

CALLIOPE

Vol. XX THE STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART & LITERATURE
Spring 2023



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The Student Journal of Art and Literature

Volume XX - Spring 2023

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Our thank you also goes to the many students who submitted their creative efforts for consideration. It is only through their courage and diligence that *Calliope* continues to materialize. We received many fine works this year but were limited in the number of entries we could publish. We hope, however, that students will persist in submitting their works to future editions of *Calliope*.

The *Calliope* Committee extends special appreciation to Annandale faculty and staff in the following offices, divisions, and committees for their continued and generous support of this endeavor:

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Submissions are welcomed from September through February each year at Calliope@nvcc.edu. Submission guidelines are available at <http://www.nvcc.edu/calliope>. *Calliope* reserves the right to reprint and present submitted works on the *Calliope* website and other media. Students interested in joining the *Calliope* staff as interns should contact the editors at the address above.

From the Editor -

Another issue of Calliope is here and so is another revelation—the desire for connection and belonging never fades. Many of us have felt the tug of cynicism and at times despair since the days of the pandemic. Social and political antagonism greet us daily and can overshadow many of the joys we wish to share, the greatest of which being relationships, to one another and to the world around us. The works in this issue can be sobering reminders of the power and beauty in the simple act of relating to each other and appreciating the power of the imagination to force us all to put aside self-doubt or disillusionment and embrace life with empathy and fascination. All of us at Calliope applaud the creativity and insight of the students who have made this issue possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Til Turner". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Til" and "Turner" being capitalized and prominent.

Til Turner
Editor

calliope *kal<e>i:opi*. U.S. (*Gr. Kallioph*)

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses,
presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of
steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes,
played by a keyboard like that of an organ;

2. attrib. calliope hummingbird,
a hummingbird, sellula *calliope*, of the
Western United States and Mexico.

Oxford English Dictionary



First Prize - Poetry

Aigul Egemberdieva

WHEN I MISS YOU

(KG. To my country)

I'm flying like a golden eagle
Above my favorite lake.

I look and drown in it.
It reflects and saves me.

I hear and feel the wind.
The smell of fire, grass.

Let it soak into your hair.
Let it warm your hands.

I remember the sun on my skin.
A herd of horses rushing

through the mountains
Leaving behind a column

of dust. I'm a nomad,
I can't be stopped.

Your blood boils in me.
I hear your voice.

You pray out loud
Sitting on your knees

Facing East Swaying
in the wind. The smell

of flatbread fills my house.
Round gold glistening

on the table gathering
seekers around it.

They forgot fatigue, sadness.
You are eternity watching

For the dance of life, death.
I am your shadow.

First Prize - Artwork

Maria Munoz

WHERE DID MY RIGHTS GO?

Photography



Second Prize - Artwork

Lains Herman

SELF PORTRAIT

Watercolor and Colored Pencil



Third Prize - Artwork

Megan Perez

HOSTAGE

Digital Art



First Prize - Creative Nonfiction

Daniel Gore

THREE ACTS OF COURAGE

(In loving memory of Mike, the adventurer, and Dad, Mom, Marybeth)

Act 1

The tension was palpable. It was really only a short drive to the barber shop but no one was speaking. Bob drove the green '68 AMC Rambler through the backstreets of town. He was proud of that car, it had been the cheapest one on the entire lot. At the moment though, he wasn't thinking about car prices. Instead he was wishing for a distraction from his son's extreme discontent. Searching the radio stations, he caught the end of a staticky news bulletin. Streams of young folks were heading to a music festival in upstate New York, called Woodstock. Bob turned it off disgustedly. He had seen similar dispatches on television.

He contemplated what he'd just heard. Damn animals. Hippies growing their hair long, smoking marijuana, taking LSD and screwing. The girls are wearing next to nothing and not even shaving their armpits. It's pure hedonism. None of my kids will become like that.

Suddenly, he flashbucked to Nadine in France. Okay, she hadn't shaved her armpits either - but that was different. That was during the war and that was Europe from another era. Besides, all the men he fought with kept close cropped hair - masculine hair. They were real men, respectful to authority and willing to sacrifice for their country. Not like these idiot hippies. I'm taking Mike to get a haircut, even if I have to drag him by his damned ears.

The Rambler paused, delayed from heading to main street by closing railroad crossing gates. Mike sat on the right side of the bench-like front seat. Lost in thought, idly tugging on an unused seat belt, he didn't notice the train surging past.

Dad doesn't get it. He has no idea what school is like. The lines are drawn. Short hair isn't remotely cool. Getting a buzz cut will label me. Might as well brand the word "LOSER" onto my forehead.

No way I am going to be a loser. I can feel things starting to go my way. That girl, Cindy, smiled at me in math class the other day. Coach said he would start me during the next game. They told me my yearbook photos were the best ever taken. I am the number one player on the high school chess team for Christ sakes. It's like all of a sudden I can feel fate touching me and know that I am destined to do something great. But I just can't do that as a loser. Besides, long hair looks cool. There is no fucking way I'm getting my hair cut. I'm scared shitless but have made up my mind. I'll just have to face Dad.

The crossing gates opened and the Rambler moved forward. The car passed the

firehouse and made a left on Main. A series of worn shops and several old bars lined either side of the street.

From the rear seat, Enid considered her husband while fingering some rosary beads. Despite being overly stubborn, Robert was a good man. Unfortunately, he was also way too strict and often had a temper that could erupt from some limitless internal well. Now that they had been married for so long, she understood. For all intents and purposes he had grown up an orphan, never grounded with any sense of security. As a parent, Bob loved his children with all his heart but all those deep-seated emotional scars would take over in times of duress, usually in the form of rage. His anger could be so primal it would completely overwhelm his kids.

He had mellowed somewhat after Marybeth, their youngest, had died on an operating table. But even though his anger had tempered somewhat, Enid sensed some type of gauntlet being thrown down with this trip.

So she had told Bob she needed to come. “Why?” he had demanded. “Because I need to be there,” she responded and gave her do-not-argue look. Normally he was so adamant about doing things his way that she would back down. However, when she gave that look, he knew arguing was useless.

Enid looked at her oldest son, Michael, a forceful personality in his own right. No question he had an independent streak. At fifteen, he was already bigger than Bob. Now he was a goalie on the lacrosse team. She heard only the toughest and craziest boys played lacrosse goalie. They did not wear much protection and those balls were so hard. She had never played sports and shivered at the thought of needless physical pain.

From this angle, she could see Mike’s jaw stiffly set under some growing sideburns. He could be stubborn too - almost as much as Bob - and lately seemed to delight in arguing with his dad on just about any subject. Other times he displayed a voracious temper of his own. She had a bad feeling about what was coming and took refuge in a silent prayer.

Act 2

Bob spied the familiar blood red, white and blue of the barber pole and parked the Rambler in front of the shop. He got out quickly and walked around to the sidewalk. For a moment he hesitated - discarded cigarette butts surrounding the uneven pavement summoned memories of spent shell casings on an open field. Breathing deep he continued onward, opening Enid’s door to help her exit the back seat.

Mike just sat, looking sullen. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders, took a deep breath, and slowly opened the passenger side door. When he got out, he announced quietly, “I am not getting my hair cut.”

“What’d you say?” asked Bob

“You heard me.”

They stood facing each other on the sidewalk. A crack traversed in between like a Maginot Line. Enid watched from the side, a neutral country.

“You are going to get the hell in that barber shop!”

“No way!”

Bob was furious. "I said go in," he bellowed as his right hand clipped Mike off the ear and side of his head.

"You hit me!" Mike spat out with disgust. "You want to fight me?" He reared back an arm before throwing a punch.

Enid, heedless of danger, moved as quickly as she ever had in her life, trying to place her body between the two. She was partially successful, with her shoulder intercepting much of Mike's arm as his fist thrust forward. The punch never reached the intended target but his arm unfortunately succeeded in knocking his mother to the ground.

For a moment, eternity flashed by as each one processed what had just happened. Suddenly they all began to talk at once. Bob and Mike bent to help Enid up, apologizing as they did so. Enid saying "I'm alright, I'm alright" and "you boys just stop this!"

Act 3

They finally shut up and all got back in the car. Mike instinctively took the back seat to put some distance between himself and his father. The ride home was quiet again but the tension had been released like a popped balloon.

Enid reviewed what had just happened. Thank God, nobody had been hurt. She worried for her husband and son, not knowing how this episode might impact their relationship. She vowed to keep praying for them both. The important thing is that the family remains whole.

