

SHADOWS
Photography
Brandon Schuermann

VOLUME XLIX

P'AN KU

Editor's Note

This magazine grows with us and I truly believe that we have done an excellent job representing the times. I hope that P'an Ku will continue to grow and advance with the student body.

I've learned to embrace my sense of humor while working on this magazine and with my fellow staff members. I look at people differently. I have a more welcoming view of individuals who I once would have shied away from in the past. I've learned to trust my instincts. I've been able to step back and see who I want in my life and what truly matters thanks to the experiences I have had with the P'an Ku staff. P'an Ku introduced a lot of possibilities into my life; it has allowed me to see myself in a different light. I found strength where there was none. Before becoming editor-in-chief, I felt like I had fallen into a box of comfort and monotonous routine. As an artistic person I felt choked; I felt restrained. It wasn't until my adventures with P'an Ku that I was able to break away from that box and find myself. I tend to be a loner by nature and P'an Ku taught me how to be part of a team, a family.

There is a lot of dark material in this issue of P'an Ku, but this is all part of life. Through the darkness we are able to see the light. Without one we aren't able to notice the other, and such is P'an Ku. Without Yin there is no Yang and vice versa.

This is bittersweet. It is time for me to say goodbye as I will no longer be part of this unbelievably talented and dedicated staff. I have found a new comfort zone, a place to call home but at the same time it is time to move on. If I were to stay I would just be stuck in yet another box. I don't feel as though I have outgrown this publication because of its ability to be molded by the creative process of the students. However, because of that very same creative process students must grow, develop their sense of self, and continue on so that a new batch of beautiful minds can have their turn.

That being said I would like to thank the P'an Ku family as well as the students of Broward College for giving me this opportunity to express myself and for joining me on this amazing journey. Also, a special thanks to Dr. Patrick Ellingham for taking a chance on a shy quiet girl in desperate need to find her voice. I believe I have found it.

Melissa Frascati

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LOBSTER CO-OP

Photography

Ivar Fandel

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INSOMNIA

Samantha Pollio - Featured Poet

The bewitching hour is upon me,
That limbo between yesterday and tomorrow.
The present hour when reality takes on hues of strange.
The moon should not grin so wide, touching both ends of sky.
Looking like the Cheshire cat escaped its rabbit hole to
Take residence in the black velvet beyond my window.
Yet, there it shines. Pouring moon beams down my throat like white fire,
Intoxicating the senses.
Drowning Logic and Reason into a stupor,
Imagination quick to lock them away in the dungeons of my gut.
Midnight fish, with scales made of stars, swim lazily around my head.
Flashing nonsense in my eyes.
The shadows on the surrounding walls come alive to dance in some wild native jive,
Keeping rhythm while the clock's tiny arms pound a beat upon its face.
My brain begins to flutter,
Desperate now to join this strange phenomenon swirling before heavy eyes.
And with a resounding crack, my skull bursts in two and out flies
A thousand fantasies decked with paper wings.
The pen begins to throb in my hand; a pulse jumping through its sole vein.
Alive and ready to take down the converging beats of those elusive winged daydreams,
And give voice to them.
So it claws, marks, claims the plains of the snow white innocence of the page.
Moving with ferocious dexterity until blue smoke rises from its tip,
Like the hazy fumes of a caterpillar's pipe, joining the mayhem churning above.
Until the bell of the clock tolls once, surely for me.
Signaling the end of the midnight magic.
That strange bewitching hour rides off atop the winged back of that black and stately raven,
Back to its Plutonic shore.
Leaving me sapped, bled dry.
As the pen falls still between limp fingers.
As the wings of all those daydreams grow brittle under the weight of crushing reality.
As the shadow dancers melt back to their respective darkness.
As the midnight fish swim homeward up a river of stars.
And slowly the grinning moon, less manic now, reverts back to its close lipped smile.
Reason sobered enough to round up those loosed fantasizes
And Logic, hung-over in the worst way, holding a palm to his forehead as he
Staples up the gaping crevice in my head,
Reprimands me for my outlandish follies.
With nothing left in me I slap the cover of my notebook closed,
Blocking out the prying eyes of coming dawn.
Because the stories told in the bewitching hour
Are not tales for the dwellers of day.



