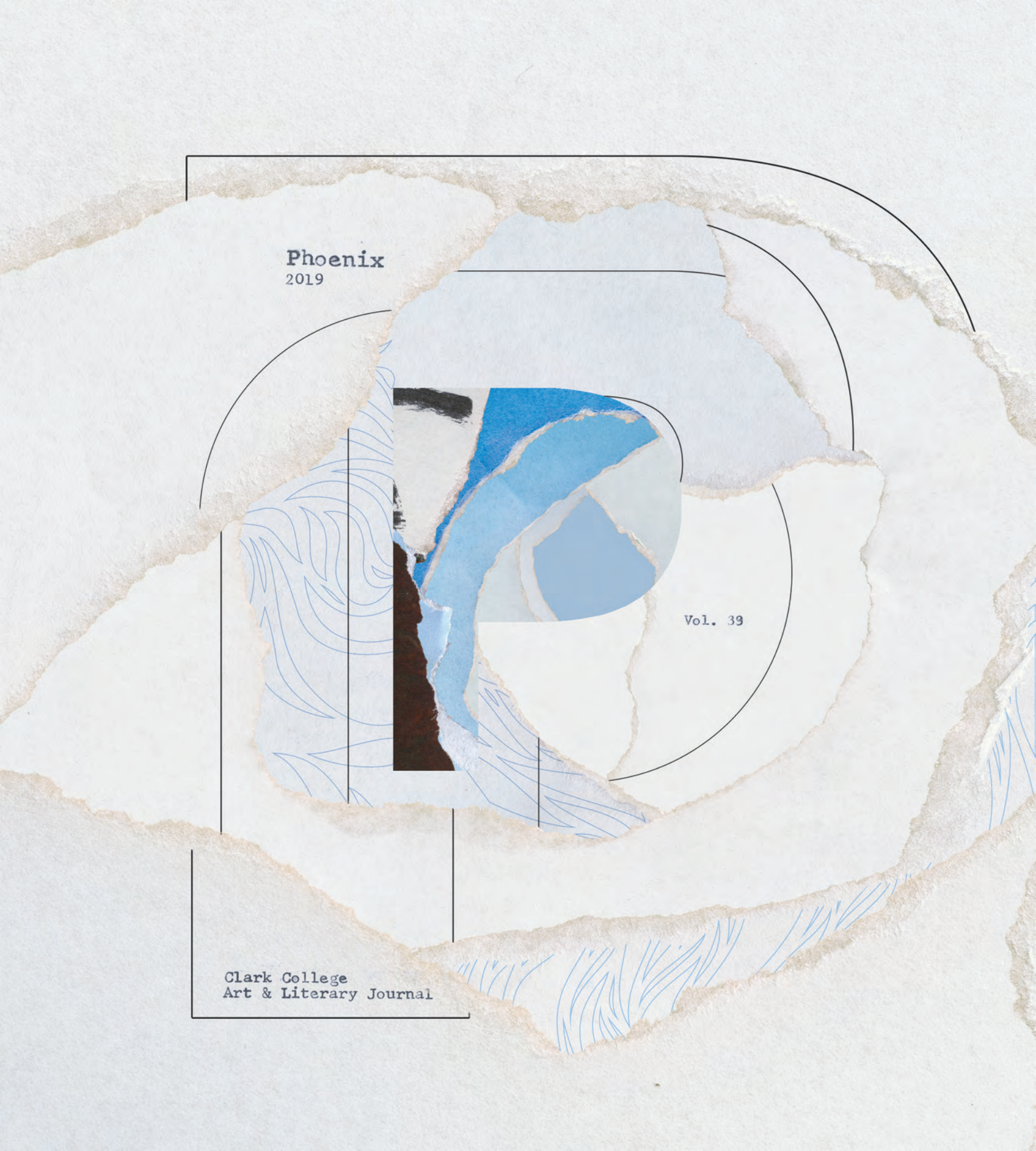


Phoenix  
2019

Vol. 39

Clark College  
Art & Literary Journal



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Clark College  
Art & Literary  
Journal

2019

**Phoenix**

Volume 39



## About the Phoenix

*Phoenix* is published annually by the Associated Students of Clark College in collaboration with the Art and English Departments. All contributors, editors, and volunteers are members of the Clark College community. Anyone who is a student, alumni, or faculty/staff member in the year of publication is eligible to submit work for possible inclusion.

Submissions are chosen through a blind process by a selection committee composed of students, faculty, and *Phoenix* staff.

## How to Submit

We are searching for thought-provoking poems, works of fiction and creative non-fiction, original music, and visual art by Clark students, staff, faculty and alumni that resonate with us as readers, writers, listeners and viewers. Submissions are accepted year-round through the online submission system, Submittable. Submit online at:  
[clarkphoenix.com/submit](http://clarkphoenix.com/submit)

## Acknowledgements

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The entire staff would like to thank President Bob Knight, Brenda Shular, Lisa Hasart, Darci Feider, Samantha Lelo, Sarah Gruhler and the ASCC Finance Committee.

Send inquiries to:  
Associated Students of Clark College  
1933 Fort Vancouver Way  
Vancouver, WA 98683  
fax: 360-992-2828  
email: [phoenix@clark.edu](mailto:phoenix@clark.edu)  
web: [www.clarkphoenix.com](http://www.clarkphoenix.com)

*Phoenix* is a non-profit publication paid for through student activity fees for the sole benefit of Clark students. It is distributed on campus free of charge. It is not available for purchase.

## Editors' Statement

From early on in the process of creating this year's edition of *Phoenix*, the art and literary staffs collaborated on the idea of *depth*. The further we discussed it, the richer the idea became, with so many great ideas emerging from this one word—the soul, deep emotion, colorful art, and dark stories. All of these came together into the feeling we strove to capture, which is represented by the cover. Designed by Victoria Gutierrez, the cover displays lightly colored photographs that overlap, photographs that are torn away, leaving parts of their whole self. This cover is contrasted by the colorful inner photo that peaks out through the cutout "P." The two designs show the depth of the journal and the different emotions—both bleak and lively—that are reflective of the art and literature in this year's *Phoenix*. The cutout "P" symbolizes looking beyond the surface into the depths of the journal, drawing the readers in, allowing them to peer into the depths of the lives of the artists and the writers, peeling back the layers one bit at a time with each turn of the page, experiencing the parts of the whole.

When deciding on a theme, we looked carefully at the pieces of literature and art for inspiration. Consider "Ashes," a work of fiction about two siblings struggling with each other and themselves, their personal demons coming to the surface while they struggle to connect with each other. The poem "Exiting I-5" depicts a man who sees himself reflected in the face of a homeless veteran, held in the space of a single red light. The collection "SELF" shows a series of seemingly ordinary objects that bring forth countless implications about the artist's life and the effects of mental health. Many pieces, in one way or another, showcase depth.

For this year's interview, we met with Gina Ochsner, an Oregon fiction writer fascinated by the uncanny and magical and the ability of characters to dive into their own depths and transform beyond their expectations. Through her writing, she has been able to explore places and people who might have been otherwise difficult to access. Focusing her stories on these subjects, she aims to create an environment of the unconventional, the uncomfortable, and the unexplored. *The Necessary Grace to Fall* won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, and her writing has won numerous other awards as well.

In our 39th year of publication, *Phoenix* is still going strong. We received over three hundred art, music and literary submissions this year. One thing is certain to those among the staff: It was a thrill to see the depth of emotion put into each piece and the creativity of those here at Clark. We really have a diverse and talented group of students and alumni that make up a true community of authors and artists.

The *Phoenix* Editors

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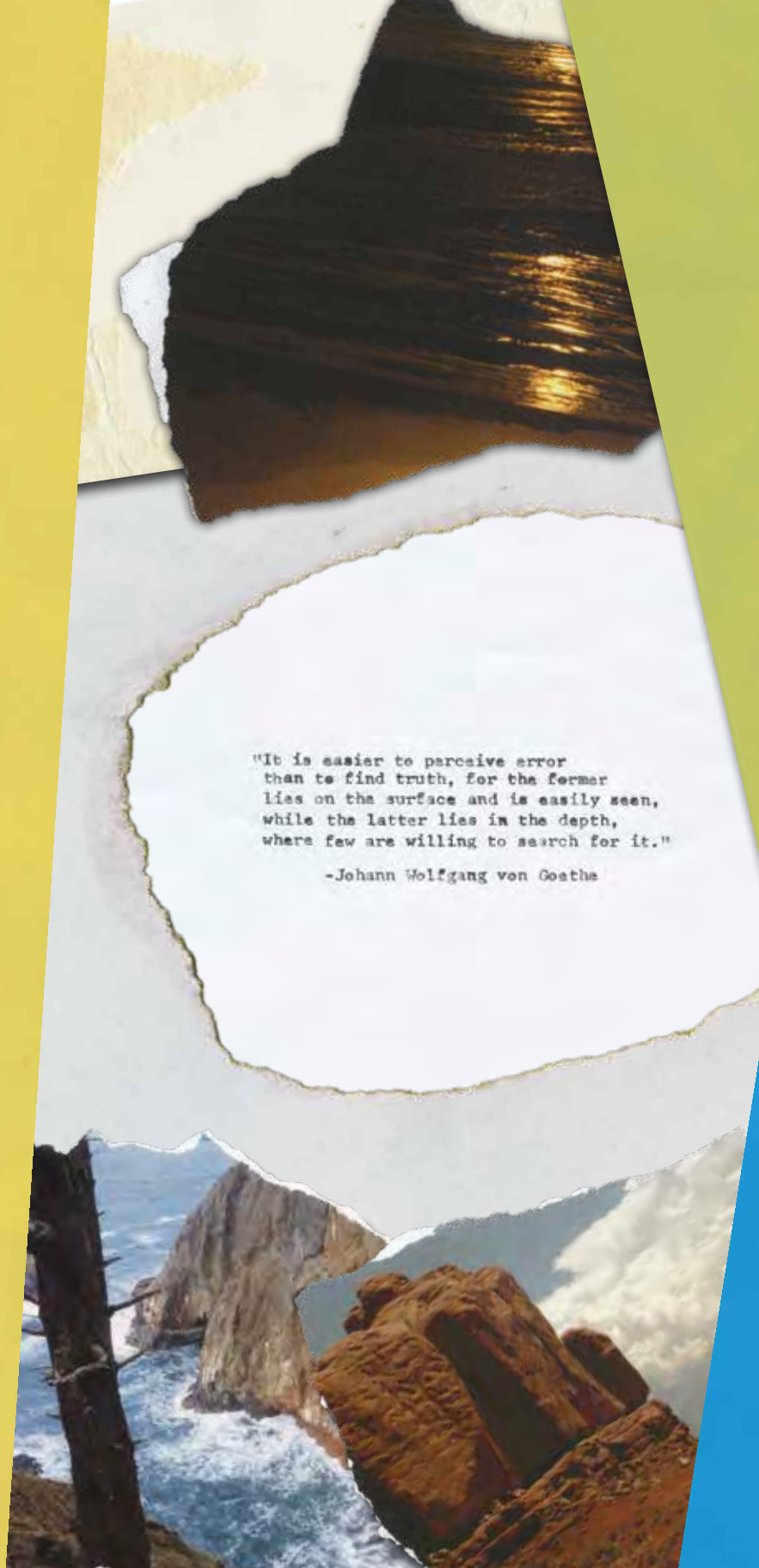
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Untamed | Olivia Gagnon | Ink on Paper

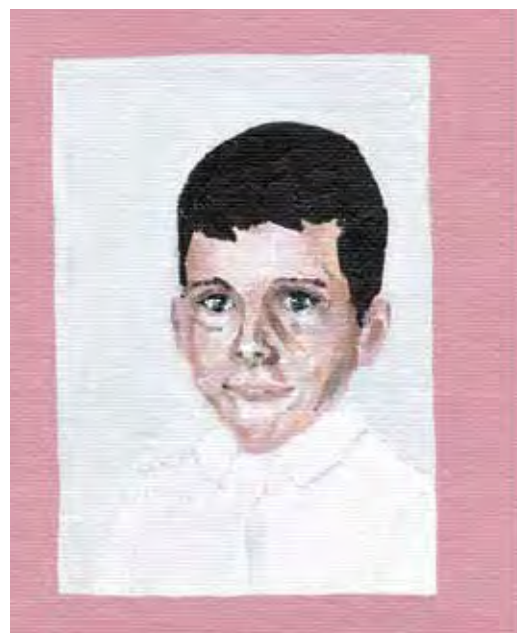
## After the Mermaid Sings

By Martin Middlewood

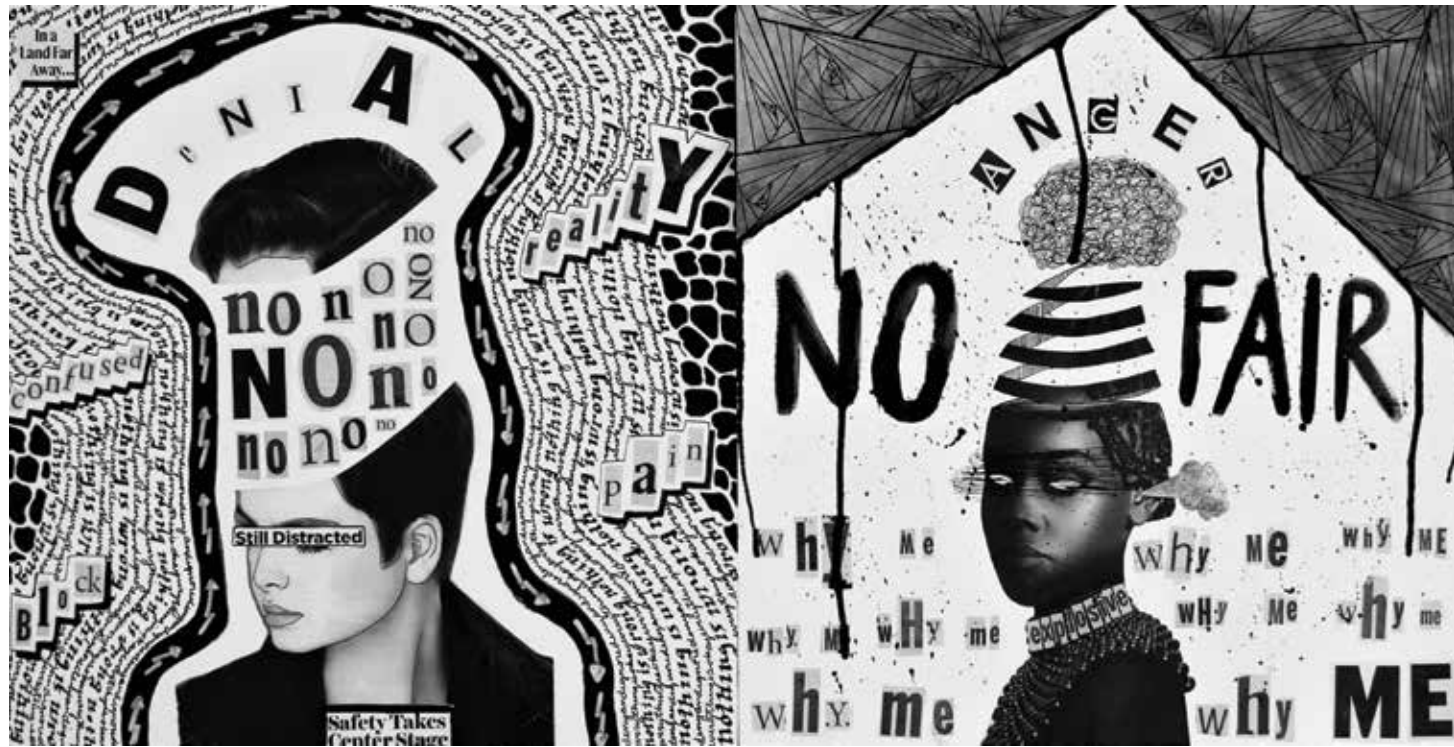
When I am Alzheimer's old  
Confused and twisting in the wind  
Will I remember that seed  
Of you I hold  
Deep in my heart  
Near the aortic valve  
Will I recall how the touch  
Of your finger  
On the back of my hand  
Was like sex  
Or that the smell of garlic  
On your breath opened  
A garden of delight  
Blossoming across my nervous system  
Or that your laugh echoed  
Down my aural canals  
Vibrating not just my tympanum  
But my soul  
Or how the salt taste  
Of sweat on your neck  
Rolled across my tongue  
Like ocean waves  
Drowning me  
Or will I sit  
Watching ESPN  
Flash across my Swiss cheese  
Cerebral cortex stealing  
My memory of you  
Making me tortured  
Trying to recall your face  
As you smile on me  
I greet you like a stranger  
Deep in me sprouts  
That déjà vu of you  
And I rolling in the sand  
Laughing in gritty wet bodies  
While the sea crashed over us  
Caressing our skin  
Swallowing us  
Like a green light  
Or will some vagueness of you  
Haunt my memory fading  
Like a rabbit's tracks  
In the snow  
On a warm winter day  
Making me puzzle out  
Some abstraction of you  
Now the rubric  
Of a name  
I no longer recall



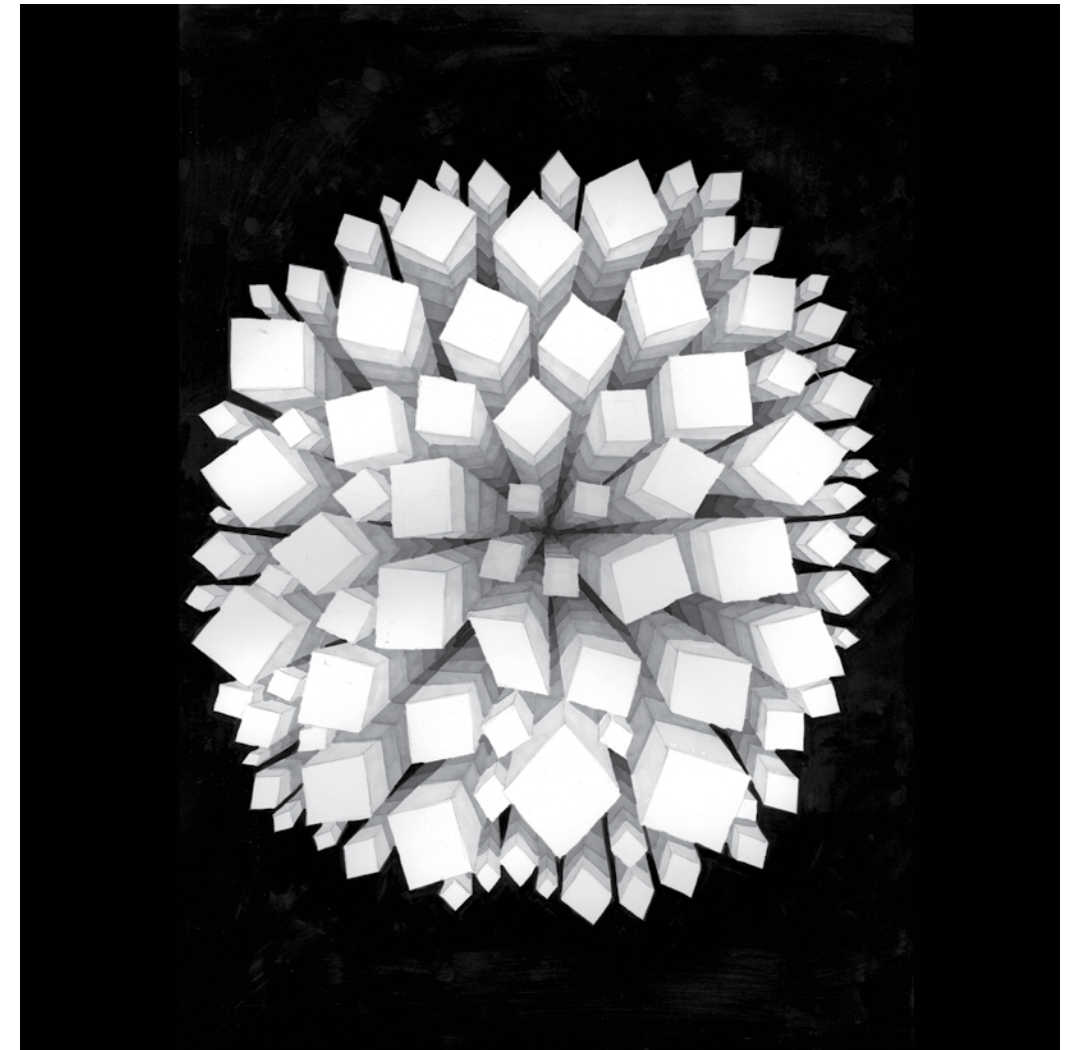
**Dad** | Katie Hyland | *Arylic on Canvas*



**Last Day at the Overlook and Mom and Charlee**  
Ian Beckett | *Silver Gelatin Prints*



Stages of Grief | Brooke A. Nugent | Mixed Media on Paper



Illusion of Space | Molly Gustofson | Ink on Paper

# Rattle

By Samantha Bunch

Cybil isn't morbid. That would imply that she's obsessed with death—if anything it's the opposite. She's fascinated by the way things live, the particular struggles that are both imposed and overcome by selection.

Birds' eyes are almost completely enveloped in bone because they have no need to orient their eyes inside of their skull. Instead, birds twist their heads in the direction they want to see; it's why they jerk their dorky little heads around so much.

When looking to the sky, Cybil can't help but see complex patterns of bones cutting their way through the air and landing gracefully on the black wires that lazily cling from pole to pole. The bird proceeds to flit several times, pip left twice, then right once—as birds often do.

Then the shot rings out.

It would normally be commonplace. Beatty is the sort of town to plaster sentiments about the Second Amendment on their lawns, cars, and baby onesies; however, as this shot ends, the elegant, black mass falls from its roost and smacks the dirt with a sound of dead weight.

Cybil's dad stands on the porch with a rifle perched between both hands.

When she asks why he shot the bird her dad shrugs. "I just did." It's the sort of non-answer she's received for the last eighteen years.

It's later in the evening that she chooses to admire the body of the dead crow. The sun rises in the mountains, but that's not where it returns. When the sun sets in Beatty, the town looks apocalyptic: the way it touches down on the eternity of flat ground and falls away makes her stomach drop to the floor of her pelvis. If she believed in God, she'd fall to her knees and pray at the sight of it. Instead, she's on her knees looking down at a thing she used to look up to. The skull was fragmented, the bullet ran right through the lower beak and out the left socket. Without a skull, she decides it's a bad candidate for articulation, and she already has enough miscellaneous bones floating around her room that a random disassembled crow would likely be of inconvenience.