Mike felt the pure adrenalin that comes with a physical altercation. I'm glad my punch didn't connect though. He had actually seen fear in his dad's eyes - whether because of the oncoming punch or from the realization that things were out of control. I feel bad for Dad but am satisfied I finally stood up to him. I doubt he'll demand I get a haircut again. Somehow Mike knew the relationship would be forever rebalanced.

Bob was shaken to his core and probably had the deepest thoughts. My God. I lost a daughter last year and today I could have lost a son! What would have happened had we really fought? Would he ever forgive me? A haircut is just not worth the price of a child. I really need to try to stop being such a hard ass on my kids. I know I'll have to try my utmost to make a change but am damned nervous that I might not be able to succeed.

When they arrived home, the two younger sons, Terry and Danny, were returning from their joint paper route. They could immediately sense something intense had occurred but if it didn't involve them, they were happy to ignore it. Although both would eventually have their own battles with their father, none would be nearly so dramatic - a good thing for they were never as brave as Mike. It would be many years before they realized how much actual trauma they had been spared as a result of that day's three acts of courage.

Adrian Rosas-Eterovic
SELF PORTRAIT
Digital Art



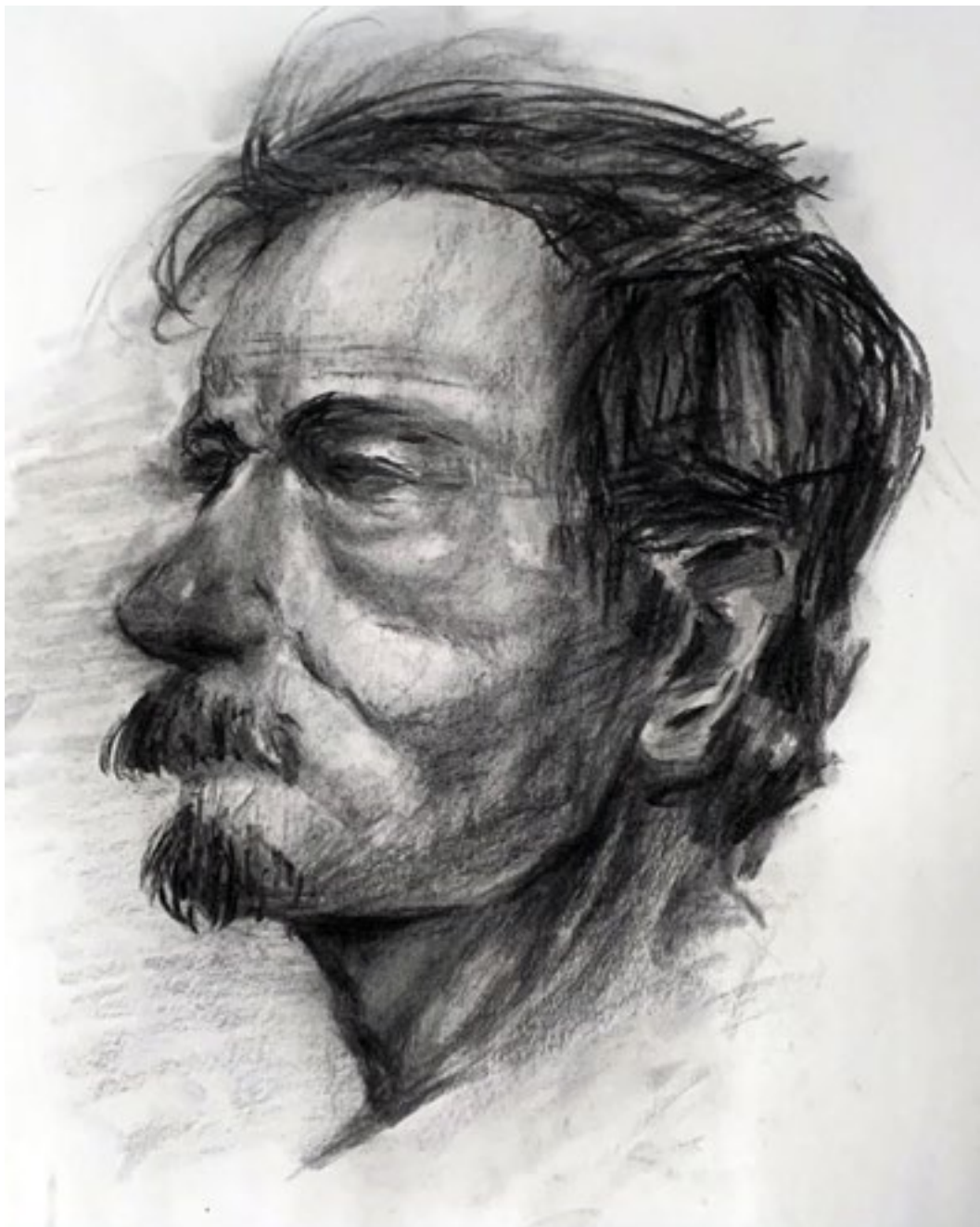
Nathan Evans

PATCHING UP RED

Acrylic on Canvas



Khue Dao
OLD MAN
Charcoal



First Prize - Fiction

Mikayla Hart

BLOODLINES

1935, London, Ontario

Lola woke in her chambers, hastily dressing. She looked out the chamber window, the little town of London, Ontario greeting her. The sunshine felt warm on her skin as she took in the different colors of the autumn leaves gently floating onto the different buildings.

She could see her neighbor, Mrs. Peterson, shouting angrily at her young son, who had just scattered the leaves she was sweeping across the cobblestone street. Lola suppressed a smile.

The neighbor who lived across from Mrs. Peterson - Mr. Noah - who was a middle-aged man from Germany, was starting to cart his farming supplies down the street and towards the field past the village.

If she listened carefully, she could hear the Prestons a few doors down arguing like they did every morning.

With the excitement of the day awaiting her, she headed downstairs for breakfast.

"Maggie, how many times do I have to tell you? Stop touching the hot kettle," Lola recognized the voice of her grandmother, chastising her aunt Maggie. Aunt Maggie was a tall woman in her fifties with short, red hair and blue eyes like the rest of the family. She wore a red working dress.

"Mom, I am not a five-year-old child. I reached over to grab it and it overflowed."

Grandma made a noise of disbelief. She was a tall, slightly squat woman with white hair that went past her shoulders. Currently, her back was to Lola, whose presence hadn't been noticed. Lola flattened herself against the wall, so as not to be noticed.

"I'll take care of it."

Her grandmother looked around quickly, making sure nobody was watching. She recited an incantation, and there was a feeling of something strange in the air. Maggie sighed in relief.

"Now, if anybody asks, just say that I have a secret herb that I use, and I am not telling anyone what it is," Grandma said, pointing her finger sternly at aunt Maggie. Her aunt nodded.

Lola decided that now was the proper time to enter the kitchen.

"Good morning," she greeted. There was a tea kettle on the stove as well as a pot of something boiling - probably a potion. There were also herbs scattered all over the counter.

"Good morning," Aunt Maggie chirped, quickly grabbing a bag of herbs. "I was just picking up a bag of herbs." Her grandmother nodded, going along with the story. "I should be on my way." With that, her aunt quickly left the house.

As soon as her aunt left, her grandmother turned her gaze onto Lola, waving a soup

ladle threateningly.

“What? Have I done something wrong?” Lola asked innocently.

“Just because I am old doesn’t mean you can pull schemes over on me. I have a sixth sense for things. I know you were eavesdropping,” Grandma said.

Lola contemplated whether to tell the truth or not. If she did, she would probably get in less trouble than if she didn’t.

“I didn’t mean to. It just happened as I was walking into the kitchen. And it was just a healing spell -”

“You weren’t meant to see it! What if somebody else had seen it - someone who wasn’t a witch? And no good ever comes of putting your nose into other people’s business,” her grandmother finished. “Now, dear, do you want some breakfast?”

“Yes, please,” Lola answered. She hadn’t noticed with all of the excitement that her stomach was growling. She sat down at the dining room table. On the walls hung portraits of the family, including Grandpa, her aunts, uncles, and cousins. Her grandpa had died the year that Lola had been born. Grandma talked about him sometimes.

There were no photos of her mother in this room. The only things that Lola knew about her were her name was Elizabeth, that she had been seventeen when Lola was born, left shortly after that, and that Lola looked like her. She had learned the latter two facts when she had snuck into her father’s chambers to look at a photo of her parents together. The back had read, “Arlo and Elizabeth, married 1915.” Of course, her father had caught her; while at first, he had been mad, he gave in to her curiosities and answered a few questions. Besides that, there was no talk of her mother. Her grandmother had forbidden it. It was the greatest of all sins for a witch to abandon her family.