VALENTINE'S DAY

Photography
Cecilia Angeles



LITTLE BLUE
Watercolor
Maileen Marcos

THE PIPER

Samantha Pollio - Featured Poet

He rolls through the hard wood doors,
A man with a purpose.
His hat brim tipped precariously forward to hide black eyes.
Swagger swings his hips
As he marches to his pedestal.
Through the cigar smoke veil and booze buzzed haze
He can hear the patrons,
Their thumbs tapping along the greasy bar tops;
Anticipation crackles through the air like static waves.
He takes his stance, squares shoulders,
Smirk crawling across his face.
Brass brushes his lips, a cold metallic flavor.
Breath bursts forth
From a wide golden mouth.
Haunting notes curl into every corner in the bar,
Coiling down the patron's ear canals,
Teasing their senses more than the alcohol.
The tempo changes, the speed more urgent.
His notes grow harsher, pricking the patrons' skin,
Burrowing just under the surface.
The melody screams "on your feet,"
More a command than an invitation.
He watches them now,
Jerking their arms, swirling their hips, lurching in a primal motion.
They are his puppets,
And he their puppeteer.
Pay the piper his dues
Or his music shall lay claim to you.

AMANDA MESA

Featured Artist



BEING
Photography



GREECE
Photography

BURNT MARSHMALLOWS

Julius Robledo

“Wretched night!” The drudging words escape his lips. Walking through the back alleys of the town, garbage lines the side of the buildings, some of it is stacked up like homes for the indigents and lost. Each step gets heavier and heavier with the passing of time, he needs his fix. Finally at his destination, a man in baggy clothes and a baseball cap looks him over.

“What will it be?” He knows his costumers by the visage of death drawn upon their beings.

“I just need the usual... It’s been a long night.” A stack of singles and fives is passed from one to the other, and as soon as it is counted a bag containing tiny blue pills is exchanged.

“See you soon.”

When he gets back to his apartment she is waiting on the dirty old couch, a thing full of smells and stains that remark the past two years as if they’d been decades. Her thin lips are dry and chapped, a crust under her nose and bags under the eyes makes it hard to remember what she looked like before it all started. He puts his coat on the back of the door, and crunching past plastic cups and caps that litter the hallway he scratches at his head. Thin arms and even thinner wrists still manage to gather the tools of their addiction. Straws, tin foil, and a couple of lighters, of which he can’t recall which work or not.

“What took so long?” she asks as her head wobbles, trying to sit up. He makes room for himself on the edge of the couch as he clears some of the table by tossing a heap of garbage to the floor.

“I was just thinking, maybe we ought to get

out of here soon. I mean, like... get out of here, this town, start new somewhere else.” He opens the baggie and takes two pills out, rips two pieces of tinfoil, and passes one of each to her. She grabs a straw and lighter just as he does and places the pill on the metallic surface. With the straw in her mouth she begins to burn the underside of the tinfoil, a smoldering crackling is emitted from the pill as it heats up and starts to smoke, she suctions the white smoke as the smell of burnt marshmallows fills the room. He follows suit.

As the pill melts, it moves on the tinfoil, making a dark spiral as it travels on the surface of the heated metal. Their lungs absorbing the opiate and eyes widening, this is what their life has become. After two more pills they lay back and hold one another.

“I think it would be a good idea.” Her hair is oily from lack of washing, she tucks it behind her ears. Pimples are sprouting like mountains across her unwashed face. When was the last time they washed? They can’t remember, the bathroom is only used to defecate once every couple of days, and maybe to throw up in more often than anything else. The shower is seldom used. “I’m tired of this place, the people are horrible.”

Sustaining his head like a helium balloon that has grown too heavy, he comes in and out of consciousnesses unable to talk. They both fall asleep on the couch.

Sunlight. Its warmth is heating up their faces, it awakens him. She’s still asleep. Getting up he feels his bones crack, falling asleep on the couch is no good for them, but he doesn’t notice after a fix or two. Once in the kitchen he pours

himself some water in a cup that's been sitting by the sink for who knows how many days, weeks even. After gulping it down he opens the fridge to find it empty. The last of the food stamp money had been spent on their current stash, selling them had become yet another habit meant to sustain their addiction. He serves more water and drinks it down.

Sitting on the couch he sets up another piece of tinfoil, the roll is still new and has quite a bit of the shiny metal paper on it. He shakes the lighter to make sure it's still got fuel, placing another pill on top he lights up. She awakens as he blows smoke on her face.

"What... oh... here..." she grabs for the paper and straw as he lights it for her. This is how every morning is spent.

"We need more money, we'll be out by tonight." His voice shakes a little, she knows what he means.

"Alright, I'll call Hue. I'm sure he could use some release." She inhales, and holds it. Again, burnt marshmallows fill the air.

She's dolled up, un-showered, but dressed up. Her skinny legs are nothing like they used to be. Once upon a time she ran every morning before going to work at the restaurant, her figure was envied, her beauty was obscene. Every man wanted her, and she knew it. Now she's just another corpse walking the street.

"Hue is coming soon, you'll have to go wait outside. Can you head over to John's and see if he can hook us up with some pot? Tell him

he can come by for the money later." She's applying lipstick to her chapped lips, a bit of eye shadow, and some flush takes away the look of death. She almost looks normal, but there is something about addiction you can never hide.