She doesn't realize she's running her fingers over her old scar, a regular tick of hers. The puckered star just beneath her right clavicle does not have a similar exit wound. The bullet is still lodged in her shoulder. The .22 rattled around inside her, landing near her subclavian blood vessel. No reason to remove it and chance a clot.

She didn't hear it when it hit her, but she felt it. First, just a terrible pinch, but when her hand instinctively clutched her chest, it came back bloody. It was a sight she was used to seeing when it wasn't her blood. The thin coat coagulated so quickly and molded to the tips of her fingers, almost as if it was always supposed to have been there.

Her father was shouting. She turned to face him; he'd already run halfway from the vantage point on the hillside to the patch of tall grass she'd been waiting in. When he reached her, he crouched down on both knees, initially holding either shoulder then hugging her to his chest. He said it was just dumb chance. He said he was sorry. He couldn't stop saying he was sorry. His breathing was heavy and the words came out unevenly so that the same phrase sounded a little different each time. She had to remind him that she was going to have to go to the hospital.

In the back seat of the Cherokee, it was hard for her to focus on anything other than the pain radiating through the soft tissues in her shoulder. Each of her breaths shuddered on its way out as she listed state capitals--starting with Nevada and spreading in all directions from there. She got to Iowa before her dad hit a pothole.

"Fuck!"

"Cybil? Cybil? Are you holding up?"

"Mmhmm."

"I'm so sorry baby, everything's going to be—"

"Mmhmm."

"It's okay; we're there. We're right there."

As he parked, she listed to herself the bones in her body starting with her right clavicle and working her way out to the peripherals. He pulled her out of the car, carrying her in both arms, and walked her through the sliding doors of the hospital. Upon entrance, he yelled that he was holding a bleeding girl, and she needed help. He sounded much more concerned than he had in the car. The panic in his voice reminded her of her mom's final night.

Cybil is still fixated on the crow splayed into the dirt. Only a few moments have passed, but standing alongside the infinity of desert and sun makes it seem as though time is pressing itself deep into her skin. She looks out to the horizon and makes note of the lone Joshua tree her mom loved. The woman loved this whole damn desert, and now she's a part of it. The dirt never stops looking like ash to Cybil. It would be nice to live someplace where the dirt looks like dirt, and the air actually moves and bumper stickers say dumb things about coexisting instead of dumb things about shooting people, and pretty birds didn't get shot for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Someday, she thinks, she's going to be nothing more than a pile of bones and a single piece of lead.

She remembered when she was put under for surgery and how the little plastic cup pressed itself into her face. She was fading and keenly aware of it, but less aware of the possibility of waking up. The sensation inspired images of her mom: blue-faced, eyes rolling back, jerking, and then a sudden calm.

Quiet tears pooled down the sharp corners of Cybil's eyes, "I don't want to—" and like that, she was already gone.

He said it was just dumb chance. He said he was sorry.



Post-surgery, the first thing she remembered is seeing her father leaning into a cheap vinyl chair. The extra flesh on his cheeks appeared to melt over the fist he was using to prop himself up. Trance-like, he stared at the muted TV hanging on the wall, admiring the way the rolling closed captions methodically replaced one another. He wasn't asleep, but it was hard to imagine he was really awake.

She's going to be nothing more than a pile of bones and a single piece of lead.

Before she collected herself to say something to him, he beat her to the punch.

"I'm beginning to think this Dr. Oz guy is a bit of a quack. Thirteen health benefits from chia seeds? Not buying it." He looked at her with pale eyes and smiled, which only made him appear more exhausted. "How're you holding up, kiddo?"

"Kinda shit."

"But all right for being shot?"

"But all right for being shot."

"Listen—"

"It's fine. I'm fine. Shit happens."

"No. If I'd lost yo—"

"You didn't."

"I'd've done myself in."

"Why wou—" She hangs her head for just a moment. "Dad."

"I didn't mean it."

The two were suddenly engrossed in whatever it was the captions might've been saying.

After spreading her mother's ashes, she asked if he believed in God. He met her with silence. When he posed the same question, she met him with the same answer.

An atheist's empty sky threatens to crash down more fiercely than any floor of heaven.

It was later that same night, both drinking and telling stories about her mom. She wasn't quite old enough to drink, but most people around here drank young; not much else to do. The stories started sweet. Her dad told her that when the two of them got married, her mom walked down the aisle barefoot and wore a daisy chain around her neck. Cybil told him of the time she read *Where the Red Fern Grows* to her and made some minor edits to the end: the dogs lived and it turned out the boy could live with his family and the dogs after all, because God hates to see a family split apart, dogs included. Until recently, the title never made a whole lot of sense to her.

After that there was an edge to the stories, about how a whole room of people could love her and she'd still be completely alone. Her dad blamed the drugs. Cybil blamed the entire way her mom was. She also blamed Beatty, but she

doesn't tell him that; he loved this whole ugly place, just like her mom did.


That's about the time when she asked if he thought people get to live again. He told her, "I don't believe there's ever been a liquor heavier than the air that replaced it."

"What's that even mean?"

"Not answering you is an answer." She still can't tell if he was being thoughtful or if they were both just impeccably drunk.

The hollow way the crow rests in the dirt might be the thing Cybil resents most about this desert. Apathy is inevitable when there's so much emptiness around them; there's real rot here, and it doesn't mean a damn thing when it's swallowed up in an eternity of nothing. She chooses to leave the body just as it is and let the scavengers that dwell in the waste do what they do.

Inside, her dad is sleeping on the couch, passed out while watching the TV sift through its collection of violently bright colors. He opted to sleep in the warm glow of Snuggie commercials instead of the queen bed he no longer shares. Cybil takes the loveseat adjacent to him and wonders if he'll look the same when she's gone. As of now, he still cooks for the two of them; would he still take care of himself without her? It isn't a pressing issue yet, but the thought of her dad wandering through a house created for three makes something inside her pinch terribly. Even so, leaving can no longer be a question.

Before getting herself to bed, she chooses to leave his sleeping body as it is, letting him do what he does. 



Remembrance: Yellow Dahlia and Purple Dahlia | Deanna Shaw | Oil on Wood Panel



Phyllis | Lexi Dufault | Silver Gelatin Print



**Enlightened** | Stephanie Bowen | Ceramic



**Eye of the Beholder** | Jaycee Ritola | Graphite and Acrylic on Paper

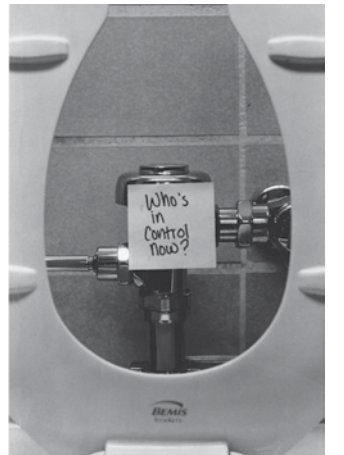
# A Machine

By Rita Maksimenko

There is this lonely gal,  
A close friend of mine.  
I don't understand her need  
Or how much she expects.  
I feed her eyes with Insta pics.  
I feed her ears with wordy lyrics.  
I feed her soul with teased romantics,  
But that isn't enough.  
I give her screens filled with action & love.  
I give her screens filled with emotions & life.  
I give her screens that show reality.  
I give her screens that show the present, future, past,  
But that isn't enough.  
It is never enough.  
She craves comfort  
From my tiny mega chip.  
She demands my attention,  
And I know I must submit.  
This girl who holds me now,  
She doesn't realize something:  
I am just a computer, an AI.  
I can not replace human connection.  
I can sing and play music.  
I can be a joyful host,  
But that is all but a fad.  
I have no emotion in my metals.  
I have no heart in my motherboard.  
I have no hope in my RAM.  
I have no love behind the lens that watches.  
I have no connection to offer from my servers.  
I have no friendship to link her and me,  
For I am but a piece of hardware.  
A Machine.



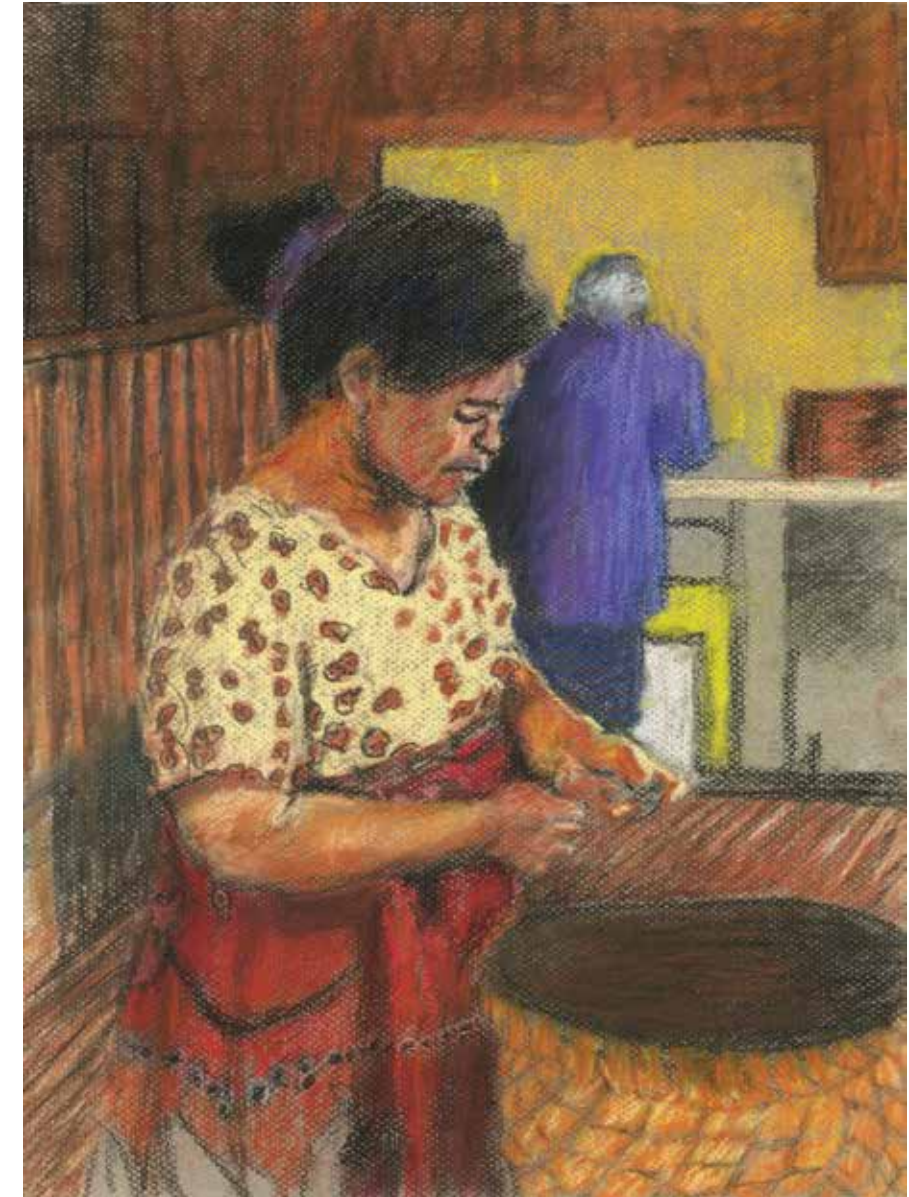
HI-83 to Paradise | Zachary L. Warnke | Silver Gelatin Print



Who's in Control Now? | Austin Collins | Silver Gelatin Prints and Color Slide Film



**Sapphic Love** | Stevie Hale | *Charcoal and Pastel on Paper*



**Cooking in the Kitchen** | Don Andersen | *Charcoal and Pastel on Paper*

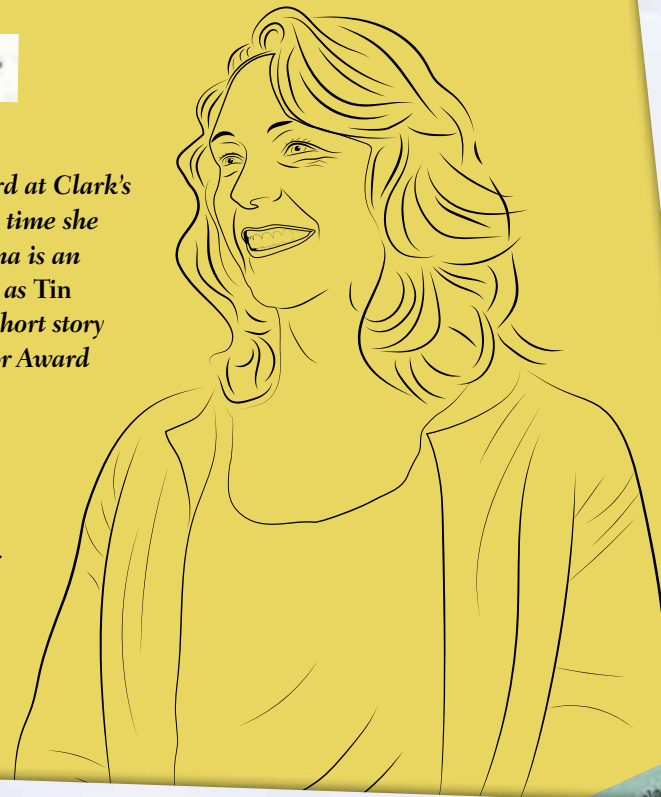
## The Strange, the Divine, and the Paranormal:

### An Interview with Gina Ochsner

By Eily McIlvain

*Several years ago, Gina Ochsner won the first place short story award at Clark's annual literary conference, which turned out to be far from the last time she would be published, and far from the last award she would win. Gina is an accomplished writer, whose work now appears in publications such as Tin House, The New Yorker, Glimmer Train, and Kenyon Review. Her short story collection, The Necessary Grace to Fall won the Flannery O'Connor Award in 2002, as well as the Oregon Book Award. Her next collection, People I Wanted to Be, also received the Oregon Book Award. She is well-known for her keen depictions of humanity and her diverse range of characters and settings.*

*I met Gina in a loud coffeehouse in Wilsonville, Oregon. Neither of us recognized the other at first sight but both knew a writer when we saw one. What follows is a conversation about magical realism, ghost stories, language, lightning strikes, and getting to know people who aren't real.*



the divine, the paranormal--that's the normal for their world. The two worlds aren't separated; they're just kind of seamlessly overlapping. I've had wonderful opportunities to hear a lot of stories and to hear their stories told in a different way than my Western ear is used to hearing. Like, it was really interesting to go to southern Bulgaria and hear that it still is the common practice to sell girls at 13 years of age and to exchange money with the groom's family—at a bride market. I thought I knew what that would look like and came in there with this Western idea of “oh, this is awful,” but really, it was about honor within the family, honor within the society, and the money was just for show. The girls themselves really looked forward to going to this event. I was all prepared to get real mad at these fathers, selling their daughters, but it's really kind of like a place-marker arrangement between families, one that will last for generations. So, sometimes during the writing process my own assumptions are challenged and that's part of the discovery.

**McIlvain:** Oh, well that's fun.

**Ochsner:** It's been fun to write! Well, obviously I wouldn't do it if it weren't so much fun. And when I'm working with students I tell them, “Play—I'm gonna play, and you should too. This should be fun. If it's not fun, then stop and do something fun and then come back to it when it's fresh.” The worst thing to do is turn it into a chore. A love of writing starts with the love of hearing a story told and hearing it told well—Ursula Le Guin talks about this, that it all starts with a love of words, it starts with a love of the sound of words and the love of playing with the sound of words. If you love to do that, then you can have a really rotten day writing, but you'll make it. You'll still be a writer.

**McIlvain:** You travel to some really different places. Do you typically learn the languages?

**Ochsner:** I try. It's very important for me to understand some of the grammatical structure of the language, because grammar mirrors the culture. In Russian, the forms used to express how one feels are passive. These things are happening to me; I don't own it. English is narcissistic in some ways. When someone explained to me the importance of

using their word for “to get to,” I said, “Why don't you use the equivalent of, “I'm going to go?” Why are you using “to get there?” And he said, you use this because there is an ambivalence couched in the verb, sort of a “God willing—the tram's still running, I don't get hit by a snowplow—I will get there.” I'll have a real challenge with the Roma novel because I don't have someone I can ask directly. A lot of it will have to be done in English, and then I'm losing lots in translation; the sense of it, the deep sense of what something means.

**McIlvain:** Can you talk about your writing process some? How has it changed since you started. I assume it must have changed some—?

**Ochsner:** No, actually. Not really. I'll show you my process. [Pulling out papers from bag and wallet]. Generally I start with some very small ideas, so small I can fit them on Post-it notes. This is the start of the short stories. Everything starts out handwritten. If I get really fancy, I'll start making maps. So, step one is getting coffee; that's always step one. Then step two is to draw.

**McIlvain:** You're an artist?

**Ochsner:** Not really! But I'll draw. The idea is to get the one half of the brain warmed up. Oh! And this here is a piece of sicco bark [holding the bark out]. That's gonna show up in a story.

**McIlvain:** Thank you so much for that. I know sometimes those things can be personal.

**Ochsner:** Well, my social security number isn't there so, not too personal. Then what will happen is I'll take this to a whiteboard, and I'll start typing it into my computer and start moving chunks around. I'll print it out, cut it out, and start moving it around.

**McIlvain:** You're very hands-on.

**Ochsner:** And I'm really visual. I have to see how stuff is going to fit together, and the problem with the computer screen is you can only see so much. But my kitchen table is way wider; I can get almost a whole short story out. Then

**Eily McIlvain:** What are you working on now?

**Gina Ochsner:** I've got two projects that are going at the same time, which is how I do a lot of stuff. I've usually got two, three, four things at the same time which is because sometimes one will sort of stall out, so I'll just let that one stall and work on something else and come back to it later. I have a short story collection, and I call them “the creepy stories” and they're all set in Oregon and southwest Washington. Some of them involve watery creatures that like to drag people down to the bottom of the sea. Some of them involve ghosts. Some of them involve the selkie mythology. Just this idea of people—and particularly young adult people—in transformation. As their bodies are transforming, they're discovering they are much stronger than they think, smarter than they think, more capable than they think, and

they really can navigate the adult world. And I think young people need to really know that. The other project is the result of about ten years of research in Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Latvia, and Bulgaria.

**McIlvain:** Is this about the Roma?

**Ochsner:** Yeah, this is the Roma stuff. It was just wildly fascinating, these different cultures. I went to a little Baptist church in this tiny town in Serbia and after the sermon the pastor said to like all twenty people there, “Now, this nice lady has come all the way from America to hear your ghost stories! And I'm giving you permission to tell them. And if you've got a vampire story, you can tell that too.” And they all did. They've all had these encounters, weird, wacky, wild experiences. The world of the invisible, the strange,

I can see if there's any dominant imagery showing up. I'm really big on imagery and the sound of words. From there you can see what wants to go with what things and what things don't fit. Those things can go to a different story—I just hang onto the scraps. I've got piles of scraps. Some are years old.

**McIlvain:** Where do you store your scraps?

**Ochsner:** Most of them end up in things like this [referring to the folder next to us on the table] or shoeboxes. Around this time of year, I'll go through them. Because it's funny how memory works—sometimes I'll go through the boxes and see, "oh, I did end up using that" without even realizing it.

**McIlvain:** What keeps you writing on days when you'd rather give up?

**Ochsner:** Ah! I think it's the love of storytelling. Some days, you'll see something and you'll think, "I don't care if I'm having a crappy day, I gotta write that down." I was at Goodwill and the lady behind the counter said, to the other woman she was checking out, she said, "Now you have a mighty blessed day!" And then she said, "I am! I'm sober, I'm not in prison, and I have five dollars in my pocket!" I thought, that's it. That's a whole person's life there. You can build on that.

**McIlvain:** So how do you get to know your characters, especially if you're not writing based on people that you know?

**Ochsner:** I read a lot of people who are from that area and writing in that area, and I look at the way they describe people. If I can't travel there, that's my second best thing. Watch the soap operas they're watching. Figure out the kind of people they're emulating. Look at how they dress, what they talk about, what jokes they tell. And that's how you get to the heart, that's how you start building characters.

**McIlvain:** So, you spend all this time reading and traveling, how do you know when the story gets to the point of gestation where you can actually begin?

**Ochsner:** Yeah, that's the question though isn't it? And I think that's when the characters start to have their own voice, and it's not my voice. It's them, and I can hear it. I can hear the difference in the sound of their voice and what they have to say. It isn't anything that I would have come up with on my own; it's not what I think, and I know it's them. So I'm working on a character and he's just started, maybe two weeks ago, and this is 1998 in Yugoslavia. He's watching a soap opera on a black market TV, and there's all these people in the room. They're watching a smuggled tape of Chuck Norris. If I can hear how these people in the room are talking to each other about what they're saying on the TV, then I know it's come to life. I've got a seat.

**McIlvain:** You were involved in some part at Clark College some number of years ago. Can you talk a little about that?

**Ochsner:** Oh, that was so exciting! And I was just, I think I was about 20 years old, and I was a new mom and I had been out of the writing program where I had finished up. This was my first story, and I sent it out and I was really nervous. We had been told in writing school, "Don't enter contests cause you'll just end up losing all your money!" So I thought, "I don't know, but it's local, it's within driving range." I had hoped to go to the conference—the winner got to go to the conference, and there was a prize. So I submitted the story, and it was very exciting and honestly, I can't remember if I got a note in the mail or a phone call, but that was a day in my life. It was such a shock to have someone—and not your mother, or a friend from writing school—say hey, we like this. It was a big deal to go up there.

**McIlvain:** What did you do at the conference?

**Ochsner:** It was a day long conference if I recall. I just remember taking notes and notes and, oh it just really fed me, and I was just so hungry to have that in my life. It was a big day! I think every writer has the moment where they hear from someone, not family, not friends, and it's that validation to keep writing. There is something worthwhile, so keep pursuing it. Then I think I came back, it might have been Gerald [Smith—English professor at Clark]; it might

have been someone else, who asked me a few years later if I wanted to come back and teach one of those sessions, and I did.

**McIlvain:** So you write magical realism. Do you consider yourself a magical realist?

**Ochsner:** Yeah I think I am. I think I can write realism, and I enjoy writing realism, but I have found that I find more liberty, more compaciousness, more...opportunity to be mischievous with magical realism. I get to tell more lies artfully, truthfully, and I can take more risks within that form.