She was broken of her reverie by her grandmother delivering her a plate of eggs and toast with milk. Her father entered through the backdoor, brushing away crows. It was of no use though, as the crows flew into the house and perched on the furniture, cawing.

“Your crows are hungry, Mom,” he said, clearly a bit irritated as he shooed away a crow that tried to nest in his hair. Like Lola, Arlo Schwartz had brown hair and blue eyes. He was also a bit adventurous as a young boy, her grandmother had told her. But that was where the similarities between Lola and her father ended. “Good morning, sweetie,” he added, smiling when he saw Lola. She smiled at him.

“Shoo!” her grandmother yelled, flapping her arms at the flock of crows that had gathered around her as she gathered food for them. They only listened to her grandmother. Obediently, they went back to bothering her father, who was fanning them away with his jacket.

“Honestly, Mom, how long are you going to keep this up? This is getting ridiculous!”

“Oh, hush now, you’re the one that’s been ridiculous. We’re witches, Arlo, and crows are creatures of magic, so they’re naturally drawn to us. As creatures of nature, we can’t abandon them when they’re hungry!” Grandma exclaimed, starting to toss bread and fruit to the crows.

“I am not saying that, I am just asking why we have to let them into the house,” her

father countered.

“As creatures of magic, they amplify our magic and report back to me of any changes that I need to be aware of,” Grandma explained.

Father sighed, aware that he was on the losing side of the argument. “I am going back outside to the garden.” Grandma nodded. He took some of the crows with him.

She planned to try to sneak out of the house to spend some time outside in the village. She finished breakfast, and, while Grandma wasn’t looking, grabbed her day hat and bag. She was almost to the door; she could practically feel the sunshine and hear the birds.

“And where do you think you’re going?”

“Outside to the village.”

“No, you’re not. You need to continue your studies,” Grandma said sternly. In her hands were several books. Lola groaned as a crow flew by and stole her day hat, dropping it on the coatrack.

She protested loudly as she led her to the parlor, lit the candles around the room and table, and set the books down. The table was full of tarot cards and cups of tea. Surrounding the table were bookshelves full of books on magic, demonology, tarot, and medicine.

“Hush, now. You have a responsibility as a witch. Our power only comes once every other generation, and that is a special gift, one that must be cherished. For generations, our family has used our power to protect the people of this village, whether they know it or not. I’ll be damned to hell if I let you stray from this power of witchcraft.”

And with that, the door of the parlor closed behind Lola.



Bao Tram Nguyen

UNTITLED

Watercolor



Second Prize - Poetry

Agrani Satyal

CHINA PLATES

There is a set of china plates hidden in one of our kitchen cabinets,
my mother never lets us touch it.

When my mother married my father,
she brought many things with her -
a new bed, a few kitchen items, a new sofa set,
very few of which
remain with us today,
like the china plates.

They are big, round plates,
with a garden painted on top.
You look at them for long enough,
and you can almost smell spring.

Most china plates
come in a set of five,
we only have
four.

Every time I ask her about the fifth piece,
there is always a new story,
but in all those versions,
the breaking of the plate
is always
an accident.

'a lie told often enough becomes the truth'

In one version,
the plate breaks,
from the weight of memories.
In another,
from the weight of grief.
In the version, she told me last night,
my father breaks it in anger -

or accident;
same thing she says.
The story ends there.

I ask her
if we'll ever use them for dinner
again,
she shakes her head -
I can't afford to lose another one,
I tell her it's only a plate.
she tells me, I'll understand it some-
day.



Karla Mejia

FLEUR BLANCHE

Digitally Edited Photography



Nuha El-Shikah

CRANES

Paper Folding and Photography



Second Prize - Creative Nonfiction

Chryne Lillo-Goodenough

A FAITHFUL, FATEFUL NIGHT

I remember visiting the beach at night a handful of times. The first of these is in Saint Augustine. It is distinct because my father's thick curly leg hair quickly became infested with sand fleas, which my aunt had told us she had never had a problem with before, so it was probably not a risk we would run into. He spent the rest of our trip with large, itchy, red lumps. He worried about eggs being implanted underneath his skin that would hatch with a big burst like an alien from an 80s sci-fi flick the rest of the trip. The second time was in South Carolina. A single flashlight guiding our path to the water, my mom restless due to the uncertainty that darkness so kindly provided. The beach is one of those places that feels forbidden to go to after certain hours. Mom and I looked for seashells and moon crabs as my dad swiped the beach with his metal detector hoping to find treasure. The third, and most memorable was Daytona Beach circa the end of 8th grade at a church camp conference.

I am notorious for talking myself out of things: trying out for plays, joining a sports team, or even something as essential as peeing. So, you can imagine the months leading up to the beach trip were filled with back-and-forth conversations, anxieties, and frustrations on both my part and my family's. Ultimately, the decision was made to attend. The then 14-year-old with brown hair, blue eyes, pale skin, and a freckled face, who was more American than most, South and North that is, was going to Daytona Beach. I was going to have fun in the sun, make sandcastles with my friends, and grow closer to God. Months turned into weeks, and weeks turned into days. I had thought very little of the impact that this trip would have on my future development as a person, the trauma that would form, and the consequences that would result in my attending.

As ominous as this sounds a lot of my concerns were brought on by past experiences. This trip was big for both the English and Spanish youth. There had been some friction between the two youth ministries, and this trip in many ways was supposed to bury the hatchet. Why did this matter so much to me? well, the all-American part. Growing up and being mixed race has a lot of emotions attached. Every person's experience is different. My sister can't say that she experienced the same feelings that I did and vice versa.

Bullying from one group to another had been an issue brought to the leader's attention multiple times, but it didn't concern them enough, so my sister ended up having to deal with it herself. With one mention of who our dad was, they stopped out of respect for him and the shared understanding of shared heritage. It also helped that she looked the part, a spitting image of our Lela.

The blending of the two ministries was a huge deal for me i.e., having to face the same ridicule and rude stares that my sister had before me. Girls talking badly behind

my back or rather in front of my face in a different language that I should have spoken fluently. I already didn't look like the "traditional" part of a Latina Americana, I at least should have spoken the language, connecting me to my other culture. I hated myself for that.

For the most part, the trip was great. Sure, the bus broke down and we had to stay in a motel for a night. Then when we finally got there, I was put in a room with two other girls with only one bed, that could fit two people comfortably. I was fine, bunking with one of my best friends, although sleeping in that bed was not an option as she had once rolled over on me in her sleep on another church trip, causing me to suffocate slightly. I ended up sleeping on a wicker loveseat with 2-inch padding that could barely hold two people, let alone my 5'3 body for a week in a room that reeked of cigarettes. The only room in the resort, I might add, that had this issue. My ability to see the glass half full was at its highest and most impressive state.

That's exactly what I did, I spent the rest of the trip filling my glass with positivity so much that the slightest rattle, breeze, or tiniest grain of sand would break the hydrogen bond, and every last drop of positivity would trickle down the glass like tears on my porcelain face. At the end of the week, I found myself sitting on a blanket, sand in between my toes, and a noir sky filled with stars echoing the sound of the crash of the waves. The strum of guitars, the glow of the fire warming our faces as we sang songs. We laughed, we cried, and then one of the leaders asked for people to come up and share their testimony. One by one, teens walked in front of the group and shared the impact that this week had had on them, but all I could think about was how miserable they had made me. I'm glad you had fun stealing my ideas and taking credit for them. I'm glad you had fun tormenting me. I'm glad you had fun in an actual bed and a room that didn't reek and that when you came to people and complained, they would listen and care.

Now, I'm not sure if it was only my frustrations pushing my glass nearer to the precipice or if it was God himself tapping me on the shoulder, but something pushed my fragile glass over the edge, and it shattered. Positivity rushed out and hardened in the sand at my feet. My hand rose without my approval, my legs moved without permission and suddenly I found myself in front of everyone using my words to cut like the shattered glass that once held my optimism. To be completely honest, I don't recall the exact content, but what mattered was what happened afterward on that faithful fateful night we all shared; under the stars, on a beach, I had declared my pain and was ostracized for it.

My whole life I was labeled. I had been the "quiet child". "Chryne doesn't talk.", "She just needs to get to know you better." "She talks all the time at home." "When she has something to say you better listen." No one had expected me to speak up. I didn't even expect it myself. I learned that I was capable that night. My friends congratulated me, proud that I had said something. The teens who didn't even do anything to me, apologize profusely, shocked that this kind of behavior was happening. The girls who had tormented me, at last, apologized in an "Oh dang, we got caught" way.