"Alright." It's all he says. He gets up and walks to the door, grabs his jacket and just as he's about to close the door she says to him:

"I love you!"

"I love you too babe... call John's when you are done." He walks down the stairs and runs into Hue, he's a tall blonde man, wearing glasses as usual. He's married, but likes to get

his kicks elsewhere just like everyone else. He's never asked him just what it is that he does, or what makes him go somewhere else to find company besides home,

he doesn't care. Besides, Hue doesn't know who he is.

John's house is five minutes from the apartment, it is an old house filled with old newspapers and an array of stuff which could be easily thrown out, but John just can't seem to part with it. It reminds him of his parents, he says. They saved all of this stuff, and now it just happened to be his watch over it. Having them both gone, this was the only thing they'd left behind. A house full of garbage. He knocks on the door.

"Come on in!" John screams from within. Opening the door with his thin fingers, he hears the rustling of the dog as it's running towards the door. It's an old pit bull with barely any teeth left, a very lovable old dog.

*She almost looks normal,
but there is something
about addiction you can
never hide.*

“So what’s up?” John is rolling a blunt, he always has pot.

“Not much, Lucy is working a job so I thought I’d come by.”

“I see...” He knew what this meant, but didn’t say anything. Lucy wasn’t a stranger to him by any means, even shut in pot heads need to get their rocks off every once in a while.

“Hey, do you think you can front us some of that kind-bud? Lucy will have the money for you tonight, you can just come back with me and she’ll give it to you.”

“Alright, not a problem.” Lighting the blunt makes the room fill with smoke almost instantly, maybe it wouldn’t happen so fast if there wasn’t so much shit in there, air circulation might be better; but tell that to John and he’d only say that it’s his house and he’ll do as he pleases. He’s right though, no one should be telling someone else how to live their lives.

The phone rings, it’s Lucy.

“Yeah, I’m all done over here, you guys can come through if you want.”

“Sure, we’ll be right there.”

She’s back in her regular clothes, her face is still flushed even though there is no make up on it. Her lipstick is a bit smeared, and her hair looks kind of clumpy. She’s smoking a pill as the two of them walk into the living room, seems like Hue left her a tip, there is a bag with a nice stash of pills by her side of the table. This is good, he won’t have to go out tonight to re-up. John takes a seat on a metal chair across from them, tossing a baggie of pot on the table.

“Twenty five please.”

“Here you go.” She puts down her utensils and reaches into her pocket, pulling out a small wad of bills. He accepts the money and pulls out a pre rolled joint, lighting it he winks at her

and she smiles.

“So what is up for tonight?” John takes a couple of puffs and passes the joint to Lucy.

“Oh I don’t know, thinking we are going to stay in and maybe watch some Fifth Element.” Her voice seems raspy, maybe it’s all the smoking.

“I was thinking we could get some groceries, the fridge is kind of empty.” He takes the joint from Lucy and inhales a large hit, coughing as if his lungs were trying to escape years of torture and abuse.

“Easy old man, you can’t take those big hits with this stuff.” John takes the joint from him and puffs at it. “I can give you guys a ride to the market if you need, I could use some supplies myself.”

“Sounds good, now that we have a little bit of extra cash it sounds like a great idea.” She lights the tinfoil, and sucks in more of the burnt marshmallow.

It’s been three days since Hue came around, and they needed more money. Lucy went to walk the streets for a little while, he stayed at home trying to figure out who he could rob and how to make a quick buck.

Lucy comes in a couple of hours later, her dress is a bit ripped, and there is something dripping from between her legs, down her bruised thighs. She doesn’t say anything as she passes by him on the couch, she throws a wad of bills on the table and heads straight to the bathroom. He hears the shower go on. He grabs one of the last pills and lights it up.

“Hey, Steve!” She screams from the shower. “Can you head down to T’s and pick up some more blues?”

“Sure thing babe.”

The alley hasn’t changed much, a couple

of bums are fighting over the contents of a garbage can as he passes them, they don't notice him. Shadows seem to elongate and compress, the wind is blowing and there is little to no fresh smell, it's a stink of decay that seems to linger in the inner city. Shivering from the cold he crosses to the other side of the alley where T is usually hanging out this time of night, but he's not there. Instead there is another dealer, he's seen him before. Tall and dark, with an over sized coat on, gold teeth, and a fuck you look on him.

"What you need boy?"

"Umm... where is T?"

"He ain't here... now you need somethin' or not?"

"Yeah, I need two hundred worth..."

"Aight..." He reaches in his jacket and pulls out four baggies, each with five pills inside.