**McIlvain:** What makes you call yourself a magical realist vs. an urban fantasy writer? Would you be as accepting of being called urban fantasy?

**Ochsner:** I think I would embrace urban fantasy, except that I live in the country, and so my people live in the country. Maybe I should ask you, when you use that term, what do you have in mind?

**McIlvain:** To differentiate the two, I would say that magical realism is when the magic is as an accepted part of the story and the world. Our characters tend to sort of already know that it's there, even though they can't always see it. Whereas urban fantasy usually hinges on people discovering that there is more to the world than they initially thought.

**Ochsner:** I like that word discovering. I like how you phrased that, discovering that there's more to the world than they knew, and I think that's what I want to do. So I could call myself an urban fantasy writer in that respect. I love it when a character does discover something. It's really cool when they discover something that I didn't even know they were going to discover. A discovery for both of us.

**McIlvain:** And that is an interesting concept to talk about, the idea of your characters having their own agency, discovering things on their own that you didn't plan for.

**Ochsner:** Oh gosh, you know, I think that this guy—just as we're talking—I think he's going to fall in love with one

of the characters on the soap opera, and that's going to change his life. And that's what keeps you writing: deep discovery. I want to keep discovering. I'm interested in pulling out the seams of things and making parachutes out of them, going somewhere else with that fairy tale.

**McIlvain:** Would you keep writing even if people stopped reading?

**Ochsner:** Oh my gosh yes, yes. Yes, absolutely, I don't think I could not write. It's like asking my lungs not to breathe.


**McIlvain:** I think it's sometimes important if you want to understand a writer as a writer, some people write for profit or they write for recognition and other people write because we have to.

**Ochsner:** We have to. And, if it were about recognition, gosh, we'd just like—

**McIlvain:** We'd wither up and die.

**Ochsner:** We'd wither up and die, cause there isn't a lot of it actually. It's a joy to talk to another writer, because most of the time we're in isolation. We're working in solitude. A writer works, by necessity, in solitude.

**McIlvain:** And it doesn't, I think, help. I think most of us are somewhat wacky people, that end up dismissed.

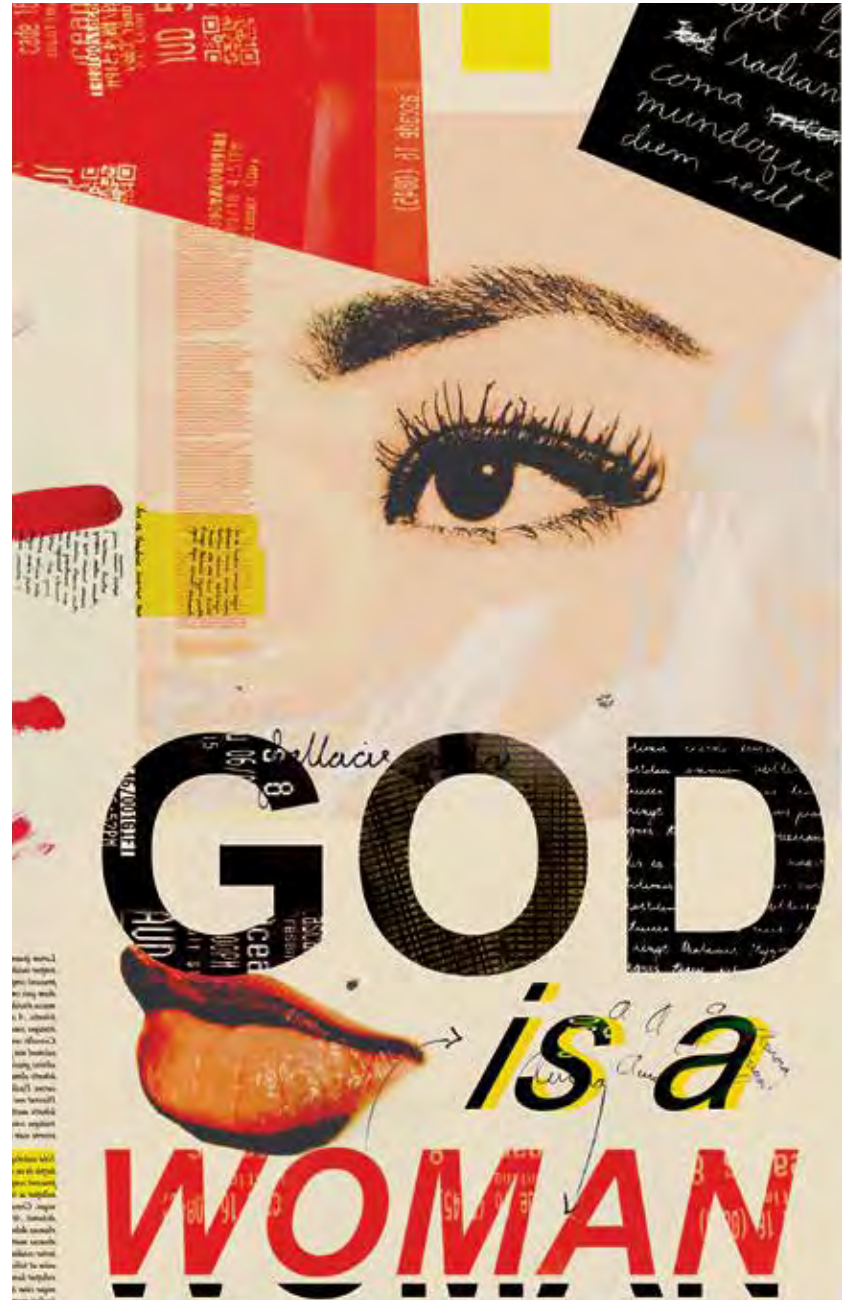
**Ochsner:** Well, my sister-in-law saw me one day downtown, kind of in a place like this, and I was just looking out, thinking about this soap opera, and then she called me up later and said "I saw you downtown," and I said "Oh really, what was I doing?" and she said "You were staring out the window like a crazy person, like a total moron. What were you doing?" I said "Oh, maybe I was working," and she laughed so hard, though really I was! That's just how writers work. I think writers are dismissed as the crazy dreamers. Don't we know that, in every society, we have to have crazy dreamers? 







Women Not Product | Hayley Estep | Digital Photography



god is a woman | Victoria Gutierrez | Digital Collage



Act or React: Anger, Fear/Anxiety and Sadness | Erick Martinez | Ceramic



# Instinct

By Eily McIlvain



Dream Cigarettes | Sarah Stewart | Digital Illustration

A year or two ago, a self-defense instructor accused Vivian of lacking a killer instinct. Wrestling on the mat, a tangle of sweaty limbs and loose white clothes, Vivian had finally flipped him. Her trembling arms held his in a tense Kimura lock.

“C’mon. Tap me out,” he choked to her. “You can do it.”

The sweat had cooled against the back of Vivian’s neck, and her eyes saw only the pale inner crease of his elbow, blue veins tracing just under the surface. For an instant, all she could see were her arms, so slight compared to his, slipping—pushing his shoulder just far enough to break. All she could hear was the sound of muscle and bone—the crack-rip, the deep pop.

She couldn’t risk it.

“What the hell is this?” her instructor had demanded as she let him up, without levering any more pressure against his arm. They stood together at the center of the mat, the rest of the class watching with wide eyes, silent and still. “Do you want to do this or not, Vivian? You’ve got to grow some kind of nerve. You got no killer instinct.”

Vivian, everyone called her, even though it wasn’t the name on her birth certificate. Just the name she had picked up and tried on after she began seeing Enzo.

The words on the tip of her tongue had been, *You have no idea*. She heard the echo of Enzo over her shoulder, *You’ll have to be tough. But you can do that, can’t you? I can see it, you’ve got a little fire in you.*

Vivian just walked out of the studio.

When Vivian first met Enzo, self defense had been acting. It had been the stage where she rehearsed the life that Enzo and his guys lived everyday, broken elbows, bloody noses, bone-deep bruises like spots of gangrene. Landing a kick fired her blood; the grunt of an opponent brought the sound of Enzo, whooping with savage pleasure. And pride. It was the pride that spurred her on.

There was none of that now. She had left all of that behind, the pride and the savagery. The only thing that was left was the instinct to survive, to escape, so deep and primal that in the early months, she would bolt awake in the night, collect her things from the motel or train station or airport, and move on without a backward glance. This alone kept her moving forward. Like a shark, to stop moving meant to stagnate and die. So far, she’d made it for seven months on her own. But she could still feel the teeth of Enzo’s dogs snapping at her heels.

In the little gaps in the days and nights where Vivian was idle, they always managed to sneak in. Seb’s smile, like a scythe across his face. Enzo’s hand sliding around the back of her neck, pulling her into him. His voice low in her ear, whispering a trick, the key to a con. *Just slip your hand there. Smile at him like that. Don’t blink too quickly.*

Every late-night noise in her broom-closet apartment was the thudding of his boots against the floor. Every voice on the street was his, calling her name.

If it had been painful to love Enzo, then he made sure it was excruciating to hide from him.

This morning, Vivian was up before even the cold winter sun. She made coffee and drank it while it was still almost-too-hot, until her tongue turned to sandpaper. She signed into her email—no cell phone anymore, too traceable—and saw that already the little red box over the envelope icon was showing double-digits. Nico, from the diner, had emailed her twelve times.

*Vivian, hoping you could pick up an extra shift tomorrow morning. Hit me back and let me know. - Nico*

This sent at 1:37 a.m. And then: *Vivian, we need you. Hit me back. - Nico*

And the most recent, just a few minutes ago: *Hit me back, Vivian.*

Nico's was her first job since she'd gone on the run, waitressing at a greasy diner in the heart of their busy city. Nico paid her under the table like he did for some of his illegal guys, and he was okay with not having a cell number for her on file. As long as Vivian was reliable, he didn't ask too many questions. He

probably assumed she was just some battered woman.

She tugged on her leggings and wrote back to Nico as briefly as she could.

*Just saw this. So sorry, on my way now. See you soon. - Vivian*

The city was still mostly sleeping when Vivian pulled into the cramped lot across from the diner. A few of the other shop owners moved lazily inside their own stores, silhouetted through windows and thin curtains.

The CLOSED sign still sat in the front window of Nico's, but the door was unlocked when Vivian tried it. The little bell jingled above her head.

The silence startled her.

No one was there. There was no humming from the coffee pots or rhythm of Nico's Sixties playlist from the radio. The lights were down low, the whole place cast into a bluish early-morning shadow. The little restaurant was longer in the dining area than it was wide, a row of six booths against one wall, the bar counter and its audience of squat little bar stools against the opposite. The counter obviously needed to be wiped, coffee staining it from the night before, which meant Nico had slacked on closing and hadn't been in yet this morning to catch up.

*Hit me back, Vivian. 6:03.* That would have been sent from the aging computer in the supply room Nico had commandeered for his office. He should have already wiped the coffee away, switched the radio on.

Over the course of her time with them, Vivian had watched plenty of Seb and Enzo's prey stroll into traps laid just under their feet, had seen when the wire was about to trip, the net coming down, the snare catching. Vivian had no

If it had been painful to love Enzo, then he made sure it was excruciating to hide from him.

intention of being snared. She spun and jerked the door back open, forcing her way out into the chilled air again.

At the threshold of the parking lot, she froze. Her car sat with its rear just higher than its nose, like a dog beginning to stretch, head and chest bowed. Both front tires shrugged, deflated, against the pavement. The bottom fell out of Vivian's stomach. An enormous wound gaped on each of the front tires, no attempt made to hide the intent.

Seb.

Vivian felt like screaming. Had they actually found her? Had Enzo taught her nothing?

The lock was still down on the driver's side. Seb hadn't been interested in anything inside.

What had she expected? Of course he would send Seb after her. No one else would pursue her so ruthlessly, aside from Enzo himself, who Vivian had never known to engage in work he could delegate to underlings. The others only tolerated Vivian as the fun thing Enzo played with. They answered to Enzo and so wouldn't touch her for that alone.

They hadn't seen the things that Enzo taught her, late at night when there was no one to overhear, his voice in her ear, hands guiding hers to soft tissue, vulnerable bone. They hadn't seen the things he'd taught her in the brisk way he moved, the precision of his violence. They had all been absorbed in the high: blood and cash and glory. She'd never been a threat to them.

But Seb, he had seen those things. He had been there, watching with slitted eyes, when Enzo leaned down to murmur to her, shaping her fingers around the grip of a knife. He had been standing in the velvet darkness while Vivian clutched Enzo's body to hers, their movements boiling the sheets around them, forming a night-time beast with two backs. He had not looked away when Vivian raised her eyes above Enzo's shoulder, his eyes glimmering with something dark that she couldn't identify. Seb had seen everything, and it had made his hatred hotter than she had known possible.

*You have a weak stomach and clean hands,* Seb sneered at her once, in the early days, when she turned away too soon from the game he was playing with a man that had found himself on the wrong side of Enzo's temper. There was a smear of red at Seb's temple where he had swiped at his face and, though she hated herself for it, she couldn't bring herself to look at him. *How does Enzo stomach it?* he asked her, and scrubbed another hand over his face, leaving behind a dark half-mask of scarlet.

Vivian clenched her nails into her palms and unlocked the rear passenger door. She slid into the seat.

Clasped beneath the backseat by a thin cord was a Glock 17. No frills, just sleek, economic. The 17 was Enzo's favorite, always had been. Vivian leaned

forward until her hand curved around the grip. Enzo had been the one to give it to her, his calloused hand reaching out to seize her wrist, pressing the weapon into her hand, mouth pressing against hers.

She wrenched the gun from under the seat with such force that the cord snapped.

She sat for a moment, staring with unseeing eyes at the gun. Vivian tried to prepare herself to face Seb again, her teeth clamped together. If he was here, Nico was already dead. Where Enzo was smooth, calculated, Seb was a flame-thrower. He could never wait.

Vivian got out of the car again. Grey clouds roiled in the sky, and wind whipped her hair against her face. She forced the gun into her waistband but didn't bother to pull her shirt over it. Seb would assume she was armed no matter what, but she didn't know what he would do if she held a gun to him immediately. She looked back towards the diner.

Seb would drag her back by the scruff of her neck, because she knew too much, had been too close. He would drag her back because Enzo wanted it, and he would punish her because he wanted it. And Enzo would let him, because she had forsaken both of them.

Vivian didn't lock the car when she left it behind.

She had once had a list of things she feared, and Seb had been at the top of it. She had known the fear of him as well as she knew the contours of her own face.

At the beginning, when a man with dark hair and an even darker smile sauntered into the restaurant where she had worked since she was a teenager, fear swept in right on his heels. It wore a coat just like Seb's, long and dark, with the sleeves rolled to the elbows. Vivian, a waitress with wide eyes, saw them both at the same time and they both saw her. They lounged together at a soft leather booth in the corner, a king and seneschal in a room filled with rich men who seemed puny by comparison.

Later, the man invited her over to his table, and told her that he would give her a good tip if she'd give him a kiss outside when her shift was over. It didn't have to be a nasty one, he assured her. Just a little kiss.

The fear watched over his shoulder with Seb's eyes, hungry and reflecting the light from the streetlamps. *You want more, don't you?* Enzo had said, lips a hairsbreadth from her own, her own eyes staring up at him as if in a dream.

*More of what?* she asked, voice hushed. He smiled like he couldn't wait to tell her, and a kind of supernatural dread sealed her windpipe.

*Of everything.*

Though Seb was only a silhouette leaned against a sleek black car then, Vivian had already learned to recognize his figure. He was never far from Enzo, no matter what the occasion. The devil and his hound.

The first time she had seen the delight in Seb's face as the butt of his gun burst

the flesh over a cheekbone, she had cast about to see if Enzo's face mirrored it back to her. Her stomach churned like a serpent writhing, but she had to see if this was another trick Seb had learned from his master. She found Enzo already grinning down at her.

That was the first time she saw what they were.

For a while, she adopted her own version of Seb's double-edged smile. She started wearing lipstick the color of damson. She learned to play the game. She let them teach her the tricks. That leashed the fear. Mostly.

In bed one night, under slick sheets, she asked Enzo, "How can you do all of this?" She had to swallow several times.

He'd waved a hand. "All of this"? The gore, you mean? Violence? Conning?"

She nodded, mute. His fingers lifted her chin, gentle, so that her eyes were forced to meet his. "Did you ever study the classics?" She shook her head.

He smiled at her, softly, as though he pitied her ignorance. "Because of eminence, acclamation. Glory." He released her chin. "If I cannot move Heaven," he said, "I shall raise Hell."

Everyone had to face their fears, she supposed. Vivian sucked in a lungful of cold air and went back to the diner. She pushed the door open. The little bell tinkled, like laughter. Her mouth was dry.

She swore her heart hardly beat.

She wasn't ready.

The whole world felt still.

Standing in the center of the restaurant between the bar and the booths, his hands tucked into his pockets, was Enzo.

No words came, and Vivian didn't reach for them. A lazy grin slanted across Enzo's mouth, showing canines and incisors, all white and glistening in the low light. He sighed, as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders at the sight of her.

"Viv," he said.

The whole world narrowed to only him. She couldn't speak, couldn't look away. Her fingers felt like clay where they clenched the gun in her waistband. "Vivian," he said again.

Vivian swallowed past the papery feeling in her throat. "It's you." The strength in her voice surprised even her. His grin curled up at the edges.

"I like the hair," he said. "A bob suits you."

"I did it myself."

Enzo chuckled. "I wish I could say the same for the clothes, on the other hand."

"What?" Vivian said, looking down at her long t-shirt, frayed a bit at the neckline. "You don't believe I made these, too?"

She had once had a list of things she feared, and Seb had been at the top of it.

Enzo's laugh was a bark this time. "You haven't lost the tongue, I see."

"Not even close."

He considered her. "So I didn't teach you nothing, after all," he said. "You've survived."

"If you had taught me anything useful, you never would have found me."

His expression deadened. "You left," he said, and his voice was flat. "You actually left."

Vivian almost laughed. "I actually left. And look how far I made it. Aren't you proud of me?"

For two years, they had been the knife and grindstone to each other, Enzo teaching her what would mold her into the best shape for him, what would make her fit most comfortably against his edges. He had never intended for her to use his lessons against him. "You know why I'm here, don't you?"

Vivian couldn't feel her fingertips. "I know. But it's not going to happen. I'm not coming back, Enzo."

Sweat from her palm slicked the grip of the gun. When she pulled it from her waistband, there was a horrible moment where she was sure she would drop it, but she didn't. She leveled it at him, barrel aiming just to the left of his sternum, like he'd taught her.

Enzo raised an eyebrow. She pulled the slide back.

"You should have let Seb kill me when he wanted to. I know he's thought about it."

Distantly, a low snicker drifted out from the furthest end of the diner. The employees-only door swung inward and a figure stepped out, a long black coat, sleeves rolled to the elbows. Vivian's heart beat like a kickdrum.

"Miss me, Viv?" The smile Seb gave her was wolfish. He carried his own gun casually, finger loose over the trigger, but kept it trained on Vivian. She looked back at Enzo. She couldn't help it. He had always been what stood between her and Seb. A Glock, the twin of hers, hung in his left hand, pointed without care at the black-and-white tiled floor.

She gave Seb the only smile she could manage, thin and wane.

"Lower the gun," Enzo commanded, but Vivian couldn't be sure who he meant. She nearly lowered hers out of habit. Enzo's hand tightened on the gun at his side.

"Seb," he said. "I will shoot you."

"Me?" Seb snorted. "Shoot your girl. This was stupid, bringing her into us, coming all the way out here after her. We're better off without her. We were better off before her." He said this to Enzo, but his eyes didn't leave Vivian. He started towards her, whether to grab her or kill her, Vivian didn't know. Without looking, Enzo smacked a hand against the other man's chest. Seb grabbed his wrist.

"You know better."

For several heartbeats, the two men stood together, each holding the other back, eyes on her. She was pinned by them. Written on their faces was the chronicle of seven months of abandonment, although Enzo shuttered his expression and Seb bared his teeth. Behind that, there was two years of violence, exhilaration, sex, and things shared that could never be unshared.

Seb lowered the gun until its nose pointed at his own feet. He still didn't look away. "It's a waste of time. She's not coming back." His voice was low and hoarse. His eyes burned, nearly black.

Enzo's voice turned coaxing now, the way it had the first night, when Vivian kissed him outside the restaurant. "Viv. Didn't you miss me?"

Her chest panged so hard she thought her heart would leap from behind her breastbone towards him. Vivian just stared at him, so many different words on the tip of her tongue. *Yes, every day, always and no, not ever. I love you and you are the devil.*

"I'm not coming back," she said again.

A knot of tension rose on Seb's jaw. "Like I said."

"I'm offering you a second chance," Enzo said, as though Seb hadn't spoken. "I'm offering you power. Us, this, all of it. Things can go back to the way they were. I'm offering you glory."

A dozen images rose up behind her eyes at once. Seb's mocking smile, face close to hers, the bloody smear still on his temple. Scarlet on cement. Birds wheeling in the sky, reflected in glassy, unseeing eyes. Enzo, chest heaving, tucking his 17 into the holster on his thigh, satisfied grin lifting the corners of his mouth when his eyes met hers. His face outlined in the dark of the bedroom that had never really been hers. Seb's face through the same darkness, standing apart instead of lying with them.

"I didn't have any power," she said, "and if that's glory, I don't want it."

"There's only with me or against me, Viv." Enzo spread his arms, as though crucified. "You know that."

Behind him, Seb pointed a gun of his own interlocked fingers at her. One eye dropped closed. Bang, he mouthed.

"I was with you for two years, Enzo. That's enough."

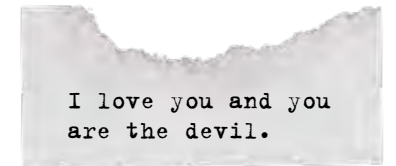
He shook his head, mouth twisted to one side. "Wrong."

"If I ever meant anything, don't do this. Let me have this. Leave me alone."

"Fuck this," Seb said, his voice was laced with disgust and something else, something final. "I'll do it."

"Seb—" Enzo began.

Vivian shot him—Seb. His mouth opened on a gasp that was also a curse. Eyebrows drew low, almost meeting over the bridge of the nose, stunned. A red stain blossomed against the grey of his shirt. It spilled out over the back of his hand, between his fingers.



His eyes jerked to Vivian's and the agony in them burned her. There was a sensation like her ribcage was crumpling.

"You bitch," he rasped. He coughed, a hacking wet sound, and red trickled from his mouth. He grabbed for one of the barstools to keep himself upright and his eyes found Enzo's. A long second passed and Enzo's face tightened. "This?" Seb coughed, showing red teeth. "This should be you." Another gurgling breath.