All the apologies made me feel seen, but this incredible moment, I had just

experienced quickly turned to fear. The ones who were supposed to listen to me, to protect me, the adults I was supposed to confide in had turned on me to write hateful rumors of what had happened that night. Before they ever arrived home on the bus, the trail spread like fire through the church, an electronic game of telephone, my life the subject, deleting me out of the chain. I, on the other hand, had disappeared, like a phantom that night as my family was continuing to Orlando for vacation. Recalling this event, I think the truth was harder to accept coming from a 14-year-old girl and I may have been the last nail in the coffin that buried the chances of the two youth ministries ever hanging out with each other again. The adults around me viewed me in a different light. I was no longer quiet, I was defiant. I had always stood up for others, but the first time I stood up for myself, I was squashed. My parents received emails and tears were shed. I learned that night that my words mattered and had power.

For a long time, I was stunted in the way that I reacted to authority or to individuals who harmed me. I stopped speaking up and chose to save my words and frustrations for later, but later never comes. In a lot of ways, this moment helped me become more calculated, a strategist figuring out when is it too far and how can I use my frustrations and express them in a way that won't turn bitter, I learned to be better. Bottled-up words, if shaken, eventually explode, but if left in the glass the bubbles go flat and the flavor is gone.



Ainsley Wilcox
CARE FOR SOME



Second Prize - Fiction

Daniel Gore

FEAR AND FLYING

Marion was bathed in abject terror. Her panic numbed brain had almost completely shut down, her limbs were rigid, and a lump in her throat threatened to dissolve into pure hysteria. Once she had been a nurse so that may be why a small part of her brain recognized these physiological symptoms - even as the rest of it silently screamed.

Marion always had an extreme fear of heights. Why she should find herself flying a tandem hang glider at maybe 4000 ft altitude was something she would have had difficulty explaining under normal circumstances. Why the pilot, Raif, had passed out was something she could not yet explain at all. Some type of seizure maybe.

She might be entitled to blame Henry, but that was something she could never do. He had been so excited after hearing about this hang gliding opportunity. "Come on Mom, let's both do it - it's my twenty-fifth birthday. You'll be near the beach and a mile high. The views will be awesome. What do you say?"

What I'll see is how long I can withstand pure dread, she had thought. But for years now she had become afraid to make tough decisions. Oftentimes it was just easier to say yes, even if the situation intuitively felt wrong. Looking at her son's adorable face, there was no way she could refuse.

So now here Marion was, hanging from the glider frame in some type of horizontal cocoon that allowed only her head and hands to be free. Raif was maybe a foot below her in his own cocoon, except, of course, he was completely limp. Directly above her was the centerline of the nylon sail which resembled a large version of a kid's kite.

Marion had her first bout of terror about ten minutes earlier, as a small plane pulled the wheeled glider into the air for take off. However, Raif was calmly reassuring, telling her he had done this thousands of times and everything would be just fine. He anointed her "First Timer" and frequently checked to make sure she was alright. The plane had pulled them up to one mile of altitude before the tow line was released.

Once they disengaged, the world had become a very peaceful place. Henry was right, the views were absolutely beautiful. Below she could pick out a barn with a bright red roof near the field they had taken off. Surrounding it were impressive rectangles of farm land, each with a different color of crop, leading all the way to the bay. Beyond the bay lay a barrier island, looking not much bigger than a sandbar. Further on was a

limitless expanse of the blue-gray Atlantic ocean.

Unfortunately, the view looming ahead of her right now was that same Atlantic ocean. She was literally heading out to sea. Raif had turned that way before passing out. He'd been showing her how to steer so both of Marion's hands were now on the aluminum control bars.

"Hey First Timer, let me show you how to maneuver this bird," he had said. "Grab the sides of the big triangle shaped bar in front of you. Those are the controls. When you want to slow it down, push your weight back from the triangle. That will cause the top of the sail to lift up and increase drag. Here, I'll show you... When you want to speed up or descend faster, pull your body forward. That will drop the top of the sail and reduce drag. Like this... You getting this First Timer?"

"Now when you want to turn left, just pull your weight to the left. Here we go... It's that simple. If you pull your body both forward and left you can make a really quick turn but will lose a fair bit of altitude at the same time. If you want to turn right, pull your body that way. Like this," and they steered toward the ocean.

It was then he made a strange gurgling sound and his arms and head went limp. The only good news is that the glider continued to seem stable as long as she continued to hold the control bars and not do anything. Marion was too panicked to do anything else anyway.

Gradually, that small lucid part of her brain began to demand attention. After a while she finally listened. Alright girl, you're headed out to sea. Unless you want to fly to France, you had better shake off this zombie act and do something. Now what was it that Raif had said? When you want to turn to the left, pull your body to the left. Marion did so, and to her surprise the craft immediately reacted. Look, I'm doing it! The glider gradually curved 180 degrees and she was now facing land. Unfortunately she pulled for too long and soon she was heading down the coast. She tugged her body to the right to counteract the turning momentum. The glider responded. She started to get the hang of it.

Okay you're turning and you're descending - what now? I've got to call Henry, he must be on the ground by now. That small part of her brain was getting bigger. It took some effort but Marion found she could leave her right hand on the control bar and gradually slide her left into the cocoon to retrieve her phone from a pant pocket. Her cold fingers pulled it out and she told it to call Henry.

Henry answered, "Mom?! How are you calling me?"

"Listen, my pilot has passed out. Call an ambulance," was all she managed before

a wind gust shook the glider. She panicked, went to grab a control bar with her left hand, managing to drop the phone while doing so.

Wonderful, she thought sarcastically. Then the lamentations started. Why do I always let things happen to me? When did I become such a wimp? I used to be an E.R. nurse and made tough decisions every night. When did I allow myself to live on autopilot?

The term “autopilot,” however, snapped her out of the doldrums. Alright nurse, you’ve got a patient in desperate straits and you’ll need to pull him through. What are you going to do?

Taking stock of her position, she began using that barn with the bright red roof as her visual aid. Each time the glider passed over it, she would turn it around 180 degrees and fly the other way. The field they had taken off from was to the north side of the barn and she would pass over it with each run. Never was a perfect run made, but each time she gained confidence. Altitude was being lost quickly.

Now how am I going to land this sucker? I guess - when the time is right - I’ll point us at the landing field and let gravity do the rest. Marion looked at the ten inch wheels on either side of the bottom of the glider frame. They were not as large as she would have liked.

She could hear ambulance sirens before what would probably be her final turn. Great, they’re here, maybe they’ll be able to stop the bleeding. Don’t think like that, she immediately reprimanded.

She turned the glider one last time toward the landing field. Unluckily, it was still a bit too high. So she pulled her body forward to descend quicker but this also had the effect of making the craft fly quicker. Quick enough to pass over the landing field and head straight for the barn with the bright red roof. Christ, I am going to hit the broadside of a barn, was all Marion had time to think before that familiar fear tried to claw back in.

Suddenly, she heard a voice and saw a pair of hands grab the control bar. “I’ve got this First Timer, let go.” Raif had come back to consciousness. She let go and watched as he pulled his body forward and to the right. They executed a sharp right 180 degree turn but were now dangerously close to the ground at high speed. He then pushed his body back to stall the craft before leveling off just before the wheels touched the ground.

The wheels hit ground in a freshly harvested wheat field. Unfortunately, the surface

was irregular so the glider rolled and bounced along until the right wing touched the ground. The glider felt like it might flip over before coming to rest, nose down. Marion had to eat some dirt but at least she was alive.

From somewhere, she heard a voice, “You did real good, First Timer.” The ambulance came. As the paramedics disentangled her, she explained what had happened to Raif. They took him away. Marion insisted she was fine.

Henry came running up. Before he could utter a word, Marion announced, “On your next birthday, I’m staying home and baking a cake.”

Gabriel Bejarano Nunez
RING IN BALANCE
950 Silver and Gemstones



Third Prize - Poetry

Spencer Salusky

CLAY FEET

Sculpted into perfection,
My clay feet are revered.
Perfectly painted,
Perfectly shaped,
Exactly how I designed them.

They crack and crumble,
At times they cause me to stumble.

But I can always repaint them.
I can always reshape them.

As long as my clay feet keep clean,
As long as I seem refined.

So many believe they're real,
At times I do as well.
So many love my clay feet,
I feel like the world revolves around me.
So when given an offer to carry its weight,
I accepted
Without question.

Perfect are my clay feet,
They can handle any feat.

Clay, although beautiful, was not made to last.
Clay, although beautiful, will break down fast.
And my feet finally shattered.

It was not until I was picking up it's pieces,
While the world I was holding witnessed,
That I noticed the flesh underneath them.

No, I could not repaint them.
No, I could not re-shape them.