"Cool cool..." He hands the money and takes the bags. "Catch you around."

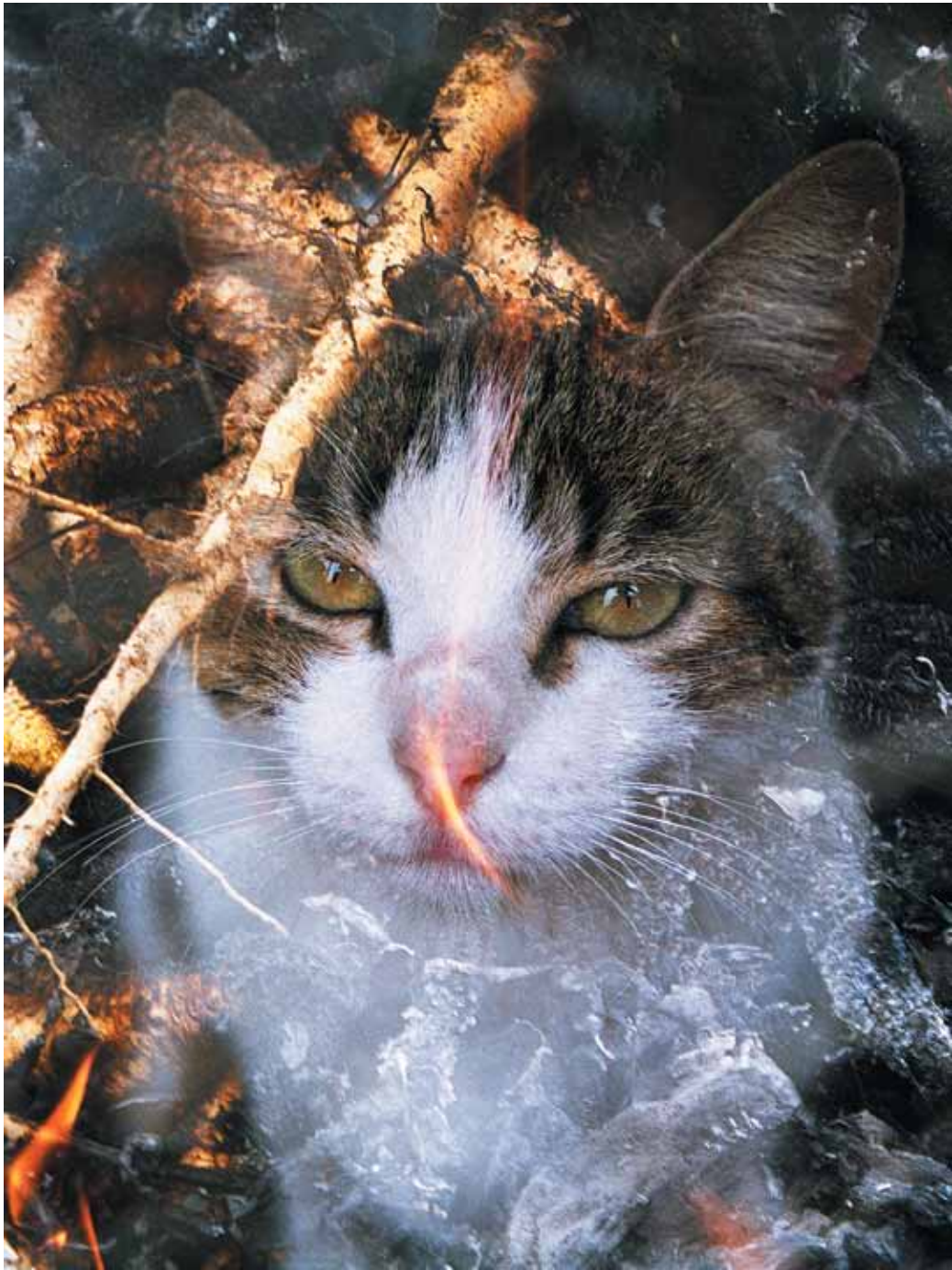
"Yeah, whatever. Fuckin' junky."

Back in the apartment she's smoking the last pill from the last stash. There are a few bills left on the table, and the aluminum roll is growing thin. He walks in and plops next to her, setting the baggies of pills on the table as he does so.

"We really need to get out of here..." He says, but just as he does she kisses him and exhales into his mouth. The hit makes him feel light headed, he forgets what he was talking about.

"You just need some more of this..." She rips some foil for him, opens a baggie, and sets up a fix. "Come on, smoke some and fuck me."

He get's high, he doesn't fuck her, his dick can't get up after he smokes the pills. They both pass out on the couch as the sun begins to rise on the horizon.