A high-pitched white noise filled Vivian's head. When it was Enzo or Seb holding the gun, no one went down like this. Vivian had never seen anyone fight it this hard. She couldn't look away, but she was desperate to. The gun felt foreign in her hand. She dropped it.

Enzo's eyes were locked on Seb. He slumped against the stool, cursing too low for either of them to hear. His body thumped to the linoleum.

Enzo crossed to him. He didn't say anything for several long minutes, standing over the corpse, hands again in the pockets of his slacks. His face was the solemn mask Vivian's father had worn after he led his best bird dog out into the yard and put him down, but his eyes were bottomless, and Vivian saw the tremble in his forearms.

So long he stood there that it might have been five minutes, or forever, and Vivian wouldn't have known the difference.

"You can go, Vivian."

His gaze skewered her. When she spoke, her voice was so thin she could barely hear it. "I can... go?"

He nodded slowly, the chords standing out in his neck. "You can go. You can go as far away as you can get." There was a kind of fierceness in his voice that Vivian rarely heard. He closed the distance between them. "You can try to outrun us. You can try to get rid of me." Her lips parted, but he stopped her. "You're not going to kill me, not after everything." His hand seized her chin between thumb and forefinger, hard enough to bruise. "You can run until you can't remember his voice, or mine. But I'll still be here. Always. I will be right. Behind. You."


Vivian didn't dare breathe. She tried to ignore the smell of blood.

"You will never have a normal life. You will never have a life without us, Vivian." He jerked his chin towards where Seb's body lay heavy against the checkered floor. He bent his head until she could feel his breath warm against her ear, his fingers still grasping her chin. His lips brushed her cheek, so gentle that it could have been a mistake.

"Never."

He stepped away from her, releasing her, and she stumbled back a step. Breath flooded into her lungs, her eyes wide enough to show the whites, like waking up from a dream.

And then she bolted.

A few years ago, a self-defense instructor had accused Vivian of lacking a killer instinct. 



Bodoni | Sierra Ruger | Digital Photo Montage



**El Chingadero** | Tyson Palmour  
Acrylic on Canvas



**Swift Skatepark** | Takuma Ikawa | Graphite on Paper

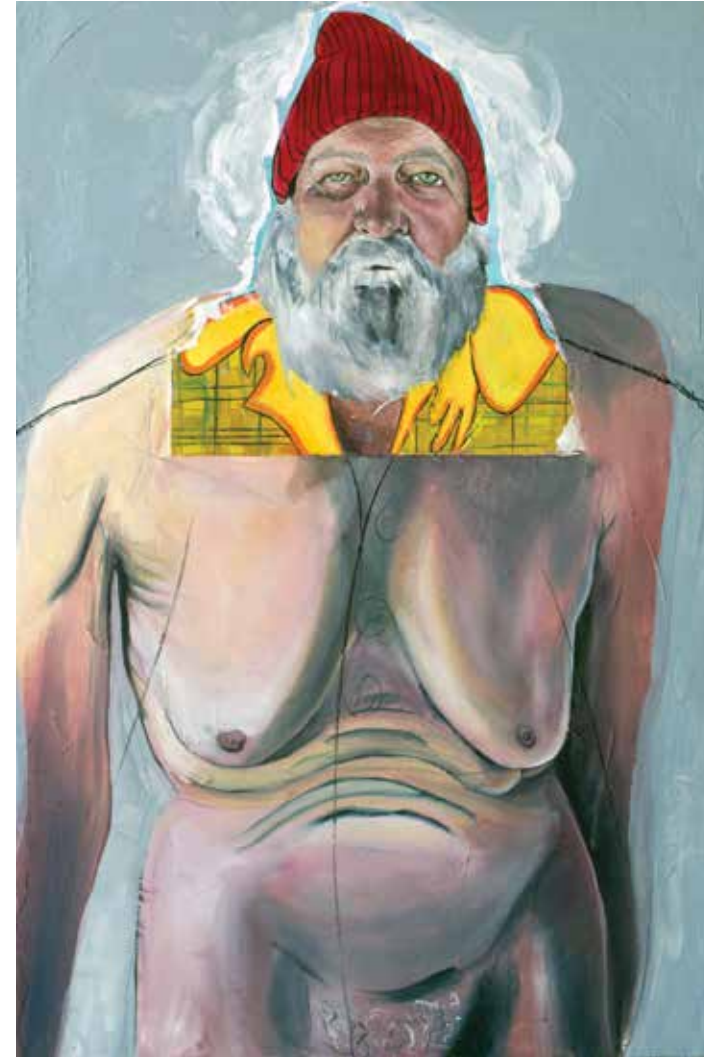




Me, a Self Portrait | Jordain Harrop | Oil on Canvas



Dr. Heckle and Mr. Jive | Julian Nelson | Silver Gelatin Prints



Hermaphrodito's Grin | Jo LaFayette | Oil on Paper and Canvas

# Roots

By Malloryann Amick

You planted the bitter seed  
That festered into poison ivy  
I let the roots grow when I said I wouldn't  
Who knew that such a seed  
Could make a catastrophic impact  
The welts raised and itching  
Because you still remain  
With your own seed that I have planted  
A kernel within you  
That could be bitter or sweet



Let your Light | John Gasaway | Graphite Drawing



Nocturne | Bryce Van Patten | Ink on Paper

## 2016

By Ashlee Nelson

I ignored the unfinished,  
important conversations  
the ones where you explained how  
you hate this house—our house  
—how loving me came with too many boxes  
overflowing into the hallway  
suffocating the living room  
piling up in the kitchen until we were  
becoming statues in our home  
I didn't want to confess  
how I had grown into myself from  
wanting to be less, how tightly curled  
I'd become  
from all the fighting.

You wrung me out  
until I had nothing to give.  
I'm always angry, and kissing you  
was no longer serendipity, but a chore  
and if I had told you  
it would have become my job  
to soothe the hurt in your rough edges  
when I can't even fix my own  
apologies were given, scripted like litanies,  
and in the same breath  
said you didn't want to wake up next  
to a dead person— quiet and grave  
— and you didn't mean it, you'd always say after:  
I don't take up too much space  
you're sorry for changing me into something still

see? I'm a coward willing to forget what it was  
you said to me since I first realized:  
nothing can grow between us  
we are old conversations and deja vu  
living where the foundation was too rocky  
for our harsh weathers.

I wore you down,  
you reciprocated.  
but I loved you  
and mistook loyalty as watching two figures crumble  
over a cliff, into the sea.



Coyote in the Land of the Dead | T.J. West | *Silver Gelatin Prints*



Smile | Ann Hanlin | *Plaster and India Ink*



# A Flickering Light

By Leah Sathrum



Light and Burn | Krysta Brixey | Monoprints



It was February 2017. The time of year when rain crashed onto the ground for what felt like ages. Every Washington resident who had wished for a torrential downpour during the summer began to feel twinges of regret. The sun had fled from our sights, leaving us low on vitamins and high on antidepressants.

Despite being in church, everyone could tell it was a mess outside. The rain slammed against the ceiling like hail, creating a sound effect that blasted through the church's poor acoustics. For the most part, I ignored it, as I was too absorbed in my own fantasies. But as the pastor's sermon went on—he was infamous for going too long—the noise became almost unbearable. All I could do was stare at him, hoping to blend in, and take notice of the wrinkles on his brow.

The church's ceiling was built into an arc, with smooth wooden beams sweeping at the top to connect to one solid structure. Members who came to church early always put out too many chairs, making it obvious to everyone when attendance was down. The floors were smooth and black, with a carpeted area near the back for nursing mothers. Paintings were hung along the walls, art with an almost postmodern style that captured different parts of biblical stories.

Finally, the pastor made his last point, one I was sure I'd already heard in a sermon years ago. Growing up in church meant hearing some of the same points every two years or so and expecting to get something new out of it. Recently, all I had gotten was a sense of boredom, irritation, and another check mark on my to-do list.

To my right, my sister Rebekah rapidly wrote down her notes on her phone. She was frowning, but only due to her immense concentration. Her pixie-cut red hair always blocked her left eye, no matter how often she got it cut. She had six tattoos to her name, an accomplishment she often bragged about. She was 31, fourteen years older than me, and still I felt closer to her than anyone else.

The pastor invited the band back up on stage, and everyone shuffled onto their feet. As I stood, I noticed my sister leaning over to whisper in my ear.

"You don't have to take communion if you don't want to," she murmured. There was no judgment in her voice, but I couldn't help but feel hurt at the words. The hidden expectation, that I wouldn't want to take communion due to my recent revelation, felt worse than I'd anticipated.

Only a few weeks prior, I had been outed by my sister as a lesbian. While I worked, she'd told my parents the story of how I had discovered my sexuality. While I'd known this would happen, I wasn't given much of a choice in the matter. When I'd asked my sister to wait, she'd insisted that they find out now. She refused to keep secrets from them and deemed that coming out wasn't about me. Rather, it was for my parents, and they needed to know as soon as possible.

The amount of backlash I'd received was, at times, more than I could take. While Rebekah was the peacemaker between myself and my parents, all bets were off when she wasn't around. My family was convinced that I was hell

bound, leading my mother into a cycle of depression that I felt responsible for. Rebekah, although more understanding than most, held me to a similar standard.

“Okay,” I whispered back, hoping my face looked blank.

She stood up and walked towards the communion table. While I wanted more than anything to go with her, I knew better. Because of a genetic trait, my family and, I suspected, the rest of my church had transformed my role. I was no longer the Christian, but the sinner who wasn’t saved, and no amount of talking could convince them otherwise.

Awkwardly, I sat by myself, mouthing the words to the songs but not singing them. My eyes began to fill with tears, and I struggled to keep them back, but I

had to. I was positive that the churchgoers who knew me were hoping for a miracle. Any tears I shed would be an opening for that, and I wasn’t sure I could handle their hopes being dashed by the truth. I was the only teenager in the church, meaning that they hoped I would be a

model young Christian, which brought on even more expectations. I couldn’t hope to fulfill them, not at this rate.

When my sister came back, we stood a few inches apart, not wanting to acknowledge the issues standing between us. Her hands were clasped as she swayed to the music, seemingly in tune with it.

I couldn’t help but get a sense of betrayal every time I looked at her. She was the first person I’d told, and the one person I hadn’t expected to take control of the situation without my full consent.

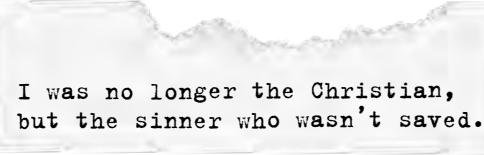
As the service ended, I hurriedly grabbed my purse and exited the aisle, wanting nothing more than to get away from that place. I knew it hurt Rebekah’s heart to see me this way, but she wasn’t the only victim. The nostalgia of what church used to mean, a place of learning and relationship-building, filled my mind every time I stepped inside. But now, it felt stale and intolerable, and the inconsistencies I’d never noticed before were being thrown in my direction.

For the first time in my life, I felt as though I didn’t belong there.

It was near midnight on Monday, only a day after my experience at communion. I sat in my bedroom, eyes staring at the brown fibers that made up the carpet. My room was small, with my bed taking up a large portion. Two shelves stood on either side of it, books filling them up. On the walls hung movie posters and a bulletin board holding photos and crafts from my childhood.

My blue curtains hid the darkness that lurked outside. For once, there was no rain. Instead, silence took its place, with the night being dimly lit by one lonely light post. It flickered on occasion, and I always wondered when it would go out.

I leaned against the stiff, wooden headboard that held up my mattress. In my



I was no longer the Christian,  
but the sinner who wasn't saved.

right hand, I held a small phone. It was old, but free, so I couldn’t complain. I was awaiting messages from Rebekah, her texts coming in slow. She always thought through her texts, each word carefully selected.

*You need to forgive Mom. You know she loves you,* she wrote. Her message left a bitter taste on my tongue.

Only a few hours earlier, my mother and I had had a small skirmish. As we’d discussed the day, our words coming out awkward and contrived, she’d ended our conversation by admitting that I’d become her biggest problem.

The words had stung more than I’d wanted them to, and so I’d left her, alone. I didn’t want to know that my mother considered me a problem. For most of my life, I’d tried my best to prove that I was a good kid, getting great grades and mostly avoiding trouble. Now that she’d said this to me, it blew my hopes to pieces. A good girl couldn’t be gay. It just didn’t happen.

My relationship with my mother had always been held by a thread. She was vocal about her emotions and I wasn’t, guaranteeing fights on multiple occasions. Now, they were only accentuated. My father, while heartbroken about my homosexuality, tried his hardest to keep the family together. Even so, when my mom and I were alone, he couldn’t do anything.

Yeah, I wrote back to Rebekah. I shifted slightly, the stiff board behind me making my back ache.

It was the only way I knew how to respond, especially in times like these. I was a writer, but there was a distinct difference between writing dialogue between fictional characters and explaining how the real me felt. My family didn’t understand, and they made sure I knew it.

*Listen,* my sister said. *I know it sucks, but Mom is having a hard time too. You just have to be patient with her. She feels bad, you know.* Her sympathetic voice made it hard to be angry, but not impossible.

I wanted to say that I did, that I understood. Yet, a part of me was skeptical. It wasn’t like my mother lived in another country, making our communication sporadic. No, she was just a room away. Even so, I hadn’t heard an apology or anything close to one. In the moment, the idea of someone feeling bad but not wanting to say it to my face seemed contradictory.

*Okay,* I responded, keeping my emotions at bay. I brought my knees closer to my face and wrapped my arms around them.

I’d learned the fine art of acting numb, of pretending like nothing really mattered. For the most part, I’d reserved it for my parents, but now I was using it against Rebekah. The tension that stood between us was thick. We didn’t talk about it, but it was there.

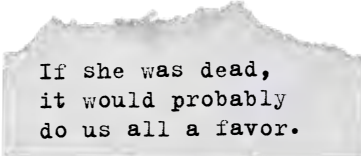
I wanted nothing more than to express my feelings to someone else, but my friends wouldn’t understand. They didn’t know I was gay, and if they did, I suspected that my friendships would dissipate. Rebekah was my only outlet.

*Can you say anything other than yes and I know?* Her voice had a slight edge, but at least she was trying to make a joke.

We chuckled, the situation becoming a little bit lighter. Moments like these made me miss the late-night messages that were fun nonsense. The times where we would talk about my horrible psychology teacher, or quote *Parks and Rec* episodes that we'd seen a million times. It was laughter that brought us together, and it helped that she always knew when to crack a joke. Someone had once said that humor was our love language, and that wasn't far from the truth.

Yes, I teased, letting myself relax. For just a moment, I wanted to forget the issues surrounding our family. I suspected she did too.

*It's getting late. You know you can always talk to me, right? I'm your favorite sister after all.*



If she was dead,  
it would probably  
do us all a favor.

Her words hurt for some strange reason. I hadn't yet realized how damaged our relationship had become. Our friendship was falling apart, and I couldn't help but feel as though I was the main reason for it.

Yeah, sure, I said, smiling to myself despite my feelings. I wanted to think that our relationship would last, but if I had learned anything it was that nothing was certain.

On Sunday of the following week, I sat in church yet again. There was another torrential downpour that struck the building like bullets, ramming into it with no remorse. On the news, they said it was going to rain all week, with no end in sight. I didn't doubt that.

The lights had been dimmed, an effect to add to the pastor's powerful preaching. I refused to listen to what he had to say, choosing instead to skim movie reviews on my phone. Bitterness shrouded me like curtain, even though I refused to let anyone see it.

A Starbucks coffee lay beside my seat, and I drank out of it incessantly to help me stay awake. While Rebekah sat up straight beside me, I was slumped in my seat. Dark circles lay under my eyes from last night when I had lain awake in my bed, pondering what I'd seen.

After a lazy Saturday night of bingeing Netflix, I'd noticed my mother's phone buzz. I picked it up and immediately noticed a nonchalant text from Rebekah. Hoping for something lighthearted, I tapped on the text, only to see something else from a few hours prior that I hadn't been expecting. Whether it'd been in a fit of rage or anguish, or perhaps stating a bit of truth, I never got the chance to find out. All I knew was what the text from my mom said, with little context as my guide:

*If she was dead it would probably do us all a favor.*

Seeing what seemed to be my mother's true feelings confirmed all my worst

fears. I had decimated my chances of being a good daughter, and worst of all, I was becoming a nuisance. Yet even as I read the text, I felt as though it was telling me what I already knew. Our relationship had been on life support, and although she didn't know it, she'd forced it to die. As painful as it was to see this comment, it was as if I knew it was coming, although perhaps not as bluntly as this.

Frantically, I checked for my sister's reply. Surely she was going to say something. My sister wasn't the kind of person to stand for such behavior, even from our mother. Rebekah wasn't afraid to call my mom out when necessary; they were close enough that it wasn't out of line. But when I checked, I felt another blow.

She said nothing. There was only the empty space of time until my mother brought up a new topic. There'd been no confrontation or any semblance of regret afterward, just one sentence to keep my brain occupied for hours on end. My relationship with Rebekah was unraveling with every choice we made. The ending of that friendship was something I didn't think I could handle.

Feeling rejected from communion, having fights with my mother, and not being defended by my sister, all of it created an avalanche of emotions that I couldn't control. I'd tried so long to maintain my composure, but now, it felt as though there was no point anymore. I wanted to point fingers, yet I couldn't help but think that I deserved this crushing blow. If they hadn't found out, this wouldn't have happened in the first place, at least that's what I wanted to think.

I tapped my foot rapidly against the church floor to keep myself from crying. If Rebekah saw me tearing up, she would demand an explanation. The distance between my sister and me had been painful, but knowing this new piece of information, I wasn't sure I could have that kind of conversation with her.

Staring at the pastor, I tried to focus on his glasses, hoping this concentration would keep me from tearing up. Occasionally, I looked in Rebekah's direction, making sure she didn't notice my internal struggle. I kept it up for most of the service, fighting my feelings as hard as I could.

In the end, my resistance was futile. Replaying my mother's words like a chant, I could feel tears brimming, just waiting to be released. I tried to keep my head low, the fears of having to explain myself taking ahold of me. I was losing my family, making them hate me. If there was ever a time in which I wished I wasn't gay, it was now.

The worship music began to play again and, as the congregation began to sing, I buried my head in my arms, unable to take it anymore. I hated crying in front of people, especially this many, and I briefly considered running to the bathroom.

I felt a tug on my sleeve, and when I looked up, Rebekah was staring down at me. There was a mix of pity and desperation in her eyes, as though she wanted to help me but didn't know how.



“What’s wrong?” she asked softly.

She sat down next to me, rubbing my back in small circles. My crying turned more violent despite my attempts to keep silent. I couldn’t tell her the truth because I knew what she would say. And while I knew everyone needed forgiveness, especially myself, I had never been inclined to give it away on a whim.

We sat close together, listening to the worship music. As communion began, I noticed several people looking in my direction, causing me to feel shame. I didn’t want other people’s eyes and judgments focused on me, not right now.

We looked at each other for a moment before I looked away, not wanting too much eye contact. She could read me well, and I was afraid she’d see right through me if I stared too long.

“What are you thinking right now?” she asked, like a counselor talking to a patient.

I didn’t know what to say, partially because I didn’t know how to describe my feelings. It was times like these where I wished she could read my mind and know exactly what was wrong without me saying a word.

“I’m just...frustrated...” I said finally.

She brushed a piece of hair out of my face as she scrutinized me. Rebekah always knew when to take me seriously, but she didn’t often rush me. It was one part of our talks that I always appreciated.

“Okay,” she said calmly. “Are you frustrated at me?”

“No...” I said between sniffles. My entire body seemed to rise and fall with each sigh as I tried to put my emotions under control.

“You know I love you,” she said gently. “Mom and Dad love you. We’re all just trying to do our best.”

“I know,” I said, nodding. Even while I acknowledged it, the words stung and the flow of tears increased.

“Oh honey,” she said, eyes softening.

Rebekah pulled me into an embrace, her arms holding me tightly. I buried my face into her shoulder, letting a few tears roll down my face. Even though I couldn’t look at her, I knew she found this painful. She wanted to see me happy, as much as I wanted the same for her. We were at opposite ends in this long-lasting conflict, struggling not to lose sight of each other.

“It’s gonna be okay honey,” Rebekah said, her voice cracking slightly. “Everything is going to be fine.”

In that moment, I thought of the light post outside my bedroom window. I pictured it still flickering, the darkness threatening to take away its light. I was always waiting for it to fail, but maybe I’d misjudged it. I didn’t know. I could only wait and hope it wouldn’t fade before summer came. 🌊



Beautiful Gloom | Justin Stachowiak | Digital Illustration



Ad Meliora | Olivia Gagnon | Oil on Canvas



Crescendo | Emily O'Neal | Mixed Media Collage

# In The Temple

By Lynnne McIlvain

I knew the man was a god the moment He set foot over the stone threshold of the temple. He did not shine as Lord Apollon shone. He held no mighty bolt at His belt as King Zeus held. No, this god walked as a mortal. His beard was close-cropped and gray-tipped, the thick hair on his head salt-and-pepper in color. He wore the modest chiton of a seaside fisherman. His face bore the lines and creases of a man who spent much time beneath the eye of Helios. Despite His middle age, He was hearty and handsome. To all appearances, an ordinary man.

Except His eyes. In His eyes, the tides of the sea roiled. Whitecaps broke against the rocky shore.

I bowed low. “Lord Poseidon,” I said with my eyes on His sandaled feet. Feet that walked daily on the carpet of Mount Olympos.

“Please,” the god said, “rise. You must be the fair Medousa.”

The thurible hung at my side, leaking the smoke of aromatic herbs. It glinted, sunlight streaming over the temple threshold. I tightened my fingers around the chain. I straightened but kept my gaze low.

“I am. What or whom do I have to thank for the great honor of the Earth-Shaker learning my name?” I asked.

He smiled, teeth straight and shining. “Those on this island speak of you,” He said, “and tell of your beauty and graceful step.” He lowered His own gaze to my feet, hidden by the long hem of my sacred robes.

“You flatter me unjustly. I am only a servant, my lord.” His praise warmed my face, but also cowed something inside of me. I took a step further back into the temple. “How may I help You?” His eyes gleamed, and He stepped forward after me. The silver thurible swung anxiously at my hip. I kept my shoulders straight, though I did not offend Him by looking Him directly in the eye.