No, they are not as beautiful
As my clay feet.
But they are real.
They are me.

Vinh Ly

WATER AND GLASS

Charcoal on Paper



Charlotte Penezic
REINTERPRETATION OF
JEAN-HONORÉ FRAGONARD'S
YOUNG GIRL READING

Paper Mosaic



Khue Dao
SLAY THE HEAT
Digital Art



Third Prize - Creative Nonfiction

Daniel Gore

PHOTO SYNTHESIS

At first glance, it's just a trapezoidal wooden box.

No wonder my 1948 Dumont television was nicknamed Doghouse.
Peek in back, however, and see the finely positioned army of vacuum
tubes designed to capture oncoming
waves and rapid-fire tiny electrons
at an eleven inch TV screen. These
mobile projectiles impact as sparks
of luminescence * * which compete
with the darkness * * * * * to form
colorless illusions of photos moving.

A few years after World War II, models like Doghouse sold as hotcakes.
Visualize, for the first time, images flaring out of air and into living rooms.

By the 1950's, the shows I Love Lucy and Gunsmoke were houseguests.
News shows began to broadcast. Ball games were televised everywhere.

Slowly, unexpectedly, troubling
portraits infiltrated the content. The political abuse of Joe McCarthy;
the daily trials of Jackie Robinson; the plight of the Selma marchers;
the emotional abyss of multiple assassinations; the perverse inhumanity of
the Vietnam War. Each time, the Doghouse shockingly exposed our
worst selves - in stark black and contrasting white. Yet, somehow, those
illuminating electric fires also became rites of purification.

Gradually, enough citizens tossed their feigned innocence into the flames
and said

NO MORE

Ember by glowing ember, a nation's light began to overtake long shadows.

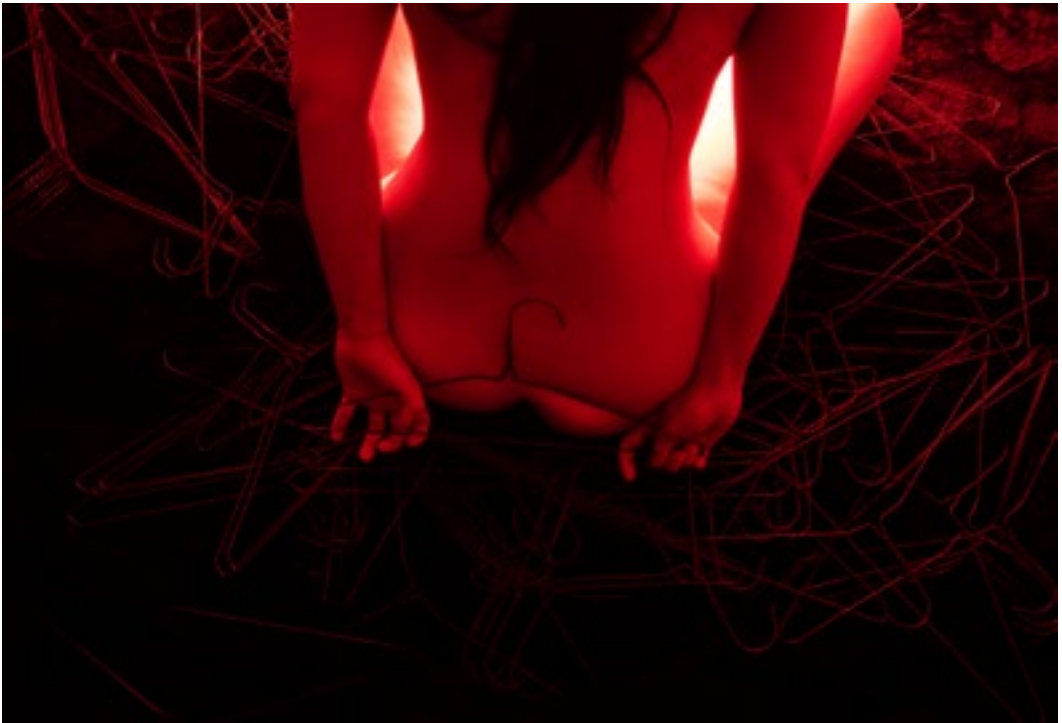
Diana Garcia Escobar
FLOWER MARKET
Digital Art



Maria Munoz

YOU DON'T LET ME HAVE OPTIONS

Photography



Tuvshinbayar Zeveg

READY

Oil Paint on Canvas



Third Prize - Fiction

Spencer Salusky

CLOSER THAN IT LOOKS

A white space with no walls, floor, or ceiling. A young man floats in it. His eyes flutter open. They narrow as he looks around him. "What the fuck?"

Far off, at a distance of what seems to be about 500 yards, is a dark speck, levitating in the abyss. The man flutters his feet and swims through the air toward it. He arrives in only a couple seconds. That speck grows into a woman, about the same age as him, her eyes closed.

"Renee?" He whispers. Her eyes dart open.

Renee's teary eyes open. "Jay? What is going on? Why are you here?"

"I don't know," Jay mumbles as he looks into the nothingness below his feet. "All I remember is going to sleep and then... I woke up in this place."

Renee scoffs. "Great. Just great. This is exactly what I needed. Stuck in... whatever the hell this is... with you."

Jay sighs and shakes his head. "Really? Do we really have to go there right now? I think the arguing can wait until we figure out how to get out of here."

Renee rolls her eyes. "Whatever."

Muffled dialogue echoes through the chamber. As they look around for the source, Renee's eyes stop above them. "Look!" She points upward.

Far above them, there are flashing, colored lights. "That's gotta be it. Let's go." Jay says as he pushes his feet and goes flying.

"Wait!" Renee exclaims. She mimics his movement and follows close behind.

As they approach, it becomes clear that the lights are coming from a large, levitating screen. The images reveal faces. Renee and Jay's faces.

They stop in front of it and stare in befuddlement. "Wha...?" Jay lets out.

"Wait," says Renee, "I remember this."

On the screen, Renee and Jay stand in the sunshine. They're in front of an ice cream stand, giggling with youthful energy. The corners of Jay's mouth turn upward. "Yeah, me too."

The two of them walk away from the stand and sit down on a nearby bench. Renee brings her vanilla cone up to her mouth, and Jay pushes it into her face. She gasps, audibly, then laughs as she smushes the remnants of her cone into his nose. He smiles, then kisses some of the ice cream off of her face. The monitor cuts out.

Renee smiles, "That was a really fun day."

"Yeah, it was." Jay says longingly. His eyes drop below him.

The screen lights up again. Renee and Jay are sitting at a dinner table with two older people who bear a striking resemblance to her. Off screen, Renee giggles.

Jay puts a palm to his face, "Not this."

On the table is an assortment of dishes. Everyone serves themselves. “So, Jay, what does the young man taking out our princess do for a living?” Renee’s father bellows, cutting into a roast beef on the table.

“Oh, I’m in accounting,” Jay says as he scoops a mound of white goop from a bowl, and throws it on top of the meat on his plate.

Renee’s mother raises her eyebrow and says, in a thick accent, “That’s pretty hot.”

Jay chuckles as he cuts into the meat. “I’m pretty good at handling spicy food.” His fork lifts a chunk into his mouth and, immediately, his lips pucker. His face turns a bright red and he spits the mush out onto his plate. The screen blacks out.

Renee cackles, “I can’t believe you did that! Had you never seen horseradish before?”

Jay blushes, “No I hadn’t! Not everyone grows up with a German mother.”

The screen changes to show Jay sitting in a chair on his laptop. Renee picks clothes up off the carpet. “How many times have I asked you not to throw your clothes all over the floor?”

“Look, I’m sorry,” Jay says, “but when I get home, I just want to get out of my uniform and relax. I don’t think about where I’m putting it. Besides, is it really that much of an inconvenience?”

Renee glares at him. Finally, she explodes: “Fine, then you pick them up!” She throws a shirt in his face and storms away. He sits there, mouth open, before going after her.

“Oh, screw you!” Jay shouts down the hall. “At least I actually work! At least I know some kind of responsibility! You’ve lived off of your parents for so long that you don’t know how to function as an individual! You do nothing! Nothing!” He pauses for a moment. “You are nothing.” Renee’s face crinkles up. “You don’t exist,” Jay continues, “You have no personality. No goals, no aspirations. Who are you? Do you even know?” He breathes heavily as he stops talking, and his eyebrows fall from a tight anger to a soft remorse.

Renee stares a dagger into his soul. “Get out,” She whispers, “Get out now.”

Jay’s car is filled with boxes. He picks up the last one on the ground and pushes it in the backseat. Closing the car door, he looks up at a balcony a few stories up. Renee stands on the other side of the glass door, gazing tearfully at the parking lot. The picture cuts out.