9 LIVES
Photography
Antonio Ugalde



FROM GEORGIA TO MAINE
Gouche on Bristol
Jonathan Rice

THE FIRST HORSEMAN

Samantha Pollio - Featured Poet

He came to town in a white Cadillac,
The Georgia clay eddying thick around his head,
A lowly rendition of a halo,
Kicked up by the blistering heat of summer winds.
He called himself the Preacher Man
Promised redemption in a lamb soft voice
At the pulpit every Sunday morning
Where he had the wrinkled biddies fanning themselves with prayer books
While their husbands cowed under his falsified righteousness.
He walked Main Street every afternoon,
Clasped hands with his flock
Who were oblivious to the burnt seal marked upon their foreheads
Or the legion of snarling beasts congregated at Preacher Man's feet.
They never suspected such a gentle young man
To play the hand of the devil
So they ignored the hell fires flashing in his sunken eyes,
And the taste of brimstone that wafted from his holy vestments.
Until the day that reckoning broke down upon their faces
And turning back was no longer an option
For they followed the wolf into the lion's den
And Preacher Man joined his three brothers again,
The apocalypse riding their coattails.



BAMBOO & PEBBLES
Photography
Alex Ladd

MAGIKER

Lauren Parks

“Did you hear? A magiker just arrived,” Jadi said, with an eyebrow wiggle that implied the magiker was quite dashing. Granted, Jadi thought every newcomer to our village handsome. A good part of our friendship involved me nodding along to her long-winded monologues about her latest infatuation(s).

I rarely begrudged her that though; she was one of the few girls who found it in themselves to speak with, let alone befriend the eccentric village alchemist’s odd, technically orphaned, stepdaughter. Jadi couldn’t see the bad in anyone, which was why she wasn’t given grief for her poor choice in friendship. The villagers adored Jadi and her high-standing family, thus her safety from ridicule. I wasn’t so lucky.

But that was old news, so my mind wound its way back to the last magiker to pass through Stonehollow: a greasy, weasel-like man whom the constable had run out of town after he’d been caught with his hands on the inn’s coin-box. Hopefully this magiker would be just as memorable.

Jadi’s bright smile exposed her dimples and drew me out of my reverie. With a knowing look in her eyes, she added, “And I hear he’s a horse magiker. So you should like him already.”

That revelation piqued my interest. Jadi knew me well; horses were my favorite animals, and plus, I’d only ever seen a magiker use a dog or one of those strikingly plumaged birds from the far south—the ones that spoke with odd voices—in his act.

Magikers are performers. Often accompanying small circus troupes, they perform tricks and small feats of so-called magic; sometimes they claimed to be healers and would sell bottles of cure-all. But really,

their magic derived from slight of hand, well-trained animals, and bitter concoctions of herbs that grew wild throughout the countryside. Little better than cons or thieves, our village tolerated their presence because, frankly, we had precious little entertainment, particularly in the colder months. Every other year or so, a minstrel from the capital stopped in for a few days and travelling performers visited during summer, but everyone left quickly, before winter set in. This far north, winter came early.

I found myself wondering what breed of horse the magiker had and what kind of tricks it knew, but as I bolstered myself to ask, Jadi had already moved on, her hands a flurry as she spouted what the rest of the village girls would wear to the performance scheduled for tonight.

I grinned, thinking about how many girls would freeze tonight, wearing their best gowns and dresses to impress the newcomer. Hopefully Jadi (or her mother) would have the sense to see the folly in wearing clothes meant for a summer gathering a month shy of Midwinter. But Jadi carried on, rambling about Sascha’s green dress with the gold stitch-work until we reached my stepfather’s house. I never got to ask more about the magiker. Artean, my stepfather, and I co-existed, assuming I followed his rules. If I was late, he locked me in his stillroom until he saw fit to let me out. If I made too much noise or annoyed him in any way, a bitter potion that caused horrendous muscle cramps for days would be forced down my throat.

I rarely stayed at the house during the day. At dawn, I slipped out of the house to wander about the woods and sneak rides on

horses loose in their fields, which certainly led credence to my reputation of oddity. I wouldn't return until just before dusk, when he expected dinner on the table.

That was my life—had been for over ten years.

“Hurry Lalia, we'll miss the show!” I didn't get a chance to respond or shush her before Jadi dragged me by the hand out of the door of my house. However, Artean didn't have a chance to scold me either, so the night was starting well. The question of where the magiker would perform answered itself; everyone in the village—bundled in wool jackets and scarves thank goodness—converged on the town square, the crowd thrumming with anticipation.

He was conspicuously missing—the magiker—but a wood crate filled with an assortment of props sat on the platform where the king's heralds issued royal proclamations. Jadi pushed her way to the front with me in tow, bouncing up and down like a small child about to open a highly anticipated birthing-day gift.