“Perhaps I came to visit my little skops-eyed niece,” He mused. I did not reply. Never in my sixteen years at the temple had Lord Poseidon visited my Lady’s shrine. Then He said, “I came only to pay a friendly visit to the lovely priestess.” He touched His brow. “I hope to see you soon.”

I bowed deeply and when I rose, the sea god was gone.

That night, I changed into my linen sleeping robes after my bathing. The scent of mint and myrrh lingered around me. I laid on my bed, still uneasy from the visit of the god earlier in the day. Above me, the moon lay in her own bed, light shining through my little window, round face full and white.

Anxiety’s fist tightened around my heart. I tossed and turned. This bed had been mine since the morning of my birth, and never before had I struggled so much to relax within it. I forced myself to lay motionless but my mind refused to quiet. The image of Poseidon’s unnatural eyes haunted me. I felt them on me still.

I longed for Sleep to come to me, but even when He finally held me in His

arms, my dreams brought me no peace.

I ran through the woods, tree branches whipping my white arms. A god ran after me; I heard His footsteps pound behind me. His heavy footfalls broke twigs and sent forest life scattering. Between my breasts, my heart pounded. No matter how fast I ran, the god stayed just mere paces behind. No matter how far I fled, He never tired. I heard His chuckling, resounding through the trees.

I rolled my ankle on a smooth river rock and collapsed into an unnoticed stream. This was all He needed; He would fall upon me now like a rutting animal, with no care of gentleness or pleasure. I sobbed into my hands.

The water cooled and stroked my fevered skin. “Peneus, my father,” I whimpered. “Do not let such a brutal fate fall to my shoulders! I will not bear the weight!”

The sounds of crashing and stampede—of a god closing in on His prey—grew louder. At any moment, He would break through the trees and discover me where I lay, lamed in the river.

“Peneus,” I wept.

I heard the second that the god broke through the tree line. And at the same moment, I felt my body’s change. The water slid over my skin. It stretched my bones, hardened my skin to bark. My knuckles thickened to knobs, phalanges elongating as my arms reached above my head. My feet sunk into the earth beneath the river, spiraling out into roots. Leaves grew from my arms and slim fingers, bark joined my knees and thighs. I could not move.

A bud of relief bloomed inside of me.

The bellow of the god’s rage reached me even through the thick bark. He laid a hand on my exterior, but I could not feel it. “Daphne,” He growled, but He could not reach me.

I felt it faintly when He reached to the highest height of me and plucked my branches. It did not hurt to be a tree as it had sometimes hurt to be a nymph. I did not know what He did with the branches. Bark covered my eyes, or perhaps it was my eyes. But I was safe, the water of my father’s river flowing around what was once my ankles.

I woke with a real draft caressing my ankles, kicked free from my blanket. My heart thundered like hoofbeats. I launched upright, reaching for the candle at my bedside. A phantom touch on my wrist steadied me.

“My Lady,” I whispered.

My heart quieted, I lay back in my bed, pulling my feet back beneath my bed covers. I laid my own hand over the place where She had touched me. Even now, I felt Her eyes lingering. *Has Hypnos given you fearsome dreams, karanaki?* She whispered. I smiled.

“Only dreams to unnerve me, my Lady,” I said softly. “Nothing fearsome.”

*Then be still and rest.*

“Yes, Lady.”

But an hour after I felt Her presence depart, Sleep still eluded me. My dream haunted me. I would rather be a tree, I thought. I rose from my bed and went to the heart of the temple. My thurible waited at the feet of Lady Athena’s statue. I lit the incense beneath the careful stone eye of Her acrolith. Sweet smoke coiled into the air. A sound to my left startled me and I jumped. The thurible clanked against the marble altar. “Oh!”

I chided myself for such edginess. I was lucky not to have spilled incense all over the floor. But the sound came again, and this time a tall shadow came with it. I pressed a hand to my mouth to keep from screaming, and a weight slammed me to the ground.

The thurible hit the marble at the same time as the crown of my skull. Stars splattered my vision. The thurible burst open; the incense embers lay strewn on the ground beside me, glowing and weak. My cheek pressed to the floor before large hands seized my waist and turned me onto my back.

The churning eyes of the ocean god gazed down at me.

“Fair Medousa,” Poseidon murmured, hand stroking my jaw. “How good to see you once more. And so soon.”

When my head struck the ground, I had not thought to cry, but now Daphne’s familiar fear took root in my breast. I struggled, a tear running over my temple. What was a girl-priestess against the Earth-Shaker?

The marble of the floor was unrelenting against my spine, surely bruising me. The weight of Poseidon pressed into me, unforgiving. Something stiff pushed against my hip. I cringed away. My fists clenched, but to strike a god? The idea was preposterous. I pushed my palms against His chest to heave him away from me, but He was unmovable. My tears flowed freely, down my face and in my hair and mouth as I thrashed my head.

A sob built in my chest, but I shoved it down. “Unhand me,” I demanded. “Let me up. This is no behavior for a temple of the goddess—”

He laughed. It was a crueler, more purposeful laugh than in the dream of Daphne. He said, “Athena? I hope Athena is watching.” Then He pulled apart my sleeping robes and shoved forward.

The pain was agonizing, but more agonizing was my own infirmity. No matter how I pushed or turned, the god atop me did not stop. I wept for my own powerlessness, for the new raw aching within me. My child, came the honey-warm voice, as familiar to me as my hands or the smooth chain of my thurible. *What so distresses you?*

“My Lady,” I sobbed, “come to me.”

It was bold to demand such of a goddess but when I opened my eyes, the Lady knelt at my head, Her face above mine. Such a lovely face it was that the pain of the violation slid away for a heartbeat. The hems of Her white robes mingled

with the ends of my hair. I wanted to take Her knees and bury my face against Her thighs like a child clinging to its mother. The corners of Her mouth curved upward in a smile before She froze.

My Lady saw the man who pinned me and moved inside of my body.

Her lovely face contorted with an animal fury, lips peeling back from Her teeth. *He dares to violate a child of my service in my own temple?* Her voice shook with outrage, like an olive tree rattling in a summer storm. *Wretched Poseidon! Uncle upon whom I wish impossible death!*

My tears came faster at Her anger, but She laid Her two hands on either of my cheeks. My karanaki, Lady Athena murmured, *dry your tears. Never shall such a fate befall you again, not by god or man or beast.*

One of Her hands smoothed over my hair and I shivered. My scalp tingled, then burned. Dreamlike, I felt my hair brush my jaw as though alive. Something—a small tongue?—licked against my collarbone. Another thin form slithered and writhed at the nape of my neck, trapped where I lay on the cold floor.

Snakes.

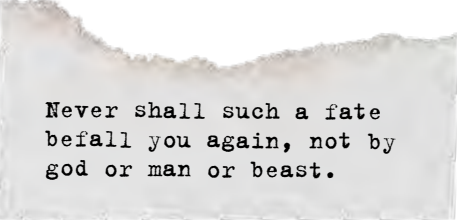
I tipped my head back to search for my goddess, but Athena had disappeared, leaving behind only Her herbal scent. Still, She had come to me despite my insolent, desperate demand, answered my call as Peneus the river had answered Daphne.

Poseidon reared back with a shout. Ichor on His jaw, even in a human body, He bled like the divine. Two small puncture wounds were visible just above the line of His beard. A snake bite. As I watched, another of my snakes struck out at His face with viper-quick swiftness, tugging on my scalp. He fell back on His hands, His body wrenching free of mine. I gasped at the sudden burst of pain and a small snake near my temple nuzzled the top of my cheekbone. I raised a shaking hand to touch my head and found hair no longer, but serpents.

Earlier, I had thought that I would rather be a tree than be raped. Would I also rather be a monster?

The god of the sea bared His teeth at me. A trickle of golden blood ran down His throat. I might look the part of a monstress, but He was worse. He snarled, manhood limp now on His thigh. Poseidon, Earth-Shaker, demon of a god. My snakes lashed around my face as though craving more of His shining blood.

Poseidon rose to His feet. My heart pounded but the snake beside my temple flicked its tongue on my skin, as if to soothe me. I thought of Athena’s calming, phantom touch on my wrist after my dream. Despite the eyes of the god on me, despite the warmth of my own red, mortal blood between my legs, I was not scared of Him. It was as though the fear bled out of me with my broken



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maidenhead. As I sat staring at Him, the fanged mouths of Athena's snakes were poised to strike.

She had come to me. She had showed me Her face—Her holy, beautiful face—that so few mortals were ever granted the privilege of seeing. Only heroes ever looked upon the gods.

"Get out," I spat, the hiss almost hiding the waver in my voice.

He spat at me in turn. Saliva landed an inch from my toes. I drew my knees up to my chest and tucked my toes beneath my sleeping robes. In the candlelight, I made out small dotted stains in the folds of the cloth. Bloodstains. I did not look away from Poseidon, not even to flinch when He spit.

"Be gone," I commanded again.

*You have assaulted one of my temple's holy possessions and in doing so, you taint the shrine itself. You commit the most grievous of sins, one so unthinkable not even a human man in the rut of war would risk this. Go forth and forever wear the dirt of your deed.*

I loved Her in all forms  
and with all titles.

I could not see Her, but I felt the heavy brush of Her peplos as She stood behind me. Beside me, the embers of the incense had burned out. Their sweet scent lingered—or perhaps it was the scent of my mistress, centuries worth of offered aromatic herbs imbued in the fabric of Her white robes. Her hand settled upon the top of my head, fearless of the serpents She had gifted me, and it was the hand of Athena Ageleia, not Athena Areia, though I loved Her in all forms and with all titles.

*With a feral snarl, the god of the ocean swept away.*

When I finally managed to sleep, She came to me in dreams. She did not stay as I fell asleep, but a long-eared owl stayed perched in my modest window, eyes unblinking. In the dream, She was the owl and She was also Herself at the same time, wide skops eyes unblinking and the silver pins that bound Her thick hair glinting. Her bright eyes were as gray as all of the songs claimed. She was one beautiful image layered atop the other and it almost hurt my head to look at Her.

I dropped to my hands and knees, scrambling forward. My dream-ropes didn't tangle around my legs as they might have in the waking world. She looked down at me, both of Her faces soft, and allowed me to take Her knees. They were slim beneath Her peplos and when I pressed my forehead to Her upper knee, I found the texture of silky feathers waiting to receive me. She laid a hand on my head. When She moved, I heard the beat of wings far off in the distance.

"My Lady Athena," I whispered, "I can never truly thank You."

*You have spent the rosy morning of your life in my service, and shall spend the sunny afternoon and fading twilight serving me as well. You will thank me enough through that alone, Medousa.*

Her fingers slid through my hair, which in the dream was again honey-colored,

not snakes. My arms lingered around Her knees, the awe of touching Her—of having Her touch me—overwhelming me. Who was I, a lonely priestess of a rocky island, to be so beloved by a goddess such as Athena?

"I will serve You even as a shade should You wish it," I vowed. "I shall serve You when my body is dust, should You do me the honor, Lady."

Her smile warmed the air around us, though I could not see Her face. I also could not see Her owl form, easing my vertigo. She said, *When you die, I shall set your shade free to the flowery Fields. There is nothing that would bring me more joy than to see my most dedicated priestess at peace in my uncle's land.* She paused and the warmth from Her smile faded. I dared not look up at Her, lest She find my release of Her graceful knees to be ungrateful. I would kneel before Her happily forever, even when my legs began to cramp and ache and my tongue cracked with thirst.

*Life shall still be hard for you, my goddess murmured. You shall face hardships even I cannot spare you from, though I swear on the Styx you shall never be made a victim as you were today. Still, Sarpedon shall not be a place for you for a long while.*

The fear that struck my heart shamed me and I bowed my head lower. "I must leave?" Tears welled in my eyes. "Is this Your request?" To banish me?

Her hand still in my hair. *It is my command, and one I wish I did not have to make,* she said firmly, the strength in Her voice as prevalent as the regret. *Sarpedon holds nothing for you now but risk, and I would prefer to have you worship me at a roadside altar than remain in this temple to suffer more.*


"Your temple is my home," I said. "Who will light Your herbs? Who will clean Your acrolith?"

*No one, for a time. One day, you shall return, and I shall see this temple revived again.*

"One day?"

*One day.*

My tears were silent. "Will I feel You still? Will I hear You still?" I swallowed a rising sob. "I would rather pass now into the Underworld than lose the favor of Your presence."

She had a bird song laugh. *Never shall I abandon you. Medousa, I will be with you every step of the way.* 



**Underwater Dream** | Krysta Brixey | *Drypoint Etching over Monotype print*



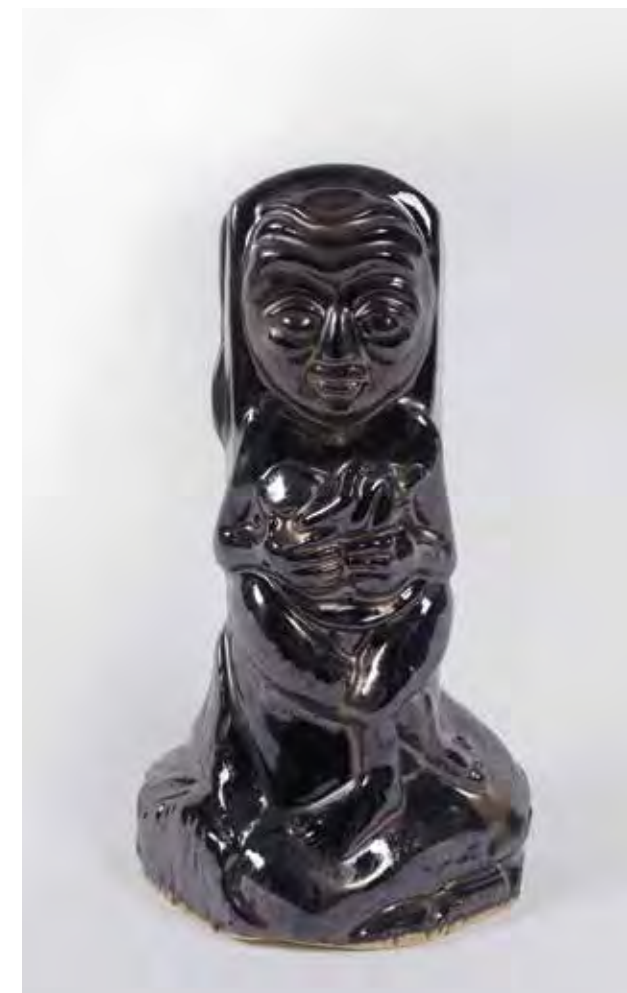
**Sensual Nature** | Paige Taylor | *Ceramic*



**Golden Lining** | Shirley Morgan | Ceramic



**Elephant Goddess** | Claudia Carter | Ceramic



**Fertility Goddess** | Brenda Pereboom | Ceramic

# Big Man

By Samantha Brooks

Dear Big Man,  
She has known Big Men before and  
the weight of their shadows is the  
first thing the Little Girl feels when she sees  
you. Her fingers fumble for a worn  
measuring tape to examine  
the width of your shoulders and length of your  
hands. She whips out a calculator  
to determine the number of  
steps to the closest exit and  
her proximity to the adjacent  
corner. As you walk closer, she shoves a  
megaphone to her lips, because  
she knows that her scream alone won't  
be loud enough for anyone to come  
running.

She knows that hands can be  
thieves, snatching childhood innocence.  
And your hands? Your hands look  
Big enough to steal what is left of hers.  
She knows that legs can be  
hammers, nailing her to a mattress.  
And your legs? Your legs look  
Big enough to pin her like an insect.  
She knows that bodies can be  
bombs, leaving only shrapnel behind.  
And your body? Your body looks  
Big enough to make her Hiroshima.  
She knows that monsters are only  
scary when they are not under the bed.  
And Big Man? You are not  
Little enough to fit under a bed.  
Sincerely,  
A Little Girl



**Distressed** | Shirley Morgan | Ceramic





**Scream** | Ben Amos | Relief Print



**Soulcaster** | Morganne Guier | Brass and Gemstones



# Mel's Palm Bowl

By Karen James



Escaping | Don Andersen | Oil on Canvas

It was 1958. Mama had a new job working at a child-care center in a bowling alley called Mel's Palm Bowl. The room was nicely furnished with cribs and an assortment of toys, and the yellow walls had a high border, patterned with little, red-suited soldiers that marched around it. It was located just down the hall from the alleys. Parents could leave their children there for free while they bowled and drank beer out of bowling pin shaped glasses. Mama often took me with her, so I could help out with the children. She said I carried the babies around like they were my own, even though I was only eight.

One night at the nursery, a tall, handsome man walked in with a broom and dust pan. He was wearing white overalls and a painter's cap. Black curls spilled out from around the cap's edges. I caught the gleam in Mama's eyes right off. She and the man began to talk softly to each other. I couldn't hear a word they were saying, so I walked over and stood next to them.

"Oh, Kate!" Mama looked down at me with a nervous smile. "This is Johnnie. He works as a janitor here."

The first thing I noticed about his face was that the whites of his eyes were a soft red. He knelt down next to me and began talking baby-talk with a Spanish accent. His breath smelled like a mixture of spearmint gum and alcohol. It seemed kind of silly since I wasn't a baby, but he was funny and kind in a Desi Arnaz sort of way.

"Hey, Blondie," he said "Where you get that dimple? It's so deep it looks like a belly button."

I was instantly charmed and so was my mother--so much so that she invited him over for dinner on her day off.

Johnnie arrived wearing a white shirt and blue tie. He walked into the kitchen following the smell of bread that Mama cooked in empty Crisco cans. She pulled the cans out of the oven and set them on top of the stove. The bread had mushroomed out over the top of the cans to form a rich, brown crust. My siblings and I stood impatiently by the stove. We knew if we waited long enough, she would cut off the top of one, smear it with butter, and divide it into pieces for us to eat. But when Johnnie walked in, we were immediately distracted by his charm.

"I think I died and went to heaven," he said. "Excuse me, is this the Betty Crocker family?"

"Well, no," Mama said with a playful air of sarcasm, "but whatever Swanson can freeze, I assure you I can bake."

We retreated to the living room. My older siblings chatted freely while Johnnie bounced my little sister on his knees. He laughed at all of their stories and jokes. I dragged out Mama's old fur coat and proceeded to stage my most convincing

impression of Tallulah Bankhead. I was silly with delight, which made my siblings giggle.

After dinner, I walked to the store with Mama and Johnnie. He bought a quart of 7-Up for us and a bottle of beer for himself. It was just starting to get dark when we began our walk back. Mama was carrying the sack while Johnnie had his arm around her, his other hand holding mine. We were half way home when a large, dark car pulled up and stopped alongside us. Two women got out. They both wore colorful, tight dresses and their hair was long and black. The minute they walked over to us, I could see the anger flashing in their eyes. They began to scream and yell at Johnnie and my mother in Spanish. The younger woman stepped forward, raised her red finger-nailed hand, and slapped Mama's face. I stepped back in astonishment and felt fear in my throat. Mama had no sooner regained her composure when the older woman knocked the grocery bag right out of her arms. I heard the crack of glass and watched as the beer and 7-Up oozed out and ran down the cracks of the sidewalk, foaming and fizzing along the way.

"You stupid lady. You going to be so sorry," the young woman shouted at Mama.

Johnnie said something to the women in Spanish and the older one tried to slap his face. He caught her arm mid-swing and then grabbed her wrist with his other hand and bent it backward. She didn't utter a sound, although I was sure it must have hurt. He dropped her arm, but both women just stood there glaring at us. I thought this was seriously weird and frightfully intimidating. I didn't know what to do, so I put my head down and kept watching the traveling beer and 7-UP as it slithered down the walkway. I couldn't think of a way to save it, and even if I did, I didn't think beer and 7-UP would taste very good together. I looked up again just in time to see the light of the moon in the flare of their hair as both women turned and walked away. They got back into their car and left.

"What happened?" I asked as the car disappeared into the night.

"Haven't you ever seen a Mexican stand-off? You might not have noticed, but we won." Johnnie ruffled the hair on top of my head and grabbed Mama's trembling hand.

"Who were those women?" Mama wiped away a drop of blood from her lip with her free hand.

"The older woman, she's my ex-wife; and the younger one, she's the mother of my daughter. You remember, don't you? I told you about them."

"Yes, but I thought you ended those relationships."

Johnnie went on to explain to Mama that the women were best friends, and the only way he got to see his daughter was by putting up with them. He told her he was sorry to have involved her in the situation.

"Don't worry," he assured her. "It won't happen again. I'll take care of it."

He did take care of it. We never saw the women again.

That fall, we moved to a new house that belonged to Joyce, a friend of my mother's. Joyce's mother had died and the house was in probate, so Joyce rented it to us for \$75.00 a month, which was cheap for how nice the house was. It had a huge living room with a fireplace: in the corner was a built-in bar with pink elephant wallpaper. Brightly colored bottles of alcohol lined the mirrored shelves, and a pink light added sparkle to the cozy area. It was the nicest house we had ever lived in.

Johnnie came to live with us. He married Mama the following week during a weekend visit to Mexico. They came home smiling and happy. Mama showed us the blue, Mexican skirt he'd bought her for their wedding day. It was a wrap-around skirt that tied on the sides and had silver glitter glued in patterns around the edges. Since our school's Halloween party was the next day, Mama said she would dress me up as a Mexican bride, and I could wear it to school. It took her several hours the next morning to hem the skirt and put make-up and a veil on me. I was late for school. I thought for sure I would be in trouble, but when I walked into the classroom, everyone turned around and looked at me with sighs of approval. I paraded around all day doing a Mexican can-can while exposing with a flurry the red crinoline beneath my skirt.

At first, things seemed to be going well at home. Johnnie and Mama collected old furniture from the neighborhood on trash day, and they repaired and varnished them until the pieces looked better than new. On the evenings when Mama was at work, Johnnie played guitar and sang songs to us in a sweet, syrupy voice. I watched as the liquid in the brightly colored bar bottles sank lower and lower. It felt like there was an energy forming, but I didn't know how to read it. I could hear sounds, but I didn't know what my mind was picking up. It was like objects being sucked up in a vacuum cleaner--like sucking up good things with bad things until they were all mixed up, and I could no longer tell which was which. I hoped it would sort itself out if I waited long enough.

Then one night, my sister Jana and I woke to the sound of Mama's screams for help. She called for Jana, her voice loud with a frantic edge. Jana jumped out of bed and went to find her. I sat up, wiped the sleep out of my eyes, and followed the sound of their voices to the bathroom. I stood just outside the open door and watched as Jana and Mama stood over Johnnie, who sat with his pants

I watched as the liquid in the brightly colored bar bottles sank lower and lower.

down on the toilet. Mama had her arm around Johnnie's head and had forced his jaw open with her hand.