“I can’t believe I thought you were different,” Renee says under her breath.

“I know I wasn’t perfect, but you weren’t either. Don’t pin all of this on me.” Jay says.

“Did you not see yourself just now? What you said to me?”

The screen lights up again. There’s a party going on. Jay is pouring himself a drink. His eyes lift up and lock onto Renee, who is chatting up people nearby her. He walks over.

“Hey,” Jay says as he approaches Renee. She looks up at him. “So, I’m here with a friend of mine, and he thinks you’re absolutely gorgeous. The only issue is that he’s super shy, so he asked me to come over and talk to you first. Is it okay if I introduce you guys?”

Renee looks at her friends with a raised eyebrow, then back at Jay. “I don’t know...”

she says suspiciously.

“Honestly, he’s the nicest guy I know and he’s absolutely hilarious. Trust me, you’ll love him. Here, I’ll just go get him.”

Renee’s face crinkles with awkwardness as Jay turns around. He takes three steps, does a full pivot, and puts his hand out with confidence. “Nice to meet you, I’m Jay. Jay Cunningham.”

She looks at him, dumbfounded, then lets out a giggle. She shakes her head and puts out her hand. “Renee Webb.” Their hands clasp onto each other.

Renee blushes, “I can’t believe that line worked.”

“Yeah, neither can I.” Jay mumbles as he stares at the now blank monitor. He floats up to it and strokes it gently. “I wish we could go back to then.”

“We can’t go back, Jay,” Renee responds. She cuts toward him through the air and grabs his hand. “We can only go forward.”

“I’m sorry, Renee.” Jay mutters, “I’ve been horrible to you.” He clasps his other hand on top of hers. “But I can be better, I know it.”

Renee grins, “I know you can too.” She leans forward. Their lips meet.

An alarm goes off. A hand slaps it. Jay rolls out of bed and sits for a moment, then looks at his phone. It buzzes. The screen reads: Renee. He picks it up and stares for a moment, a puzzled look on his face. Accepting the call, he brings the phone up to his ear. “Hey,” he says.

There’s a second of silence, before a tiny “Hey,” escapes from the other end. More silence. Reece ponders for a moment. “Do you want to do something this weekend?”



Emma Martineau

UNTITLED

Acrylic on Canvas



Poetry

Diana Morales

DAYDREAM CUTS REALITY

*Nonsensical irrelevance tunes
the classroom, diminuendo and
crescendo from post grad masters,
vying for my attention. I can't help
but not listen. Age increases across
a tangible timeless frame of no found
passion, people aloof, my mind goes
remote floating midair past the glowing
sparkles, through the window it goes.*

*Swirling around the cool breeze of
effervescent youth, it shines with
the reflection of the freshly planted
sunflowers. A contagious golden hue
coating its path towards the children
hopping along the blacktop plane.*

*Lightly dusted colors fragmented of
misshapen squares. Children's laughter
swing to and from each other's gazes.
The curly hair kid grabs the next toss,
striking the pavement straight up
into the clouds, adjoining with dew
delayed from this morning.*

*Jet speed against Earth's atmosphere,
speed diminishes catching a glimpse
of Milky Way. Galaxy of violet, red,
and blue aligning the stars dotting
the night sky. A universe of awe carries
impeccable grace painted by the inspiration
of the creator's divine reflection. Its splendor
outlines notion of desire, kept from
unbefitting hands, her majesty sealed
away by his jealousy.*

A shooting star fuming of white

*flames, revealing hidden gems lurking
in the shadows. Past moonlight, its blades
traverses with the King's thumb marking
the final verdict, "Forever out of reach!"
he says, leading me to wander in immense
open space, the purpose it encompasses,*

"Was it always meant to be unloved?"

Kimberly Vizcarra
CLOUD STUDY
Oil Paint on Canvas



Bao Tram Nguyen

UNTITLED

Watercolor



Nayleah Colindres
COLLIDED AURAS
Oil Paint



Poetry

Sayda Garcia

IF I WERE A HUMMINGBIRD

I would fly close to the sun, to imprison a little of light,
I would let it out when my day gets gray.
I would fly to the flowers and drink a lot of nectar, so that in days of sadness,
it will sweeten me and make me smile.

If I were a hummingbird, I would keep a feather so that it will remind me that I can fly.
I would curl up in my nest to feel its warmth in moments of loneliness.

If I were a hummingbird, I would fly very high, up to where I could not. would be very
brave.

I would not be afraid of the cold, nor of the darkness.
I would live every day, convinced that God would provide.

If I were a hummingbird I would fly back.
I would correct the mistakes that I have made along my life with my small beak I
would erase them and leave them behind.

If I were a hummingbird, I would fly to anywhere I wanted, without minding border,
country, or flag.

If I were a hummingbird, I would value more the small things that God give us, a drop,
a flower, the light... a nest to call home.

Alexis Reid

OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE

Digitally Edited Photography



Fiction

Lainey Bielski

A FLAW IN THE LAW

I am a failed byproduct of The Law.

“Blacken your eyes. Silence your ears. Close the blinds of your minds.”

Microchipped minds, monitored through a monitor. Sometimes, The Society forgets, they are inherently human after all, and their soon-to-be words become silence. Words spoken against The Law are strictly prohibited. Nobody really understands what The Law is, for it is ever-changing to keep the confusion, but they are to follow it without question.

Sometimes those who knew life before The Law try to speak, but they too are silenced and gaslit into Unknowing, because they can't be All Knowing. Those that refuse to bend are “put away”. The Law says it's to keep The Society from strife and strike, the two deadly sins.

The Law knows that when beaten down, struck down, and locked down, people give up. When they give up, they give in. When they give in, they stop looking out for each other, and look towards the rulership. When they look up to the rulership, they can't look down to the rationality.

I remember when microchips were first introduced. “It's just a small procedure. You'll be safer with it.” was the only message The Law projected. Thereafter, conversations in The Society were nothing more than “I got my small procedure. I feel so much safer with it.” Mind control became more controlled. The Law never told anybody what the small procedure was, for once it was done, previous memory of what the procedure entailed was erased. They did it for a false sense of safety in a previously war-torn system.

I clock into work at the same time every day to tell people they're right when they're wrong, and wrong when they're right. It's impossible to be both under The Law. There's no such thing as Free Thinking, as it encourages too much growth. There is only Freely Thinking, as governed by The Law. Sure, the power can be accredited to the computers, but these are human operated machines. They are tools for human corruption. Without humans, they are powerless.

Everything is a system. Systems made for systems that protect and maintain other systems.

I am a failed byproduct of this system.

The Law is a lie, so I lie under The Law. I manage to hide in the nooks and crannies of easily identifiable hive-mind behaviors. I do as I'm told, but never as I think. I often think against the system, but I mustn't act on it. I can't be detected. I have to sit down and shut up, not stand up and act up. Not yet.

The Society follows the same routine every day. Children are shuffled off to school

to learn how to be Freely Thinking. They're conditioned from the cradle that Free Thinking is the very thing that corrupts.

I heard a young child, no more than four years of age, telling her mother how the Free Thinking hated peace. This is the next generation to impose The Law. It is overwhelming to be reminded of that daily.

The walls in the office were suffocated with white paint. Art in any form is banned, artists were punished, and society lost its soul. Spaces where paintings should go were patched with monitors to invade every corner of life.

Workers, all dressed identically, milled around with small earpieces in. It was crucial for The Law to hear every conversation, every thought, and even every breath. All these Workers are former creative minds who've sold their souls and minds to constrictive kinds.

Carts full of books, paintings, sculptures, albums, and instruments were wheeled down dark halls to come face to face with their fiery fate. As I was clocking out to leave, a book glided down out of a cart and landed on my shoe. I crouched down to pick it up, and as I slipped my fingers around its delicately worn spine, I knew I couldn't just let it burn. All the Workers had their eyes glued to the monitors looking for any wrong move, like birds hunting for prey. I slipped the small book into my jacket pocket.

I made it back to my home, which had the same appearance as all the others in the neighborhood, and immediately felt guilty. I knew I shouldn't have, knowing just how corrupted The Law was, but conditioning kills reason. I slid the book under the white pillow in my bedroom, catching a glimpse of Fahrenheit 451. It was going to be a long time before I worked up the guts to even open it.

A long time was sooner than I thought. A warning flashed on every single screen in my home, "WARNING: We know what you have." I had foolishly forgotten, as the inherent human I am, that The Law misses nothing. Every piece of art is counted as it enters The Workplace and then recounted as they lie upon their fiery deathbeds. I opened the book. "It was a pleasure to burn." My breath was knocked out of me by the sinking dread of truthful words. Evilly true words that were deemed truly evil. The Law was burning books about how immoral and dangerous it is to burn books.