More and more people arrived, clamoring eagerly for the show, though there was a mild undercurrent of confusion. Normally the circus troupes set up a tent, making those who entered pay an admission fee. It appeared this magiker would be performing for everyone; a plain, brown bowl was the only suggestion for payment. Interesting.

A bundle of excess energy, Jadi jumped up and down in place, grinning from ear to ear. A smile crept onto my face; it was hard not catch

a little of her enthusiasm. She mistook it for teasing though and said, “Just you wait. You'll see.”

And so I did. Not moments after those words left her mouth, the clatter of unshod hooves on cobblestone hushed the crowd, leaving everyone craning their necks to see the marvel.

A blur of motion shot around the corner of the main road, entering the town square. The crowd parted, making a path for the magiker and his steed. The magiker rode bareback, bridleless, at a gallop, on the most exquisite creature I'd ever seen. The stallion made the mayor's prized racehorse look like an ill-bred nag. From the corner of my eye, I could see Ryndal and Gareth—the shire's horse traders—practically salivating from where they stood, a mere ten feet from the obsidian stallion's path to the herald platform.

The horse, nor rider, didn't seem to have any plans on slowing down. Heart in my throat, I stood transfixed at what I thought would be a horrible accident; images of the horse slipping on the cobblestone and crushing the magiker flashed through my mind, but the reality couldn't be farther from. Jadi clutched at my hand, wringing it as though I'd possibly miss what was transpiring.

Aiming for the dead center of the platform, the stallion launched himself into the air, off the road. Gasps escaped from many in the throng, but with the grace of an acrobat, the magiker somersaulted off the stallion's back, landing in a crouch on the stage. His horse managed to neatly land, then pivot on his hindquarters in a half-rear to face the crowd.

The magiker sprang up, swirling his dark

cape about as he took a bow. Still stunned, it took several moments before people began to clap and whistle at his feat. He grinned widely at the applause—his shockingly blue eyes eagerly taking in the crowd. Then, he casually bent over and grabbed something out of the wood crate.

“Greetings, ladies, gentlemen, children. I am Eachann, master of magic and speaker of animals,” the magiker said, snapping his fingers and setting off tiny colored-sparks that left a pattern of multi-hued light glittering in the air before him. Eachann gestured to the stallion, waiting calmly behind him, “This is Kieron. He is the son of the north wind and the night sky herself. Nary a horse that can best him. He is my partner in magic and mischief.”

Without any visible cue from Eachann, Kieron kneeled down on one leg, bowing to the crowd, then easily returned his previous stance.

The man certainly knew how to work a crowd. Expressions of awe adorned everyone’s faces, and I knew why. Between the costume and his grand entrance, the magiker would’ve had our attention. But he was so beautiful, so handsome, it was hard to look at him without, at least, experiencing a twinge of envy or desire. His looks placed him in his late-twenties, though he could be a few years either way. Coal black curls framed a perfectly chiseled face lit up with the bluest sapphire eyes ever to be seen in this village, where brown hair and brown or hazel eyes were the norm.

In short, every woman (and girl) wanted him and every man wanted to be him. The smirk on his face said that he was aware of this. With a tap of his foot, he sent that unadorned bowl flipping up into his hands. He tossed it up into the air, caught it behind his back, and flipped it up onto his head before sliding it back into his hands. Then, balancing the bowl on one finger, he started spinning it with his free hand, until it spun of its own accord—all the

while perched on his index finger. As the bowl whirled on, he said,

“It is my pleasure to present the greatest show of magic in the shire, nay, the kingdom! So, if you feel that you’ve been amazed and entertained, all I ask is that you leave a token of your appreciation at the end. The big lad here enjoys his oats.”

Many people chuckled at that. And so commenced the greatest show in Everin.

Eachann’s performance was certainly the greatest Stonehollow had ever seen in living memory. He turned copper bits into small silvers, pulled bouquets of winter lilies out of thin air, and dazzled small children by pulling out candies hidden behind their ears. He disappeared in a cloud of smoke and appeared moments later on the far side of the platform. Kieron performed arithmetic on par with the shire’s tax collector by pawing out the answers to the math problems posed. Then Eachann directed the stallion—still bridleless—through an obstacle course involving the crowd, all while standing on the platform.

The man clearly studied as a magiker for some time, to be this accomplished, but something nagged at the back of my mind. Some of his tricks seemed impossible. In theory, I knew how most magiker tricks worked; I could even perform a few of the easier ones. They were based heavily in slight of hand and loud distractions.

Eachann employed those tactics, but he didn’t seem to need them.