"Pull the glass out, Jana!" Mama screamed.

Jana pulled out several large shards of broken glass while bright red blood oozed out of Johnnie's mouth. Mama tried to get a better hold on his head, causing her bathrobe to slide open--a dark blue bruise had spread all the way down

A dark blue bruise had spread all the way down the inside of her thigh to her knee.

the inside of her thigh to her knee. Johnnie, still sitting on the toilet, pushed her off with one swing of his arm. Mama flew backward and hit the tiled wall a few feet behind her. Jana, her face flushed with fear, stepped away from Johnnie and grabbed Mama's shoulders to keep her from falling. Johnnie seized a small, round, cracked mirror that lay on the counter next to him. He

slammed it down hard against the counter. The mirror cracked into even smaller pieces. Johnnie picked up several shards, put them in his mouth, and began to chew. He stared at Mama as if challenging her to stop him. I watched in dazed disbelief as blood spilled from the corners of his lips.

"Kate!" Mama screamed, "Go call the police!"

"I don't know how, Mama." I could barely get my words out. I pressed my hands against my cheeks and tried to comprehend what she was saying.

"Dial zero. Now!"

I ran to the phone and counted the seconds it took to put my finger in the zero slot and pull it all the way around to make a circle. One . . . two . . . three and then four . . . five . . . six as the dial made its way back around by itself. The answering, tinny-voiced operator connected me with the police as soon as I uttered the word "Help." I explained as best I could what was going on. The police arrived within minutes, an ambulance following close behind. I led the officer to the bathroom where Mama stood huddled with Jana, both of them still staring at Johnnie's haunted eyes and bloodied lips. I thought about the Mexican stand-off and wondered how in this instance anyone could have won. When Johnnie saw the officer, he spat red glass onto the floor. It was as if he had stored the shards away in his cheeks like a little ground squirrel. He stood up slowly, pulling his pants up from around his ankles. He turned to face the wall behind him and put his hands behind his back, just as the stern-faced officer pulled out a pair of shiny cuffs from his belt. Two blank-faced men in white uniforms walked in with a stretcher and helped Johnnie onto it. He did not put up a fight or say a word, it was as if he was just going along for the ride. Mama climbed into the ambulance with him and sat by his side. The ambulance sped


off into the night, red lights blazing, casting a warm glow into the midnight air. The officer followed close behind.

Jana and I watched them leave from the front porch. We stood there, looking at each other in bewilderment. I felt sick with worry.

"Why'd he do that, Jana?"

She shook her head with anger. "He's crazy . . . stupid and crazy."

We went into the house and checked on my younger siblings. They were sound asleep. My little sister was on the couch, brown teddy bear tucked securely under her chin. Jana and I walked warily back to our room and got into bed. We lay on our backs next to each other, entrenched in silence. I rolled over toward my sister and rested my forehead against her shoulder for comfort. I could feel the soft trembling of her body, an echoing of my own.

I thought back to the strange energy that I had hoped would sort itself out. It felt somehow darker now--closer, as if it might be under my bed, waiting like a crunched-up monster to grab my ankles and pull me into its realm. Oddly, I found myself longing for the bowling alley with its bright lights and cheerful noises—the rumbling of balls, the clattering of pins, and the happy shouts of other children's mothers and fathers. 



SELF | Stevie Hale | Oil on Canvas

# Exiting I-5

By Martin Middlewood

Exiting I-5 I see the old man sitting cross-legged  
At the end of the ramp holding a cardboard sign  
I want to slip past, the red light stops me

So I read the tan and black sign without looking at him

Veteran  
Homeless need help  
Anything  
God bless

I'm a vet too  
We both have our troubles  
What brought us both to this intersection?

You sit like a begging monk without a bowl  
Ball cap pulled down  
Eyes hidden  
Me in a Toyota with a mortgage and kids in college  
You wearing a graying wild beard and old Nikes  
A stuffed blue backpack leans against the signpost  
The light goes green

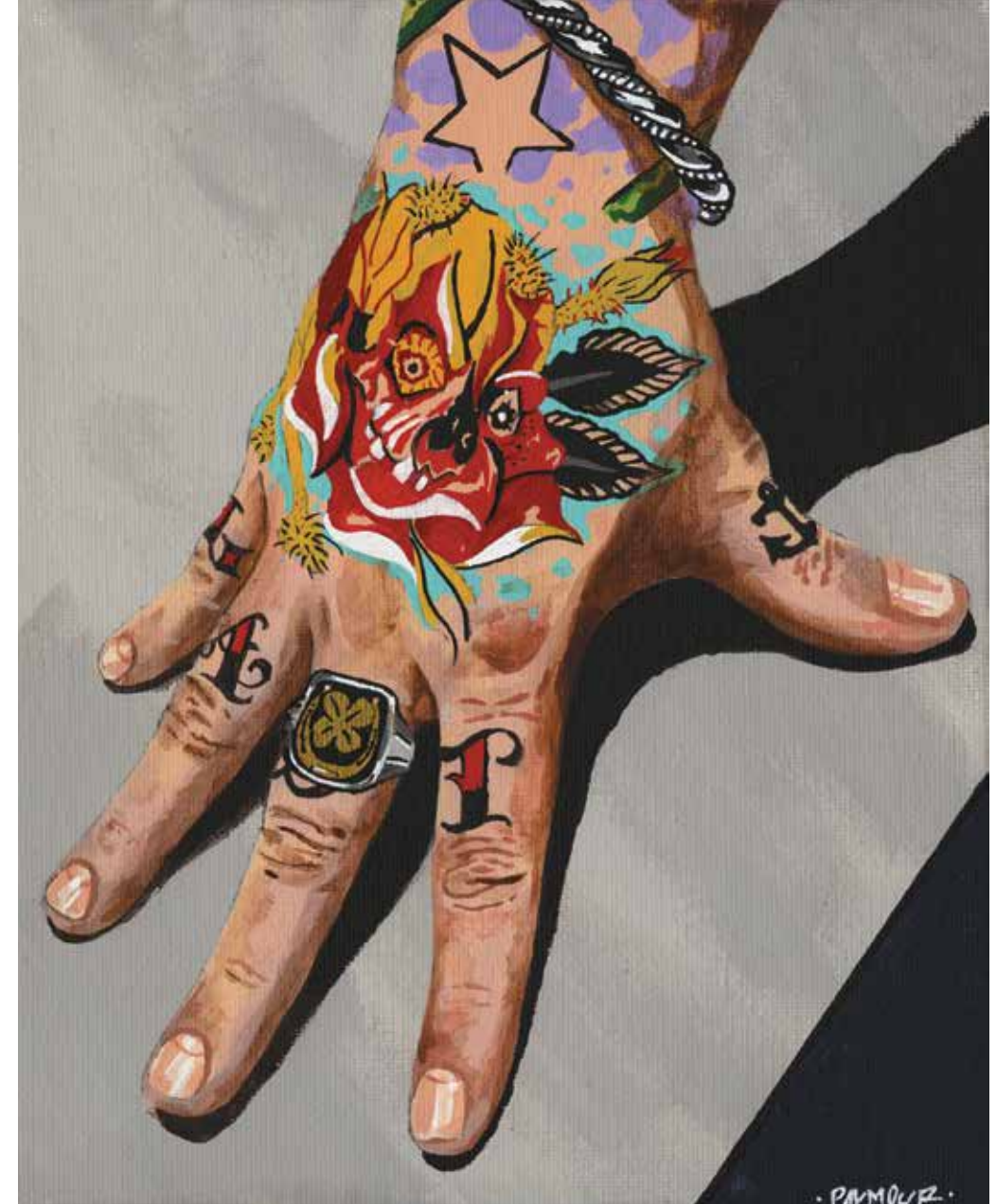
You glance up at me  
I know that look  
I see it in the mirror  
as I shave



Lucky 7 | Jordain Harrop | Oil on Rear View Mirrors



Flower Power | Daniel Rider | Digital Photo



Idle Hand | Tyson Palmour | Acrylic on Canvas



Northwestern Wedding Dress | Jenevie Paguirigan | Ceramic

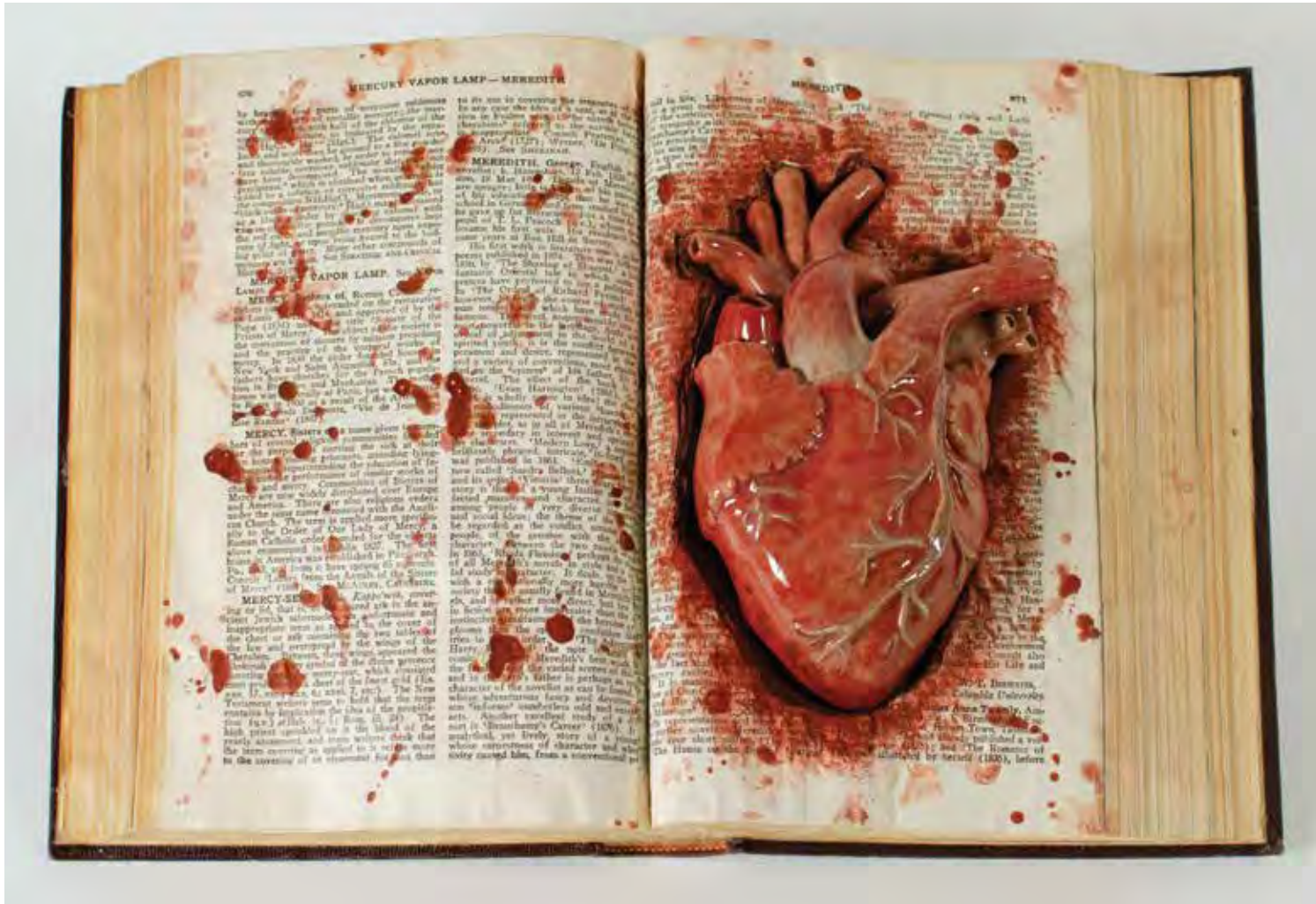


Prehistoric Impression | Sierra Nerton | Ceramic



# Grizzly

By Alex McGarity



Mercy | Angelica Grebyonkin | Ceramic Mixed Media

There was always the slightest fear in the back of Jack’s mind, the fear of being caught. The fear of what would happen if the money stopped flowing. He didn’t like to think about it; it scared him more than anything. That fear dangled there like fruit, low-hanging and dangerously sweet.

He equated the lifestyle to skydiving: you know the risk of the jump and the consequence if your chute doesn’t open, yet people did it everyday.

He knew he wouldn’t fare well in prison, but he also knew he was careful—he knew he was good. In fact, he felt as though his instincts came from some arcane intuition rather than sheer luck or experience, though in the business, it paid to have all three. Over time, he began to enjoy it. But that river of money drying up? That scared him still.

He had been scouting this house for the better part of a week. He fumbled with the lock on the front door, meticulously working a tension wrench into it, a flashlight between his teeth. The door had a Schlage lock—tricky but not impossible. All it took was time and patience. The tension wrench in his hand slipped and the tumbler locked.

“Shit,” he muttered, but the sound was muffled. He let the flashlight drop and caught it. “So close.”

He jimmied the wrench into the lock with a carefully practiced hand and pushed it through. He felt the final driver pin slide home and the door unlocked with a satisfying click. Hard part’s over, he thought. He pocketed his tools. The door swung open. It didn’t creak.

A good start.

He stepped inside silently and took a quick assessment of his surroundings. *Holy shit*, he thought. A giddiness grew inside of him. The fear now felt like a minor inconvenience. He felt in control.

He stood in the landing of what could only be described in one word: “wealth.” To his left, a spiraling staircase rose up to a high ceiling. There was a hallway in front of him just below the second floor banister. He turned right and saw a wide archway that led to the den. People didn’t normally leave their valuables in the den, but in a house like this, it couldn’t hurt to check. He walked through it.

What he saw made him gape in awe. This den was similar to how he always pictured the lobby of the Overlook Hotel from *The Shining*. Mahogany floorboards complemented the stone fireplace at the far end of the room. There was a carved wooden cuckoo clock just above a mantle which held framed portraits, several pieces of fine china plates, and a gold statue of a bear head. His eyes locked on the statue. It was small enough to be cradled in his hand. He couldn’t help but smile. *What do you think, Ma? Would a gold bear sell for enough?* he thought, and his smile grew. A glass wall stretched the left-hand side of the room. Dim moonlight shone through to display cream-colored walls and the crystal chandelier above. *Is that a Tiffany? Oh man, I hit the fuckin’ jackpot with*

*this one.* What looked like velvet couches lined a delicately-carved coffee table in the center of the room. *It can't be,* he thought, and let out a soft chuckle. Poking out from behind the far couch was the pièce de résistance—the head of a bear skin rug.

*I've always wanted one.*

He didn't walk through the room so much as he strolled through it, taking it all in. He rubbed his hand along one of the velvet couches and felt its unique softness. *If only I could take this home,* he thought, and let out another small chuckle. He felt a sense of elation. Slowly, he made his way across the room to the bear skin rug, admiring the way the brown hair glistened in the moonlight. There were long streaks of grey hair over parts of the rug. They didn't match the brown of the rest of the rug, but it looked as if it were part of it. It was spread out in a way that seemed like natural randomness. The hair shimmered in the light.

Then his curiosity morphed into sheer horror. The grey led to a dangerously large puddle of dark liquid that had pooled onto the rug and surrounding floor, forming under the head of a woman. A very bloody woman. She was clad in a dark green dress, smears of darkness all over her. He dropped to his knees and stared, not knowing what to do with his hands. The overwhelming metallic smell hit him at once, the feeling of control slipping away into an unshakeable sense of vulnerability. He felt it everywhere.

"Oh my God," he said, "Are—are you okay?" He knew she wasn't.

He placed his hand on her shoulder, rolling her over. Her body slumped, entirely lifeless. Her arm flopped from her side only to land at his knees. A red smile was ripped across her neck. Blood still seeped out lazily. Her vacant eyes stared blankly at nothing. He reached out to touch her wrist, looking for a pulse he knew he wouldn't find. His hands shook violently. Warm, he thought. *Warm, she's warm, she's still warm, oh God. Oh fuck, this must've just happened, she's still warm.* He began to back up, scrambling from his knees to his feet. He felt heavy, like someone had turned up the force of gravity. He couldn't take his eyes off the woman's face.

"You're not supposed to be here," said a soft but gritty voice behind him. Jack's head whipped around. He jumped nearly a foot. The speaker was a burly, bearded man. The upper portion of his face was obstructed by darkness and the moonlight cut off just above his lips. The man was at least twice Jack's size. He wore a pair of clear, disposable overalls and rubber gloves. In one hand, he held a neatly folded cobalt tarp and in the other, a hefty white jug, the word "Clorox" just visible. The cuckoo clock on the wall ticked as if counting down the seconds of his life. "No one is supposed to be here."

He dropped the jug and tarp, and the bleach smacked the ground with a booming thump that made Jack jump again. The Clorox jug rolled slowly, making soft whooshing sounds . . . Neither of them moved, only stared at each other,

waiting for some impending standoff to occur. Then the man's lips cracked into a sinister smile. Jack landed on another thought out of the sea of his racing consciousness. The thought of the thrill. This was a "no chute" situation.

*He's going to kill me.*

"I'm sorry," Jack said in a voice quite unlike his normal upbeat drawl. "I'll—I'll just leave, okay? I—I—I don't want any trouble, I can just go, and no one will have to know." The man only stared. Jack raised his arms as if to show the man he meant no harm. That was hardly the problem.

"Don't you touch her," the man said. His smile now shifted into a look of unsettling concern. "She's not yours to take."

"I'm sorry, I—I didn't mean to. I think she needs help. I can go and get some; just let me go and I can get her help, okay?" *He's crazy,* he thought. He knew what he was saying was futile, but that thought only lingered in the back of his mind, like the fear of getting caught. It grew into a raging crescendo. This was a new kind of fear.

"I can't let you leave."

"Please." His voice hitched.

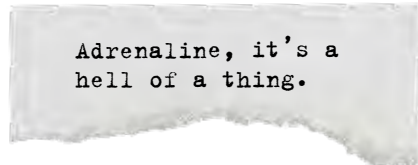
"You'll regret touching her."

There was a soft click and the bird in the clock popped out, its artificial coos breaking the silence of the scene.

The man's stomps cut through the silence like sledgehammer smashes. He wasn't just running. He was hurtling towards him. He dodged the couches and center table with shocking agility. Jack didn't move, as if he forgot how his legs functioned. He stared at the man that would surely be his demise. As he drew closer, he could only focus on the features of his face and how it was animated with fury, like something you might see in a horror movie, but this was no movie. This was real. Jack was no match. Jack was a dead man.

Then as fast as the man came at him, he fell. His left leg just came out from underneath him and he crashed spectacularly. His impact shook the room. The man had slipped on blood. He let out a roar of rage—or was it pain? Some of the china plates from the mantle fell to the floor and scattered into shards. The abrupt sound of it shocked Jack out of his temporary paralysis.

He turned to run but tripped himself, his foot catching the legs of the woman. He went sprawling onto the floor, his left hand taking the full weight of him. The gold bear head tipped over and rolled off the mantle only to hit the stone fireplace below. The bear came bouncing near Jack's head. He turned over to get back up, to assess how close the man was to getting up himself, if he was going to at all. Jack didn't feel the fall at all. Adrenaline, it's a hell of a thing. He let out a scream of outright panic. The man was in a running crawl that seemed almost faster than the initial run. He was crawling like a bear.



Adrenaline, it's a  
hell of a thing.

The man pounced on top of him. Jack put out his hands in a feeble attempt to stop him, and they collided. His size overwhelmed Jack, pinning him to the ground, knocking the wind right out of him. He gasped for air but found he couldn't take any in. He felt the cool of latex on his neck.

Jack tried to cringe away, but he was locked into place. He tried to fight back, flinging his hands up to the man's face. He pushed and clawed. It was like fighting a statue. The man simply took no notice.

"Don't. You. Touch. Her." He tightened his grip with every word.

Jack pushed his hands onto the man's face. Nothing. He tried to pry the cold latex hands free. No use. He was too strong.

They struggled for what seemed like hours, then the fight in him began to dissipate. Things split into double vision. All sounds were muffled into static, like a poorly-tuned radio. The man was speaking—no, shouting—but Jack couldn't hear a word. *This is it*, he thought. *This is how it ends*.

He made choking sounds that he couldn't hear. What were once forceful attacks were now weary jerks of his arms. He tried to kick, but his legs were restrained to the floor under the man's weight, which only seemed to grow. White film grain flooded his vision, specks buzzing around, obscuring the man's face. *I'm sorry, Mom. please, please know I'm sorry*. The white overtook him. For one solitary moment, it felt like floating.

He expected some dreamlike cocoon, but there was nothing.

Then at once, there was a flash of color. Moving pictures formed in front of his eyes.

He recognized the white walls as they came into focus around him. His mother laid on a bed held up by metal posts, a breathing tube attached to her mouth. She looked peaceful in her comatose state. He brought her favorite flowers: rhododendrons the color of

*(blood)*

the scarlet lipstick that she wore so often. He wondered if she would wear it again someday. The heart rate monitor next to her bed emitted rhythmic sounds like a metronome. The sounds came in steady consistent beeps.

Beep, beep,

*(tick)*

beep.

He reached out and clutched the warmth of her hand, its soft groves all too similar to his own.

"I read somewhere that coma patients are aware of what's going on around them. I hope that's true," he said, brushing away a tear. "I just want you to know that money is gonna be coming in soon. I've got a plan. I know you won't like it but I'm gonna get you the best care possible, okay?"

She didn't move or acknowledge that he was there. The monitor kept beeping, as if that was her response instead.

"I love you, Mom. I know you'll wake up. Just--if you can hear me, please wake up." She only lay there. "Please."

Yet, through the surrealness of the vision before him, he heard a voice from his own mind, a commentary of his own past. This is fine, it said, and he believed it. This isn't so bad, this space, this death. This is just fine. She wasn't going to make it anyways, and did you really believe she would?

*No*. At once he knew it was the truth, the cold dead truth. And from this realization came not fear or guilt, but blissful relief. *No, not really. She was never going to come out of this. And I won't either. We'll both just fade away, and that's okay.*

That'll be just . . . fine.

Her hand felt cold and hard now, like metal.

*Just let go.*

There was a ticking sound. A beep.

The white walls of the room fogged again with white static. The room faded away, out of a state of being to the beyond, and that was just fine.

*It's time*, said that spectating voice, and Jack was ready.

But there was no beyond.

But there was no beyond.