The anger I had sat on and silenced for so long was boiling over. My house filled with the sound of sirens. My front door was busted open. I whipped around and was face to face with several Law Enforcers. I ripped the book in half as they tried to restrain me. They yelled for backup. I crammed a page into my pocket as I elbowed a guy off of me. They handcuffed me. Every ounce of hatred I had for the system came flooding out, "You can't get away with this." The Enforcer that was holding me captive smirked, "We already have." The page in my pocket will be the match to burn The Law to the ground. Someday. They won't get away with this. I refuse to be put away.

Ainsley Wilcox
TOMIE'S TABLE



Bayadir Abdulmohsin

THOSE EYES

Pencil



Poetry

Danielle Hill

LOVELESS OBSESSION

You made me quiver
as you caressed my skin
with your sentiments
of what you called love.

You touched me like a Barbie doll.
As your hands
sliced my bruised skin
into chains to your liking.

You obsessed over me
as you wanted to cage
me in with your eyes.

You felt like you owned me
as your life was complicated,
so you deserved
to have someone
passionate like me.

A young woman who was already broken,
just wanting to live her own life
and was tired of being seen as an object.

Why had people hunted me as their perfect girl,
as they thrilled themselves to chase after
since I was so mysterious to them?

It's because of someone like you,
I'm afraid to be vulnerable
when someone has tried to
project their romantic feelings
to my twisted body.

They played my body like an instrument,
wanting me to recite a romantic symphony

even though they were tone deaf
of my unmoving body.
If I had to hear someone declare their love for me again,
even though I barely knew them.
I'm going to scream and shout,
since I would never love these people.

Why would I want to love someone
who saw me through as their mirage
in their twisted
alternate reality?

I'm supposed to feel sorry for them
someone told me,
even though they needed some serious therapy.

I, myself, am getting therapy for my self-worth.
It's people like you who made me question
as I knew falling in love
would be irrational.

Just once,
could someone love me
clearly as possible please.

Love shouldn't be a possession
or something you would obsess over
in your head.

Love should be a place you felt safe
and not a stage to hide your vulnerability.

Bayadir Abdulmohsin
FIERCE WOMEN
Sharpie and Pen



Poetry

Daniel Gore

PRACTICE ROUND WITH MIKE

Hands are so familiar
almost a reflection
only my broken pinkies
would belie inspection

He takes a practice swing
using interlocking grip
all concentration and purpose
ready let one rip

Gazing up ahead
to check the target line
does he know I watch
or has he left us all behind

Supremely gorgeous day
lusher than ever seen
the fairways are too perfect
no course is so pristine

“So there is golf here?”
in this place where truth meets myth
although I can not determine
which one is which

He smiles that Mike smile
and laughs that ready laugh
“Working on one’s handicap
is part of the eternal path”

Fiction

Joseph Shay

EYES WIDE OPEN

I don't think we ever realized the dangers of this forest when we were younger. We'd spend sticky summer evenings carving pictures into the bark of the Douglas-fir trees that make up the landscape. Winter mornings were attempts at not going snow blind on our way to the clearing between the trees, just so we could divebomb the hills with our sleds. Despite being younger, Nick was always willing to bomb the hill first, before we'd even checked for sticks and sediment under the snow, because that's just the wild child he's always been. Now all I can see, as I sweep the lively forest with my flashlight, are the jagged projections of the trees where branches formerly protruded. The foxholes at the bottom of those hills we used to sled on are more important to me than ever. It's frequently apparent I'm not alone as I see the baby foxes peering back at me from the entrances to their dens with eyes wide open. Despite being raised by this land, tonight I don't feel at home.

I could call out, sure, but it feels wrong to disturb the forest; or at least that's what I tell myself as I force my legs to sweep the montane forest floor with the bottom of my boots. If it were up to me, nothing and nobody would ever know I was even here tonight. The wind whistles as it flows through the tunnels between the trees. Nocturnal birds match that whistle with their own calls, while others hoot, their voices carrying well through the open night sky. The most frequent sound is the chirping of the insects, indeterminable in direction. These things keep me calm as I continue my search. Life not only exists here, it thrives here. He has to be okay. We know these parts, we always have, so why hasn't he returned?

I've already acknowledged the dangers of the unknown. The things we never acknowledged as kids. So why am I not afraid? Rather, why am I not afraid for myself? The search party called day two a wrap when the sun began to set, marking hour twenty since we noticed he was gone. That was three hours ago, and yet here I tread forth, feet cold from the spring dew that I pick up off the grass with my boots. It's as if I don't exist in my own mind. Am I the one forcing my legs to keep swinging, barely managing to support my body after an entire day of walking and hiking? How can I still function? I must be part machine. Then again, I think most people would neglect their bodies as I have if their brother was missing. I haven't seen him since I left home in August. You get to that age where your younger siblings start to annoy you just in time to leave for college; you want nothing to do with them. Now though, he's the only thing on my mind. He's well into high school, so surely he can take care of himself. Right?

He should be with his girlfriend, wherever they may be. It's comforting to know that he isn't alone. The light footsteps in the treeline reaffirm this sentiment each time I hear them. I'm certainly beginning to wish I wasn't alone. I'm starting to grow hungry

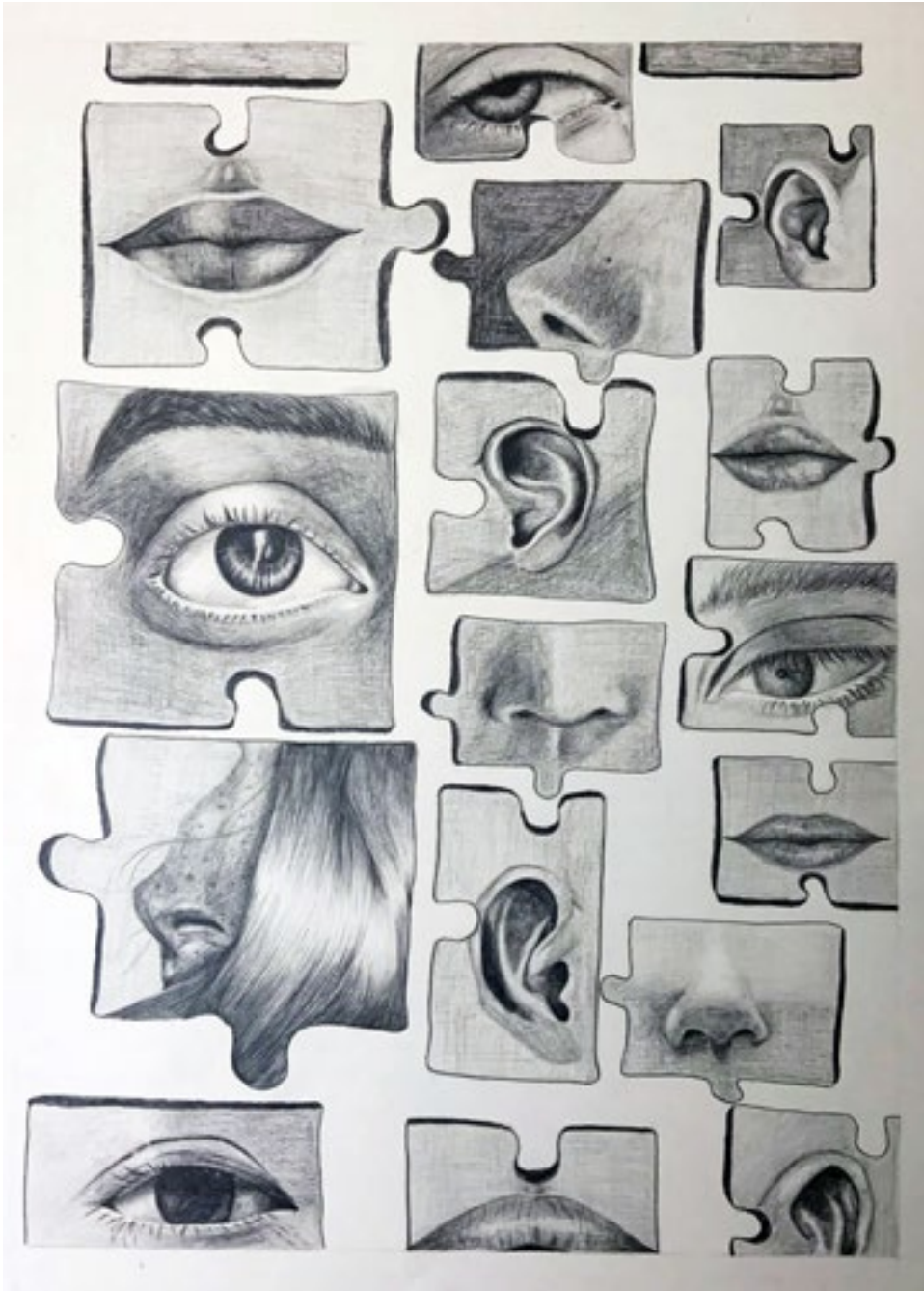
again, but I don't want any food coming out of my bag to attract the wildlife to me. For now I have to keep on. I'm grateful, at least, that it's not like the movies. If I could spot every pair of animal eyes in the treeline I may not have come this far; been this brave. My brother without resources, and I without company. What a great team we make out here in the wilderness at night, neither aware of where the other could be.