That thought stayed with me the rest of the show; Eachann was mid-way through his grand-finale, however, when it hit me. It had been so long since I’d witnessed real magic, that when I realized what I was seeing, every fiber of my being screamed to spring forward and beg on my hands and knees. I saw my way out,

and I could scarcely keep myself from shaking to pieces from sheer adrenaline and need.

Pulse racing, palms sweating, I mindlessly stepped forward towards the platform. Unfortunately, the village farrier, Sven—a hulking man—stepped sideways, out of the way of his wife and toddler daughter, and into my path. I wound up sprawled on the cobblestones, amidst the laughs of the crowd.

Picking myself up, I found myself staring into the concerned eyes of the magiker. He stopped mid-trick and moved to jump off the platform, asking, “Are you alright?”

I gulped—here was not the place to do this. Scrambling to my feet, I slipped back into the crowd. From behind me, I heard the painful “Don’t bother with that one magiker. She’s not quite right.”

But now, with startling clarity, I knew what I had to do. Pushing through the lingering crowd, I made my way home. A backward glance confirmed my suspicions; Jadi, entranced by the magiker’s coal dark locks and blue fire eyes, briefly tracked my progress through the square, but quickly returned her attention to the stage in case she got the chance to introduce her self. She’d never miss me. With that, I redoubled my efforts and slipped by, unnoticed by most, purposefully ignored by others.

~

The usual panic started setting in. The walls of this inn seemed to be closing in on me. More and more villagers pushed forward, good-naturedly trying to discover my secrets. I pray my dinner will be ready soon; I’m starting to shake at the effort of maintaining my front.

I need to get out of here, as soon as possible. Before the amicable questions became harsh demands, before I lose the ability to maintain my character.

Thankfully, the serving woman arrived just then, a bowl of hearty stew, a chunk of rye bread, and a mug of ale on a sturdy wooden tray. She smiled at me coyly. I summoned some dredges of pleasantries and gave her a toothless half-smile as I thanked her.

She curtsied, trying to maintain eye contact, but I ducked my eyes down to the tray and started shoveling in my meal. After several spoonfuls of stew, I picked up the bread to break off a chunk and discovered a folded up piece of parchment, with my name on the outside. Impressed that someone actually spelled my name correctly, I ignored the bread for the moment. (Eachann was pronounced “ee-kun”, thus the usual misspelling.) I unfolded the paper and began reading.

I know your secret. In exchange for not revealing it to the people of Stonehollow, I ask that I be allowed to accompany you on your travels as an assistant, or until we reach the capital, at which point we will decide whether it is agreeable for me to stay, or part ways.

When you finish reading this, please look to your left.

And there stood the girl from earlier—the one with haunted green eyes that had ended up sprawled at my feet at the end of the show. She smiled nervously, wringing the skirts of her dress as she approached me.

She was pretty, in a quiet, unassuming way. About fifteen or sixteen, it would be easy to miss her in a crowd, if it weren’t for the eyes. I’d never seen that color, or the depth they seemed to carry, before.

“You? You wrote the letter?” I hadn’t seen this one coming. Every so often a love-struck girl wanted to elope with me, but the tone of the letter was off for that. Those usually started about the depth of her love or the beauty of my face and ran on in that vain for pages.

She nodded and gazed solemnly into my eyes, waiting for my answer. I sighed and ran a hand through my hair before motioning her closer towards the hearth. I quickly glanced at the inn's back door that led to the modest four-stall stable for patrons—where Kieron was currently housed—then back to the dozens of villagers crowded in to meet me.

I'll never get her outside without someone seeing.

I don't need to incite a manhunt, talking alone with a village girl, so I have to disperse this here. Trying to keep the other inn patrons from overhearing, I whispered, "Listen, I'm sure you're a wonderful girl, but my life isn't what a nice lass like you wants...or deserves. You don't know what you're asking for, and frankly, nothing here could be that bad. But I would appreciate if you kept anything you may know to yourself."

She opened her mouth to speak, but no words emitted. The girl appeared to be on the verge of tears, which made me feel like I'd been punched in the gut. Good job, idiot. A blush crept up her neck, turning her ears and then face, bright red. People started chuckling behind her—what was so wrong with this girl to them?—and I reached out, not knowing what to say, but I felt some urge to try to shield her from their ridicule.

She couldn't handle it. She bolted out the back door, disappearing into the night. Of course, it could be that bad. I'd left behind that bad. I'm such an idiot.

~

I refused to let the tears pricking at my eyes escape. Standing in the empty stable-yard, I stared up at the moon, willing the tears to go away, but then, a low, throaty nicker floated to my ears, and I couldn't help but smile, despite my failure and humiliation.