All his senses came flooding back as quickly as they had gone. Jack was back in the den starting up at the bearded man. In his hand wasn't his mother's hand, but the gold bear head statue that had fallen off the mantle. Almost mechanically, without any consideration, he swung his right arm in a high arch and the bear head collided with the man's temple. The impact made a metallic *donk* sound that reverberated through the den. The man let out a horrific sound of agony and he loosened his grip. Jack sucked in a sip of air.

Blood began to flow from the man's head where the bear had collided. It ran down his face and through his beard like water through moss. It splattered Jack's face in thick drops of warm crimson. He tasted copper. He brought the bear back into the man's head harder than before. It hit him straight on, full force. The man's head was cocked to the side violently, and more blood flew from his face and sprayed through the air. The look of rage that was across the man's face dropped to dull vacancy, and he fell inanimately on top of Jack, covering him with dead meat.

Jack didn't so much breathe in fresh air as he hitched it in, then let out guttural coughs. It hurt like he had inhaled shards of glass. He threw the bear head away, and it clattered to the floor, leaving fine streaks of red where it rolled. *Oh my God. I'm alive*. Yet in the back of his mind that fear came roaring up. He found there was no relief in living, not a single feeling of comfort.

He pushed the man off him. His lifeless body smacked the mahogany floorboards with a sickeningly meaty sound. Jack scrambled up from the floor, crawling away backwards like some horrific, arachnoid creature. His back hit

the wall of the den. The man's blood ran down his face, leaving thick streaks like war paint. He hyperventilated, emitting pitiful whimpers.

*I should be dead*, he thought, and he began to sob. In that moment, he felt nothing but immense guilt. Guilt and rolling fear. It flowed through him like waves of black tides, sweeping away any semblance of happiness.

The bear head of the rug stared at him with eyes of deep obsidian and Jack stared back. He landed on one coherent thought, but he couldn't remember where he heard it: *When you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares right back*.

The seconds of his life continued with the rhythmic ticking of the cuckoo clock. 🌊



Running Tears | Tofik Khan | Silver Gelatin Print



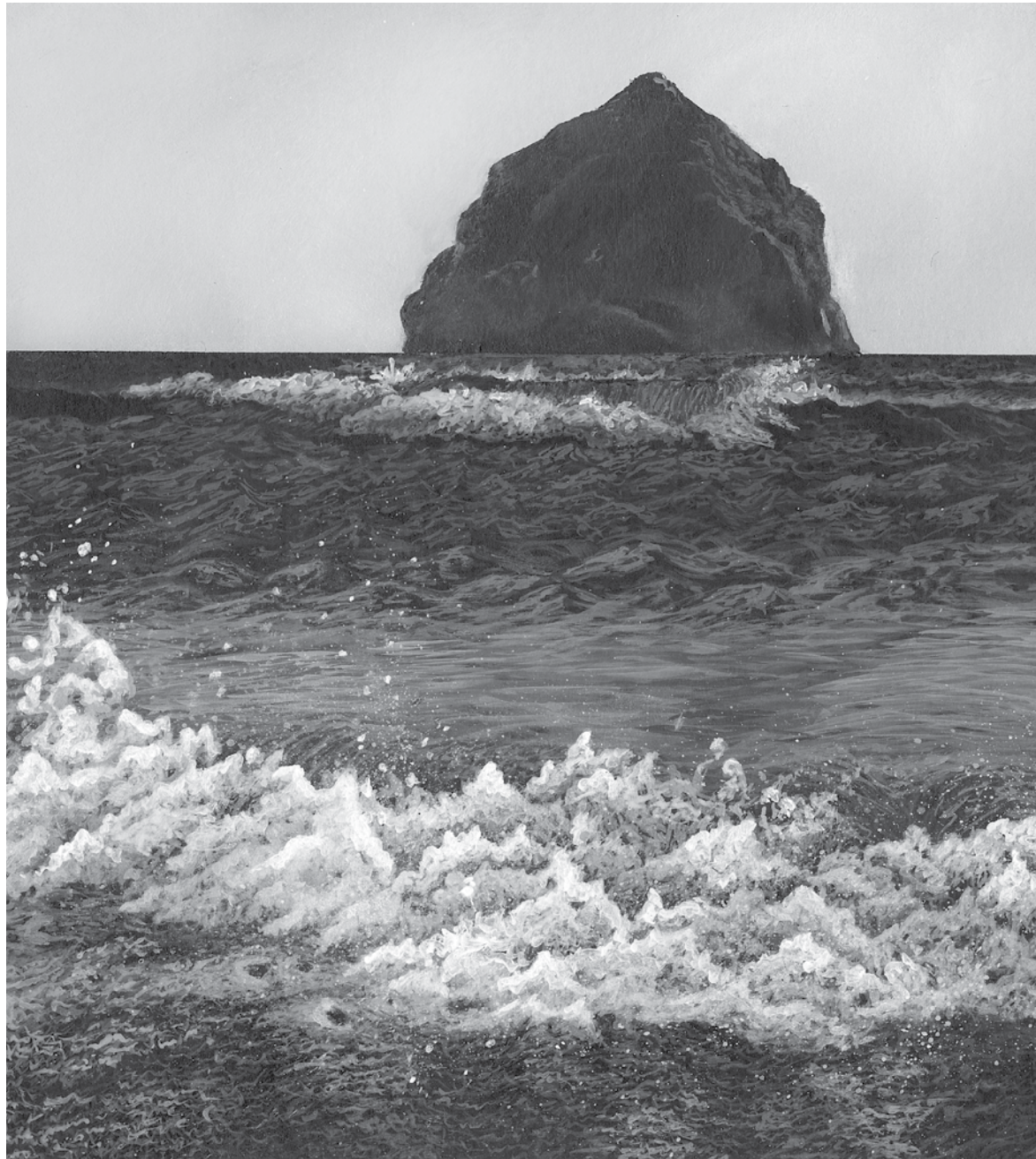
Window | Keyanna Owen | Digital Photo



Ephemeral | Maria Schaljo | Photogram

# Ashes

By Riley Kankelberg



Among the Crashing Waves | Ariana Snyder | Acrylic on Paper

My sister was never one for road trips. When she was a baby it was understandable; babies are allowed to scream and cry whenever it suits them. By the time she was four, however, she was a monster. I'd glare at my parents from the backseat, dodging her tiny but powerful fists and wondering why the hell I'd taken time off from work for this. It was admirable, wanting their children to be close, but when one was a prom-night accident and the other a mid-life surprise, the odds of any sort of brother-sister bonding were low.

Now, I tried to ignore her. It was almost midnight, and I was having a hard enough time focusing on the pitch-black, one-lane road. At twenty-five years old, Bella still couldn't sit still. The phone came out, then went away. The seat belt clicked off; then the warning light annoyed her, and it clicked back on. She squirmed in her seat, retrying each position only to discover it still wasn't comfortable. "Do we really have to listen to this?" she asked finally.

My CD player was spinning "Otherside" by Red Hot Chili Peppers. I had to turn it up farther than normal to hear it over the pounding rain. I pretended I didn't hear her.

"Tim! Can we change the music?"

"What would you prefer?"

"Country."

"You mean Travis Tritt?"

"I mean Carrie Underwood."

I winced at the mention of modern country. "I don't have any of her."

"No, and you can't plug your phone in because this truck is a million years old."

"It has character."

"It has tetanus."

I tightened my grip on the steering wheel, taking a deep breath. I'd bought the car when I was sixteen, the first big purchase I'd made with my own money. The years had put an orange tint on the green paint and most everything had been replaced, but it still ran like the day I brought it home. My parents had stood by the side of the driveway, arms crossed and frowning. It bothered them that I finally had something of my own, something they couldn't hold over my head. When I brought the truck home they'd been eager to let me know that I would be paying for my own gas, my own insurance, my own everything. And then my sister came along, and she never paid for anything.

"You know," I said. "We should at least try to have some fun."

"I didn't even want to go."

"Mom and Dad wanted us to."

"Well it's not like they're in a position to comment."

"Do you ever think about the things you say before you say them?"

My headlights cut through the dark and the rain, shining on a figure off the side of the road. I put my blinker on and began turning off the road.

“What are you doing?” Bella asked.

“Being a good person.”

“He could be a psychopath! Or a serial killer!”

“I’m pretty sure you could very well be a serial killer if you put your mind to it.”

“Yeah, well, I haven’t put my mind to it. I’m serious, just keep driving.”

“I’ve picked up hundreds of hitchhikers. Hell, I’ve hitchhiked hundreds of times.”

“And that’s supposed to comfort me?”

I applied some more pressure to the brakes, fully intending to stop, but was overwhelmed by a sense of déjà vu so strong that I froze. I’d driven this road

many times, and years before there had been another hitchhiker on the side of the road. She’d been bundled up in scarves and coats, her thumb half-heartedly out, as though she could walk if she really wanted. As if her college wasn’t a couple hundred miles away. I’d seen her in a math class the quarter

Before everything crumbled around me in a slow, magnificent implosion.

before, and although we’d never spoken directly, I remembered her as one of the smart ones. That time I’d pulled over was when things started going right. It was the beginning of the happiest year of my life, the brief three-hundred or so blissful days before everything crumbled around me in a slow, magnificent implosion.

I rolled right by the hitchhiker. He flipped me the double bird, and I winced. It was a jackass move, I knew, but maybe it was the best one.

“Thank God,” Bella muttered. She began looking through my CDs again.

“You know, nothing has magically appeared since the last time you looked.”

“Well, I hate this band. There has to be a better option in here.”

“You used to love these guys.”

She looked up, her eyes narrowing. “I have never liked the Red Hot Chili Peppers.”

“You did when you were little.”

“Mom and Dad didn’t even listen to them.”

“No, but I did. I used to watch you when they went to the beach. As soon as I was on break from school they’d take off and leave the two of us alone.”

“So you played this band?”

“Yes.”

“I was probably screaming and crying.”

“No, you danced to it.” She narrowed her eyes again, and I smiled. “You did. When you could walk you’d jump around to it. You even knew some of the words.”

“Bullshit.”

“It’s true. When I took my break they stopped asking me to babysit, and you went to the dark side of music.”

“Pretty long break.”

I gritted my teeth. It had taken less than two hours for her to bring it up.

“Excuse me?”

“You didn’t take a break from college; you dropped out.”

“That’s not exactly what happened. I took a break and lost my scholarship, so I couldn’t afford to go back. You know that.”

“So you dropped out.”

My fingers clenched around the steering wheel. The trip was turning into one long walk down memory lane, and that road was heading to a place I didn’t want to go. There were things I hadn’t thought of in years, more a matter of self-preservation than discomfort. I couldn’t stop my wandering brain, and before I knew it I was stuck in the dean of students’ office where I’d sat almost two decades before.

He had his hands folded at the edge of his desk. The desk was like my parents’ office. Immaculate. Neat. Not a picture out of place, not a pencil out of line, not a paper skewed. Already I was on edge. Places where dirt and dust weren’t a part of life made me squirm. My childhood had been one endless cycle of cleaning up. Picking things up off the floor wasn’t enough. Everything had to be dusted and scrubbed and vacuumed and organized. I wasn’t even a messy person. That was what had always driven me mad about how they raised my sister. She had no sense of organization and only a basic grasp of how to clean a bathroom. She’d never had to.

The dean cleared his throat, and I looked up. “I know you’ve had a rough couple of months. The board and I understand the situation, and we feel for you. We really do. I want you to know that, personally, I think you did the right thing.”

My entire body was still. I felt like I was watching a horror movie. Not one with cheap jump scares or deliberately timed music, but a good one. One where the camera angles did all the work, panning slowly in odd, awful patterns around the main character.

“Unfortunately, we have to take certain rules into account. We cannot pick and choose between special circumstances. It’s too slippery a slope.”

My mouth went dry. “So, you’re saying . . .”

“You are welcome to re-enroll this coming quarter. But, due to the break you took, your scholarship will not be waiting.”

I took so long to speak that he purposefully shifted one of his pencils just so he could shift it back. “Sir,” I said finally. “Sir, I don’t think you understand. She’s gone. I mean, it would be one thing if we figured it all out together, but that’s not what happened. My—our daughter—I never even got to meet her. She was gone before she was even a real person, and now my girlfriend’s gone too.”

“I’m sorry, son,” he said. “We can’t make any exceptions.”

Some of the anger from that memory, from his face with its bloated imitation of sympathy, fed into the irritation I always felt when I was stuck with my little

sister. “You know, just because you got some fancy degree from NYU doesn’t mean that you have higher ground.”

“Yes it does.”

“Why do you even care so much?”

“Because I finally won.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I finally showed you up.”

“You’ve shown me up your entire life.”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Yes, you have. I was the screw-up; you were the do-over. I never heard the end of it. ‘Your little sister did this,’ ‘your little sister did that.’ Translation: ‘if only you’d been more like her.’” It was petty, but I’d never been able to

help being jealous of that little wild-eyed child and how our parents fawned over her. How they handed her a twenty-dollar bill every time she left the house. How she’d been allowed to throw her clothes on the floor and leave them there for weeks. “It didn’t help that you were always shoving it in my face.”

I was the screw-up; you were the do-over.

“I was proud of myself! I was only ever trying to get you to like me, anyways.” I narrowed my eyes at her. “I liked you just fine.”

“No you didn’t.”

“I thought you were spoiled, sure, but I still liked you. You’re the one who never came and stayed with me when I offered.”

“You lived in a dump.”

“For a second there, I thought we were going to have a nice moment.”

She turned away from me, staring determinedly out the window.

“I don’t think this was what they had in mind, you know,” I said.

“They are dead,” she said, without looking at me. “They don’t get a say anymore, especially since it’s their own goddamn fault.”

“Okay, that’s too far.”

“Why? They can’t hear us. If you get in a car when you’re so drunk you can’t see straight, you can’t blame anyone but yourself when you cause an accident.”

“That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t respect their wishes.”

“I think it does. Do you know how often they checked up on where I was going and who would be there? My curfew was 9:00. They called people’s parents to make sure there wouldn’t be any beer, even if I’d known the kids for years. And then they go and cause a three-car pile up because they’re drunk off their asses. It’s kind of ironic when you think about it.”

“I don’t want to think about it. I just want to have a nice car ride with my sister.”

“While we go spread our parents’ ashes?”

“Why can’t we get along? Why can’t you put a little more effort into this?”

“Because I don’t want to. I don’t like you enough to waste the energy.”

“You don’t like me enough?”

“No. We have nothing in common. I’m twenty-four and you’re forty-two. I’m a journalist and you’re in construction. I have a BA and you’re a college dropout.”

“We’re back to that again? I didn’t drop out, life just got in the way.”

“By the way, I’ve got a question,” Bella said as though I hadn’t spoken. “Did you ever stop and think about what you screwing up might have done to me? Thanks to you, I had no choice but to be the perfect child. I had to be better than everyone all the time, or they’d get this sad look on their face, like I’d just shit all over their hopes and dreams.”

“Oh please. You couldn’t do anything to make them think less of you.”

“You weren’t there! And you weren’t even a bad kid. You got good grades, and you had no discipline record, so the only way to be better than you was to be a fucking angel. I got a ninety-three on an essay once and all they could say was that it was a little too close to an A- for their liking. You had a scholarship! You were doing well! All you had to do was finish and get a degree, so why did you have to blow it all?”

“See, this is what’s wrong with you. You’ve had everything handed to you. You’ve never seen anything outside your perfect little bubble. Shit happens.”

“Tim?”

“No! You have to learn that not everything—”

“Shut up! Your car is smoking!”

I looked over at her, and she pointed out the windshield. I swore. What I’d thought was mist was actually coming from my engine. I pulled over and turned the car off.

“What’s going on?” Bella asked.

“It’s probably just overheating,” I said, reaching back for my water bottle.

“Isn’t your temperature gauge supposed to tell you that?”

“My temperature gauge hasn’t worked in years.”

“Yeah, because this stupid car is so old.”

I yanked a little too hard on the hood release and left, slamming the door. When I tried to lift the hood it burned my hand, and I bit my tongue to keep from screaming every line of profanity I knew. Bella joined me. She watched as I pulled my coat over my hand and opened the hood with my makeshift glove. I coughed, waving the steam away.

“What’s the water bottle for?” she asked.

“If the coolant tank is leaking, water should get us to the nearest rest stop.”

She got back into the cab, muttering something unpleasant about my truck. I left the hood up, carefully pouring the water into the tank.

The hardest part was that we hadn’t always been at each other’s throats. We’d never been close by any means, but there hadn’t always been the anger that charged the air between us like an electric shock.



The one time Bella had visited me, she'd been sixteen. We'd had a nice couple days hanging out around town, and then I'd driven her home. A couple months later I'd gone over for dinner and everything had been different. She'd always been a brat. It came with being raised like a princess, but that was the first night she'd truly been angry with me, and she'd never stopped.

Finished, I climbed back into the truck. It started easily enough, but I still searched for exit signs as we drove. We turned off the road into a little town with a 24-hour gas station.

"Can you fill the truck up?" I asked as I climbed out.

"Your tank isn't empty."

"Just fill it up, please. I'll get the coolant."

"I suppose I have to pay for it too."

"I am driving. It's the least you could do."

Bella sighed and got out. I put a temporary patch on the leak, calculating the cost to get it fixed, and slammed the hood down. I stood next to my sister. The pump was going at half the rate of a normal gas station, and for a while we watched the numbers climb decimal point by decimal point. "Can I ask you something?" I said.

She didn't answer.

"Why did you start hating me?"

"Don't be stupid. We've never been close."

"No, there was a definite moment where you started hating me. What did I do?"

"It's more what you didn't do."

"Fine. What didn't I do?"

My sister's eyes were fixed on the slowly climbing numbers. She didn't look at me as she spoke. "You know why Mom and Dad were so hard on us, right? They had all these dreams and they didn't get them. And most of us go off to college or out into the world and we have these big shiny eyes and grandiose plans, but then one day we look up and none of that actually worked out. Life got in the way. They didn't get that. They had you. In their minds, they could have done everything they wanted, but they couldn't because of that one roadblock. They wanted us to do better. And when you didn't get as far as they wanted you to, they did everything different to try to push me ahead."

The rain started coming down harder, filling the silence she left. I wasn't sure I'd ever seen Bella speak without throwing in some sort of jab or injecting a hint of sarcasm.

"We had a weekend together," she said finally. "You dropped me off and we felt a lot closer than we ever had. Like we were real people with a real relationship. You told me that if I ever needed anything, all I needed to do was call. I tried to take you up on that. Of course, you never knew that. I called you sixteen times and you didn't answer once. You called me an entire week later to see what I needed."

"What did you need?"

"A ride. Just a ride."

"A ride where? Why couldn't Mom and Dad drive you?"

"Because I couldn't tell them that I'd managed to do the exact same thing they thought ended their lives."

I closed my eyes. I remembered that day. I'd spent my entire waking hours in the bar five minutes from my trailer. I was doing what I always did on the anniversary of my daughter's birth, the day they whisked her away before I could see how un-baby-like she looked; I was getting shitfaced. I couldn't tell her that, though.

"You were—?"

"Pregnant. Yeah."

She didn't even know how close she'd gotten to being an aunt. It was only fitting that I never knew I could have been an uncle.

"I'm sorry," I said. "What did you do?"

"I took a bus. Went to a clinic the next state over. I told Mom and Dad that I was going to a friend's for the day, and they didn't question it. They never knew. They never got to look at me like I was a big disappointment. Like I'd thrown away everything they'd given up. All I needed was a ride. And you couldn't even do that."

The pump clicked.

"Why didn't you come?" she asked.

"It's hard to explain."

"Tell me. You at least owe me that."

I nodded. She had a point. "Remember when I mentioned the shit that happened? That I had to deal with?"

She nodded.

"I lost my scholarship because I took a quarter off. There was this girl I'd been with for a couple years. I picked her up while she was hitchhiking, funny enough. She got pregnant, and we decided we were going to keep the baby." I smiled. "It was a little girl."

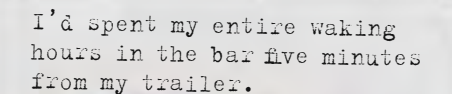
"But I'm not an aunt."

"She was stillborn. My girlfriend couldn't look at anything that reminded her of that kid. Not the college, not the apartment we rented . . . and not me. And then they wouldn't give me my scholarship back. Every year after that, on that day, I drink myself stupid and turn my phone off. You called that day."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Bella asked.

"You were two years old when it happened. I didn't think it was relevant."

"It was pretty fucking relevant, Tim. We're siblings. Family. We're supposed to tell each other these things."



I'd spent my entire waking hours in the bar five minutes from my trailer.

“We have the same parents. That doesn’t really mean we’re family.”  
We stood in silence, the rain pounding overhead.

The beach wasn’t anything special. It was pebbly and cold, the white caps of the ocean bouncing off the grey sky. The rain had stopped at about two in the morning, but the wind still cut through the layers we wore. Our parents had loved this place. They’d taken entire weekends off to stay in the one-room cabin a mile down the shore.

My sister held the urn tightly in her hands. “When I die, just bury me. None of this ‘one with nature’ crap.”

“I’m pretty sure I’m dying first.”

“Whatever. I know I’m not supposed to say this, but I hate them a bit.”

“They loved you.”

“I know they loved us. Maybe they should have focused on that a little more instead of sculpting us into perfect little socialites.”

I thought that as well, but it wasn’t something I was about to say with their ashes a couple inches away. “They did their best. That’s all they could.

“They fucked us up. We have that in common, at least.

I snorted. We chuckled on the beach for a couple minutes then opened the urn and let the ashes fall into the ocean. The wind blew some of it into the pebbles, but I was sure they’d be okay with that. Then we went back to the truck.

“I’m going to need some coffee for the ride back,” I said. “McDonald’s sound good?”

“Cheapskate,” Bella muttered. Apparently common ground didn’t mean an end to bickering. That was okay. We were different people, after all. 🌊



Under | Jordain Harrop | Charcoal on Paper



Rhythm Curly Bowls | Claudia Carter | Ceramic



Maria's Boat and Protect Me | Maria Harris | Acrylic on Canvas and Oil on Canvas





Sunset Pier View | Tamara Rene Smith | Digital Photo

## On The Spectrum

By Aron Bernstein

I

I take care when I look into a lake—  
I must not lose my gaze and come  
to prefer that world,  
rippling on the surface,  
to the one I was bent into, warped  
from the silvered backing  
on the lake's liquid glass,  
shaped to remember that I was  
and will only ever be  
shaped once.

