpse of what life is like in the most poor “comunas,” or neighborhoods of a city. This particular comuna used to be the most dangerous in all of Latin America. The colors of these homes are what captured my attention. They give the neighborhood life.

Emily Waters, “Plastic Pain”

I created this work in response to hearing about the “plastic continent” in the Pacific Ocean: a huge body of floating plastic larger than Texas. I intended to convey the harm that we do, not only to ourselves, but to marine life, by allowing our dependence on plastic to choke our environment.

Alyssa Willard, “Persian Coil Pot”

Our assignment was to make a coil pot inspired by history. I made mine in a Persian style, and decorated it with Farsi writing.

Alyssa Willard, “Picasso Remake”

This piece was created as part of an assignment to research an artist and make a piece inspired by that artist.

Ryan L. Williams, “The Fall Collection”

Designing apparel feeds my soul. I am intrigued by manipulation in design and the creative process of thinking three dimensionally. I think this collection conveys who I am to the world.

Jeremy Winkler, “Braided Sterling Silver Ring”

This piece was created using the lost wax casting method. I wanted to create a simple ring with visual appeal, intending the braiding to show depth and create interest without light.

Jeremy Winkler, “Sterling Silver Oak Leaf Ring

Using a half-inch wide sheet of sterling silver, I created this piece to represent my ancestry visually.

John H. Wirth, “Pod IV, Patina Series”

Previously, I did this lentil form in wood. My personal challenge has been to create the same form in copper and further explore the vast realm of patination. The use of copper in this pod form opened up vast areas of exploration previously unavailable to me in the wooden pod forms.

Eric J. Zuaro “Mysterious Vessel (Lights Up)”

A symbolically confusing juxtaposition of visual metaphors makes this piece interesting without being overly complicated. At first glance, one might read one thing, but upon further contemplation, questions may be raised.

Eric J. Zuaro, “Spirits of the Mountain”

The wooden round holds the whole piece up physically and metaphorically. I found the round in the Columbia River, and it was obvious to me that it had traveled quite a distance through some rough places before I rescued it.

PERMIT STAFF

GLOPHON