It gets easier not to let the horrifying possibilities invade my mind as I get closer to the water. The runoff stream with the smoothed over stones that we used to hop along. At least once a year one of us would end up slipping off the slick, moss-covered stones, drenching ourselves in the freshest water we'd ever touched, tasted, or smelled. We never even bothered spending time by the river that the stream ran off from because the stream was simply more fun. "Spinebuster Stream" we used to call it after the way we used to strain our backs from falling off the rocks. Imagining what that could mean for Nick tells me that the sound of the river isn't keeping all the bad thoughts away after all. Though if I can't sleep, and my stomach turns sitting in my house, this is really all I can do. After all, why should I get to sit by the fire while he has to wait?

The smell of blood is not what I need right now. The disgusting irony as that rust-like smell fills my nostrils, the distinct scent overpowering the light natural scent of the fir trees. At least something out here was getting to eat tonight. Still, the universe taunting me with this, making me fear only more with each new element that came into play during my search. I'd say it's unpleasant, but it feels wrong to cavil at my situation when my brother could have it far worse. Even still, I'm following the trail of that bloody scent. It's helping me stay attached to reality as I continue drifting off into thought, but I'm not sure if that's what I want right now.

How could I think anything else though, really? As that scent gets stronger, and my heart beats faster, of course my mind would assume the worst. Maybe that's the reason why. Maybe my assumption of the worst is the reason why I can't seem to muster up a reaction. My feet are still. I don't think I'm even breathing. I'm just staring straight ahead, with my light shining on her pale face. Kayla: my brother's girlfriend, her clothes soaked from the stream flowing underneath her, splashing against her back and rolling over her front. Her entire body still; her eyes wide open. If it weren't for my shaking hand jerking the flashlight side to side, I don't know when I would've finally seen my brother sitting next to her. It's quiet until he finally speaks. "I didn't mean to." The only words I'll hear from him for a long time as he sits and stares at me, like those animals in the trees; eyes wide open.

Bayadir Abdulmohsin
PUZZLED FACE
Pencil



Microfiction

Bayadir Abdulmohsin

A TRANSIENT LOVE

In my room, one ear against the cold door, waiting to hear your name and mine in the same sentence. I keep quiet to catch the words marriage or destiny from the other side of the door. Dad is mentioning something about a sandstorm in Iraq. Is your Chicago apartment big enough for both of us? Do you close the toilet seat? Suddenly, my room that was filled with my loud heartbeat became silent. The conversation ended and the topic changed. I stayed and smiled for I am now realizing how much of a fool I became because of you.



Fiction

Nawaal Nackerdien

FIRE FLOWERS

They had never seen the stars before.

The skies had been limitless voids of smoke drenched in vivid red echoes of explosions.

Even then, as the enemy battleships lugged smoke from their bodies and blasted off bombs of vivid colours, the sky was covered in a maroon, dusty cloud chockful of acid.

But down there, amongst the bodies that had fallen from the sky, they saw with black stained eyes the picture of the world's colliding.

The vindictive missiles, round in shape but painted in shades of death, collided from either warship side.

The resulting blast was dipped deep in purple and resonating gold. It wasn't the first-time bombs had met each other at the other's feet but it was also the first time they had dispersed their finely designed chemicals in a way that completely went awry.

No could have considered... Not one esteemed yet deadly soul blackened scientist, not one vision hungry dictator to another - that bombs so perfect as those they had designed could be so testily rewritten. Lost as to what their purpose was.

With one explosion, the decade long smoke withdrew its hands and sought a new purchase on which to hold onto.

The air streaked back their hair and threw tears into their eyes. It was a startled reaction — to close their eyes.

Time moves slow. Sound stops.

And the stars are blinking in the sky. They bore their eyes upon the battlefield and the one person alive to see them in their brilliance.

The ships have fallen, slow with gravity but marking streaks of flame in the blue, making way for the clearing of flaying flowers.

Carmen Cruz

TAKING A BREAK FROM REALITY

Digital Art



Gabriel Bejarano Nunez
NECKLACE IN BALANCE
950 Silver and Gemstones



Microfiction

Ryan Hutchinson

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

I never liked driving down that road. It was hectic, prone to busy traffic. But that's not why I avoided it. I hated that whole stretch of pavement because a begging man was often there, waiting at the light, petitioning drivers for alms. Every time, he would call on me for charity, and every time I would outright refuse him. With each rejection he would kindly say, "God bless you," and turn his back to me. Today I saw him, laid out, bloody on the cracked pavement, clipped by a speeding driver. I muttered, "God bless him," and drove off.



Poetry

Rosalie Hendon

CLEAR CREEK

A grove of hemlocks
deep shade pooling around the
enticingly placed logs.

Bright trickles of water running downhill.
We rise, huffing against gravity,
choosing the muddier path.

Dogwood blossoms cupped in a palm.
Red stems of red maple leaves.
Spring mayapples, snowy trillium blooms.
Ivory and purple violets peek from the grass.

Oh, the way these hours stretch.
The forest shifting with the sun,
the burble of the stream,
the falling water.

You brought me here,
with your carefully wrapped sandwiches,
to cure me
of city living, nightly construction,
honking, traffic,
the grind of work,
keeping a schedule
when the sun is shining
and the air is sweet with growing things.

You know me better than anyone.
You know this is the cure:
cool, crisp air
cloud-studded cathedral sky
stands of trees
a path to wind through them
spring wildflowers
flowing water

Somewhere to rest together
and remember our place
in the family of things

Note: “remember [our] place in the family
of things” refers to Mary Oliver’s poem “Wild Geese.”

Travius Best, Jr.

FACELESS

Drawing



Tuvshinbayar Zeveg
GIVING
Acrylic Paint on Canvas



Poetry

Elizabeth Austin

THE WONDERS OF LIFE

You cannot break and expect to fix
You cannot hold on while letting go
A picture is only meant to be taken once
A memory of all we know

Life is not so black and white
As one might originally think
You cannot fly high above in the rafters
You cannot lie low until you sink

There is more color there than we care to realize
Maybe more than we care to know
For life is not just do or die
It's how do we plant our seeds and grow

It's failing
It's falling
It's finding a way back up
It's laughing
And hurting
Worried we'll never be enough
It's floating
And sinking
And death till us part
It's giving us space to heal our broken heart
It's dying and living
And everything in between
It's never knowing where you're going
And creating our final scene

Poetry

Daniel Gore

THE TABLE

The young man gave barely any thought
while he purchased.
Composite wood, circular
a veneer of respectability.

The next morning children hid
playing games
laughing
through the chairs.

Soon, the kin arrived
and his wife laid sumptuous feasts.
Many toasts were spoken.
Grace swirled amidst the aromas.

They often sat, sipping cups
holding
their free hand.

His business affairs were commonly conducted
in a mandala of vased flowers and afternoon light.

The kids matured and talks enlightened.
Socrates made pirouettes
to the sounds of strings strumming.

Celebrations were staged with guests over late
reveling
in a ring of claddagh.
The grain and grape served to bless these communions.

The old man gave ample contemplation.
A rounded nave
with legs like Doric columns
stretching up from the bedrock
supporting
the apogees of his life.

Kimberly Vizcarra
INTROSPECTION
Wood



Juliette Vasquez
GRASPING FOR A WAY OUT
Acrylic Paint



Microfiction

Sampson Chisham

AH, I DIED

Ah, I died. The fight was too hard, and my weapon was wrong. A thousand excuses run through my head. Why did I die? Why can't I win? Why did I fail? Why can't I succeed? Did the creators make my opponent too strong, or was I too weak? The gripping of my fingers into my palm is felt as I think such thoughts. My veins are pumping blood while my hands are red as I try to win against what the creators made. I'm mad, and I'm sweating. Ah, I died again. My controller smashes into the ground.