II

The approaching ray  
does not know its own colors  
until its trial by glass,  
the ordeal of the prism.

Then, bent out of bondage, they come,  
but the hotter, the wilder,  
the more deflected.

Violet rides off the rainbow's inner track  
down tangents to a hidden bearing,  
while the reds, more sedate,  
fly straight enough to bridge  
the evening and the dawn,  
marvels lost  
on the pallid beam  
that broke itself  
to see them.

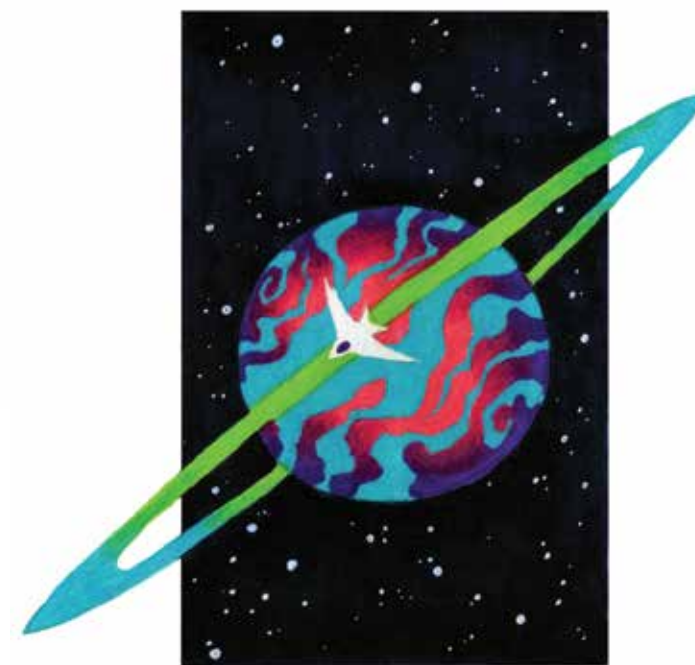
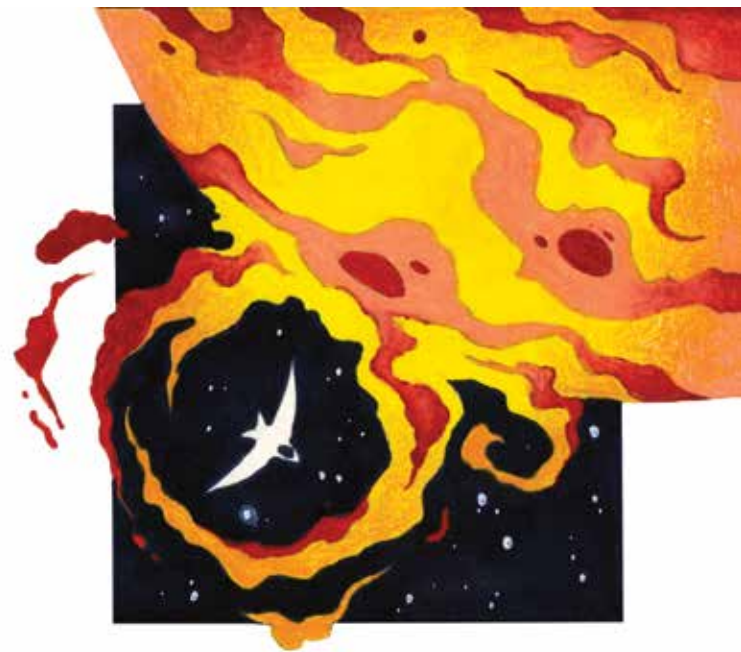
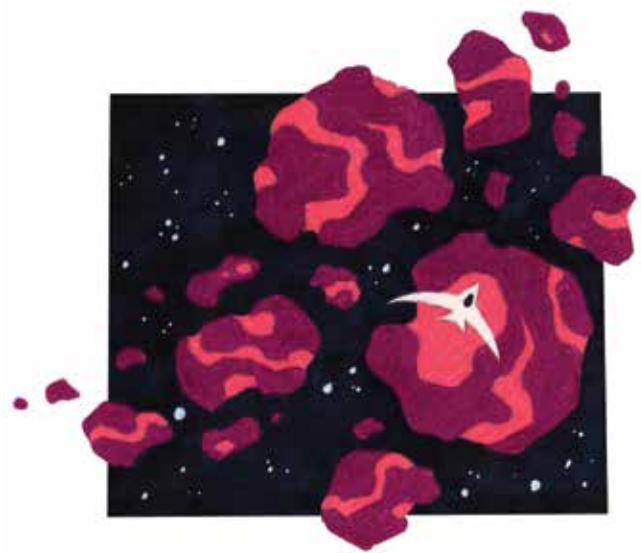
III

Madrones and mountains alike are seduced  
by the dance of their inverse selves,  
but I choose with a turning glance  
what to see—  
the face I stole  
or a candid lake bed.



Night and Day | Sarah Long | Digital Illustration





Space Exploration | Cleopatra Martushev  
Prismacolor Marker and Colored Pencil

## Statements Writers & Composers



**Coffee**  
Jenn Hughes

### VIDEO & MUSIC

Featured on ClarkPhoenix.com



**Thunderstorm**  
Ann Hanlin



**The Great Pacific Garbage Patch**  
Krysta Brixey



**Time Stops**  
Victoria Lopuga



**be conscious of this privilege**  
Lauren Duquette, Victoria Gutierrez,  
Lissa McCarty, and Connor Wier

**MALLORYANN AMICK** has been writing poems since middle school, when she kept them in a notebook. Someday, she hopes to keep them in a real book. She draws her inspiration from real life events and the world around her.

**CHRISTINA ARNAUTOV** is studying music at Clark and plans to transfer to PSU for a bachelor's degree in jazz voice. She spends a lot of time writing her own music in hopes to record and release her songs in the future. Her ultimate goal is to become a full-time recording artist in the gospel/Christian genre.

**ARON BERNSTEIN** is a music teacher, composer, and writer. He has written a symphony, a novel, short stories, and poems. Living in Oregon with his fiancée, he is currently creating an online music theory curriculum to help adult musicians and music enthusiasts.

**SAMANTHA BROOKS** is known by family and friends for her "justice bone." Passionate about fighting for social justice and those in need, she went to Haiti with a team in 2014, volunteering in an orphanage and providing medical assistance. Samantha leaves in June to travel across Eurasia for six months, combating human-trafficking. She hopes that her writing will inspire people to begin recognizing—and meeting—the needs of those around them.

**SAMANTHA BUNCH** was inspired to write a story where the environment was crucial to the feeling of the story. She settled on a Nevadan desert town because of its ugly sort of loneliness and its indications about the characters living there.

**LAUREN DUQUETTE**, being the bastard child of strangers, is a rootless canyon of wide open sky. People and places drift through this space. She grabs at the dust and licks the grains from her hands, hoping to become part of something.

**KAREN JAMES** draws her inspiration from all the children who have witnessed abuse within their families. This piece is from a chapter of a book she is currently writing. She is a recently retired certified counselor and fitness professional.

**RILEY KANKELBERG** is very close with her own sibling but wanted to explore what it might be like on the opposite side of the coin. She put two dysfunctional siblings in an old truck and watched the baggage unload. The response from her peers prompted her to submit the piece for publication.

**RITA MAKSIMENKO** has always been a writer and an avid reader. Her poetry is a mirror of her mind. She has accomplished multiple 50,000-word novels in 30 days for NaNoWriMo. This is her first time in print. She lives in beautiful, rainy Washington.

**LISSA MCCARTY** has been composing music since middle school. She is majoring in piano at Clark College and is a music teacher in Southwest Washington.

**EILY MCILVAIN** has been a waitress but has never been on the run from a criminal ex-lover. She writes about the connections that people create under unusual circumstances and believes that nobody is easy to understand. She has lived in the Pacific Northwest her whole life and refuses to die here.

**LYNNIE MCILVAIN's** connection to Greek mythology shaped her childhood and now shapes her adulthood. Retelling the story of Medousa allows her to play with how we define ourselves, how we define each other, and what exactly makes a monster. In September, Lynnne will begin her work on her classical studies degree.

**ALEX MCGARITY** is a reader who enjoys horror, suspense, and thriller stories. This is his first time in print, but he hopes to write more stories around other horror-based topics. He is a massive fan of Stephen King, who is a big inspiration to his own writing. This is the first story he has written.

**MARTIN MIDDLEWOOD** tramped forests in Southeast Asia, walked the Great Wall in China, trod the ancient streets in York, and returned to tell the stories. As a writer, editor, ghostwriter, and columnist, he has published more than 600 articles in a bouquet of magazines and newspapers. L.A. poet at heart, his work has appeared in *Innisfree*, *Proofrock*, *4 & 20*, and other publications. He and his wife live in Vancouver, where they raised four remarkable daughters, who also reside nearby.

**ASHLEE NELSON** is a writer, editor, and illustrator living with her cat, Sirce. As a creative individual, Ashlee hyperfocuses endlessly on relationships and the connections forged between two entities. She also will eat your cake, unless you were planning on finishing that?

**LEAH SATHRUM** is a Clark College graduate and currently works part-time at a movie theater. She hopes to use her writing to become a content specialist and aspires to one day publish a novel. She currently lives in Oregon with her sister and is enjoying a gap year before attending university.

**CONNOR WIER** is an aspiring composer working toward an associate degree in music. Many of his works are in the styles of the impressionists and other composers of the early twentieth century. In the future, he hopes to professionally write music for full symphony orchestras and a variety of other ensembles.

**Sketch of a Barren Landscape** Connor Wier

**Unworthy** Christina Arnavtov

**A Hero's Quest** Connor Wier

**BEN AMOS** will pursue interactive media at DigiPen next year. He currently serves as secretary of the Clark College Comics Club and is collaborating on multiple stories. One day Ben hopes to use unique storytelling devices to address the issues of addiction, mental health, and debilitating disease.

**DON ANDERSEN** was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, attending the Art Institute of Chicago. After putting his art career on hold for fifty years in order to raise a family, more recently he's taken classes at Portland Community College and Clark. Don tries to insert an element of mystery into his paintings.

**IAN BECKETT** is the Instructional Technician for The Frost Arts Center at Clark College and a Technician for Blue Moon Camera. Ian is a life-long photographer, exploring the medium as an archival record. Ian lives in Portland, Oregon, with his wife and daughter.

**KRYSTA BRIXEY** has loved art from a young age. She enjoys the process of creation and will never stop being an artist. She enjoys the digital, printmaking, painting, and drawing formats. To her, anything is a thrill as long as it's visual and hands-on.

**STEPHANIE BOWEN** has recently begun experimenting with ceramics and hopes to continue growing her skills by combining her welding knowledge with artistic expression. Her gaming background with Dungeons and Dragons helps her to express herself in out-of-the-box ways, by incorporating them into her pieces.

**CLAUDIA CARTER** is a Vancouver-based ceramic artist. Her works are infused with history and emotional expression. Claudia curates the *Art and History of African Americans in the NW* for Black History month each February.

**AUSTIN COLLINS** uses a variety of photographic formats to express very personal and difficult stories. With her work she calls attention to the nasty diseases that are eating disorders, which condemn those who suffer to do so in silence.

**LEXI DUFAULT** has been a film photographer for five years. Her work has been featured in Clark's Art Student Annual for two years, as well as in *Phoenix* last year. Portraiture is her favorite way to resonate with her audience.

**HAYLEY ESTEP** is a photographer and graphic designer from Vancouver. As a child, Hayley grew up taking photos with disposable cameras and painting alongside her grandmother. She works as a freelance photographer and her goal is to keep her clients happy while making their dream final product a reality.

**OLIVIA GAGNON** has been an artist her entire life and enjoys working with different mediums. She hopes to someday be a muralist and an archaeologist in the Northwest. She finds inspiration in nature where light illuminates the colors of everyday objects. She works out of her home in Camas.

**JOHN GASAWAY** is in his third year at Clark with a double major in studio arts and graphic design. John's work combines depth and dimension with light and shadow, brushed over to create a soft light technique, a skill he has worked on diligently for years. He is inspired and captivated by all that surrounds his space.

**ANGELICA GREBYONKIN** studied ceramics at Evergreen High School and now at Clark. Her work has been a contender in the Southwest Washington 2018 Regional High School Art Show. She started making ceramic charms and figurines in 2014 and since then her love for the medium has only grown.

**MORGANNE GUIER** has always been interested in the fine arts and fabrication. Her pieces draw inspiration from fiction and fantasy, recreating imagined worlds. She's a proud mother to her dog, Chica.

**VICTORIA GUTIERREZ** taught herself to use Photoshop in high school and since then, she has loved experimenting with it and creating new, interesting ways to communicate a message through visual language. Victoria designed the Phoenix cover for the 2018 edition, which won the award for Most Outstanding Community College Literary-Art Magazine from the American Scholastic Press Association.

**MOLLY GUSTOFSON** is in her third year at Clark College. In the spring of 2019 she will be graduating with her AA degree, and will continue next Fall working towards a degree in graphic design. Aside from school and work, she enjoys gardening, petting her cats and listening to indie music.

**STEVIE HALE** is a non-binary lesbian artist living in Vancouver. Hale's art reflects their LGBTQ identity and mental health struggles. They're currently creating works that mythologize the transgender and gay experience in a way that can engage viewers of any gender or sexual identity. They hope to transfer to a 4-year art school within the next year.

**ANN HANLIN** is pursuing her AFA in drawing and painting at Clark. Her goal is to work as a freelance illustrator and sell her pottery online and in local shops. She would also love to teach children to enjoy art through workshops and camps.

**JORDAIN HARROP** changed career paths to go from admiring art to creating it. She tries to work in ways that highlight her humor, interest, and history. Her work reminds her of how much one piece of work can change you.

**MARIA HARRIS** has been interested in art all her life but followed a different career path. Just last year she returned to the Pacific Northwest and looks forward to exploring the outdoors and painting the area's beautiful landscapes.

**JENN HUGHES** is studying graphic design and has been a photographer for ten years. She hopes to land a job after graduation that will allow her to utilize a combination of those skills. Her kids are what inspire her the most.

**KATIE HYLAND** is studying to become a better artist by expanding her forms of expression, through technical practice, and by gaining new information, perspectives and knowledge in all respects. Having experimented with many mediums, drawing and painting are recent favorites, she feels there are endless things to learn and hopes this quality sticks with her.

**TAKUMA IKAWA** is in his second year at Clark College, working to get an AFA degree with a studio concentration in drawing. His goal after graduation is to be an illustrator who designs graphics for skateboards and clothes.

**TOFIK KHAN** is a photography enthusiast. He has been practicing this art for a year and has learned much about the craft through experimentations and mistakes. His aim is to improve at making creative portraits that portray a story.

**JO LAFAYETTE** is currently attending the Oregon College of Art and Craft for their BFA in painting after finishing 2 years at Clark College. They paint predominantly in oils and do 2-D work but also love to explore their relationship with gender in storytelling through comics, embroidery, and soft sculpture.

**SARAH LONG** has been making digital and traditional art since she was twelve years old. Once graduated from Clark, she plans to look for work locally and continue her education at PSU to earn a Bachelors of Fine Arts. She hopes to someday illustrate children's books since they were a big influence on her as a child.

**VICTORIA LOPUGA** is a current student hoping to grow as a graphic designer, writer and videographer. She strives to bring purpose and storytelling through her creative work.

**ERICK MARTINEZ** was born and raised in Bogotá, Colombia. Since moving to the U.S. three years ago, he has been given many opportunities such as his first contact with ceramics. These pieces featured in Phoenix are among his first. He is enjoying ceramics and hopes to create more work and learn more about art.

**CLEOPATRA MARTUSHEV** has been studying graphic design at Clark for three years and plans to transfer and complete a bachelor's degree. Cleopatra has always enjoyed creating her own worlds and adventures through art and exploring new ways to create and tell stories.

**SHIRLEY MORGAN** had never tried pottery until well past her college days. Ceramics absolutely fascinates her and satisfies all her art goals. She uses a combination of throwing, hand building, and just experimenting with clay.

**JULIAN NELSON** is a teacher, artist, and photographer who finds his inspiration from traditional film media. Julian favors traditional, large format, black and white photography with a particular emphasis on portraiture. In addition to publications on modernist aesthetics, he has published his photography and writing in journals and has contributed to a book on contemporary photography.

**SIERRA NERTON** is working on her AA transfer degree and has taken many years of art classes, including two ceramic courses. She usually prefers a clean style and sharp, defined lines, although this work turned out natural and earthy.

**BROOKE A. NUGENT** is currently a sophomore pursuing a degree in graphic design at Clark. Aside from art and design, she enjoys songwriting, music production, and video editing. She has always been passionate about using art for expression, or creative problem solving.

**EMILY O'NEAL** is an artist born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Emily has a passion for music and enjoys weaving musical references into her visual work. She intends to continue both studying and making art and would like to build up a body of work to show in the near future.

**KEYANNA OWEN** has been making pictures since the third grade, starting with documentary photography. She enjoys capturing moments of expression in life, death, feminism, and mental health with photos and mixed media collages.

**JENEVIE PAGUIRIGAN** is a first-time ceramics student. She holds a B.S. in Tourism Management from Saint Paul University Philippines and is currently a pre-nursing major at Clark. She hopes to become a travel nurse in the near future and still find spare time to enjoy ceramics, with which she fell in love.

**TYSON PALMOUR** is in his last year at Clark, working on his AFA with a graphic design concentration. His goal after graduation is to work for a design firm while continuing his freelance work with the surf and skateboard industry.

**BRENDA PEREBOOM** began experimenting in art at a very young age. Like many, she began with coloring books and paint-by-number projects but found herself unable to be confined to the black outlines. Her future artistic endeavors will find her concentrating on creating art that incorporates moving parts.

**DANIEL RIDER** grew up in S.E. Portland and studied graphic design at Clark. He has been an avid muralist, illustrator and photographer. His work has been exhibited including at Portland Institute of Contemporary Art's show, "*Counter Canvas*." He continues to study design, aerial and travel photography, and illustration.

**JAYCEE RITOLA** has always loved drawing and has done art competitions in the past, the *Phoenix* being the first while at Clark. Despite pursuing a scientific degree, she loves the process of making games, animations and books, and she'd like to complete her own creative project one day.

**SIERRA RUGER** has always been creative. Her artistic mediums include digital and hands-on crafts, graphite, painting, writing, and music. She recently began producing one of her music pieces and hopes to complete an album. Born, raised and thriving in her Pacific Northwest community, her desire is to encourage, inspire, and challenge others through her work.

**MARIA SCHALJO** graduated from the Vancouver School of Arts and Academics where she focused in orchestra, AP studio art, and graphic design. In 2016 she won the Congressional Art Contest for District 3. At Clark, she is working on her AA Transfer Degree with an emphasis in graphic design.

**DEANNA SHAW** is originally from Seattle, where she studied graphic design and illustration at The Art Institute. Currently, she is studying oil floral painting in the method of the artist Brian Davis. Previously, she was as a commissioned portrait artist, working mostly with colored pencil or acrylic.

**TAMARA RENE SMITH** is a Coast Guard Veteran that has been drawn to photography since early childhood. After being diagnosed with PTSD, Tamara has developed a passion for finding creative ways of shifting perspective and choosing to see beauty instead of being consumed by the ugly ways life can show up.

**ARIANA SNYDER** has enjoyed drawing and creating art since she was little, and started painting while attending Clark College. She mainly works in oil pastels and charcoal, but she is going to school to become a graphic designer. She hopes that what she creates inspires others.

**JUSTIN STACHOWIAK** has been drawing for as long as he can remember and has since embraced and produced varying art forms such as animation, digital design, music, film, and game development. He aspires to achieve financial stability though creativity, but more so to collaborate and make projects with as many people as possible. He works out of his home in Battle Ground.

**SARAH STEWART** started drawing digitally six years ago. She uses her art as both a form of recreation and self-exploration and it has been featured in several collaborative projects. She is looking forward to her future career as an artist.

**PAIGE TAYLOR** started ceramics on a whim, but it is now something that she would like to continue with forever. She values art because one can pour so much life into it. Paige will keep going with ceramics as long as possible because she can't not make, she needs to create.

**BRYCE VAN PATTEN** has been creating art, writing and recording music professionally for as long as he can remember. Whether he is helping to create a brand and solving design problems; working on animation, character and prop design; or recording and engineering audio, he always gets excited by the challenge.

**ZACHARY L. WARNKE** began to shoot film photography as a creative outlet during his enlistment in the U.S. Air Force. He has devoted five years to the craft, traveling extensively to document everyday life and unique juxtapositions while allowing his photos to tell their own story. He is a Clark College alumnus, currently studying English at Washington State University Vancouver, with plans to travel whenever the opportunity arises.

**T.J. WEST** studied drawing and art history as a Running Start student before taking an interest in photography. Photography interested her because it was not as simple as producing on paper or canvas. After graduation this summer, she plans to pursue a degree in film and television production.



# Staff

Phoenix 2019

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**Connor Wier**  
Managing Editor

**Sarah Long**  
Fine Art Editor

**Susan Zook**  
Layout Designer

**Juliana Del Carlo**  
Layout Co-Editor

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Illustrator/Designer

**Victoria Gutierrez**  
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**Matthew Francisco**  
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Promotional Videos

**Megan Armstrong**  
Asst. Literary Editor

**Emma Lix**  
Asst. Literary Editor

**Haley Phillips**  
Asst. Literary Editor

## Not Pictured

Elizabeth Donley, Literary Advisor  
Kathrena Halsinger, Art Advisor

**Emily Perry**  
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**Jana Weyant**  
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**Jesca Franke**  
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**Brenden Larkin**  
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**Robert Silk**  
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**Ro Balagat**  
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**Aaron McPherson**  
Asst. Literary Editor

**Samuel Lucas**  
Poetry Editor

**Hayley Estep**  
Illustrator

## COLOPHON

**Phoenix** was produced during the 2018-2019 academic year by the student staff at Clark College's main campus on Apple iMacs using Adobe software. Layout was done in Adobe InDesign.

Images were photographed using a Canon digital SLR or scanned on an Epson 10000xl. Images were adjusted for color accuracy in Adobe Photoshop.

Body text was set in Fairfield, a Venetian old-style designed by Rudolf Ruzicka in 1940 for Linotype. Headlines and captions were set in Avenir, a geometric sans serif designed by Adrian Frutiger and released by Linotype in 1988. Pull quotes were set in Trixie, designed by Erik van Blokland in 1991.

**Phoenix** was printed by Brown Printing in Portland, OR on 80# Pacesetter Silk paper.