By instinct and a sliver of moonlight, I walked to his stall. A silken muzzle, smelling of

sweet grass-hay, materialized in my face in the darkness. Momentarily startled, I chuckled at my nerves. Kieron nudged my shoulder, clearly one for attention. I obliged, running my hands over his nose, up under his forelock, and then coming to rest behind his ears—an apparent itchy spot.

Slowly, my eyes adjusted to the darkness, enough that I could make out the stallion's silhouette against the window of his stall. He was even more glorious up close; his short coat, designed for warmer climes, shone of rare black silk. His mane fell past his shoulders, his tail to the ground. Every one of his movements hinted at the raw, potential power his muscled frame held. I've never wanted to jump on and gallop a horse so badly as right now.

And the fire in his eyes—it blazed with spirit, and it spoke to me.

I wouldn't give up. That magiker might be a master of magic, but I had a few tricks of my own.

Just after midnight, I eased out the front gate of Jadi's house, having just left a letter on the doorstep. I owed Jadi that and more, but I fear I'll never be able to repay the kindness and friendship she gave me so freely. At least this way, she'll know how much I appreciated her. I wished her the best.

With that, I pulled in my oversized travelling cloak and adjusted the satchel filled with extra undergarments, food, and the few worldly possessions I refused to leave behind on my shoulders and started off down the path that led to the village proper and the Crossed Bow Inn. Every one of my senses was heightened—if I got caught now, I was done for. My attire and the contents of the satchel would be near impossible to explain away.

The village was eerily quiet at this hour—many folks were superstitious about anyone they might meet around midnight, but I was never one to believe in that sort of nonsense. The blanket of silence made it easy to detect anyone coming, but it also made the crumpling

of a fallen leaf underfoot sound like the booming of a summer thunderstorm—at least to my ears anyways.

As I neared the inn, a distant, muffled four-beat rhythm reached my ears. I froze, straining my ears, and sure enough, someone was leading a horse out of the village—though something must be covering the hooves.

Instinct I didn't dare ignore told me it was Eachann and Kieron.

And, intuitively, I knew where the magiker was heading. He'd ride a path through the woods, parallel to the road. That's exactly what I would do in his place. With the full moon, his task of following the road would be quite easy and infinitely safer than actually using the road. But I knew these woods—knew that the road curved gently to the southwest, then cut back towards the southeast before leveling out to head straight south again. Going straight the forest, I could catch up and effectively cut him off.

As long as he wasn't hustling along faster than a walk or trot, that is. On foot, I can only go so fast, and I didn't find the idea of stealing a horse to make my get-away particularly wise. I didn't need to incite any further reasons for someone, especially Artean, to come after me.

So with that, I turned to the heavily shadowed forest, hoping I could make it in time.

~

As the hour crept past midnight, I slipped out the window of my second story window at the Crossed Bow Inn. I'd tested the stairs down to the common room earlier in the evening and ruled them out because of their general creakiness and their location right next to the inn-keeper's own room. So now, I dangled in the open air, praying no one on a late night stroll would walk past and see me as I felt my way along the bricks. My fingers burned with the strain of keeping me on the wall, but I was nearly to my next-door neighbor's window.

Not that I expected any help from them, or an easier escape, but there happened to be a bush on the ground that would provide a little cushion, some fifteen feet below their window ledge. It was better than nothing.

Two feet later, I was in position. With a deep breath, I let go. My right ankle jarred painfully on the landing and my shoulder struck a stone as I rolled across the packed dirt of the stable-yard, but I've had worse. Heaving myself up, I slung the pack I'd pitched out the window minutes before over my back and scrambled—limping—to the stable. Thankfully, Kieron was the only horse being stabled tonight—otherwise I would've run the risk of bumping into another patron in the dark.

Kieron nickered breathlessly in greeting; he knew the importance of being quiet.

"Hey boy," I whispered, opening my pack to grab the leather booties for his hooves. I slid the latch on his stall and stepped inside. Kieron backed up a few steps to give me space, then docilely lifted his left foreleg, knowing the drill.

Using my belt knife, I cleaned out some straw from his hoof, then had him stand on the leather square. A thin bit of rope tied around his fetlock, and I repeated the process on each of his other hooves. That done, I ran a brush quickly over Kieron's back and stomach, to make sure nothing would rub his skin raw under his thin coat. I grabbed the bareback pad off the rack outside the stall and swung gently onto his back, catching the girth under his belly and tightening it to the second notch. I attached my saddlebags to the sturdy rings on the pad, then proceeded to tighten the girth the rest of the way.

Mentally ticking off my "midnight-flight" check-list (which always included double-checking the bindings on the coin-purse), I stretched the stallion's front legs, so the girth wouldn't pinch him. He took a little extra care, but after years together, this was routine. Kieron came from a long line of high-strung, well-bred racehorses from the vast deserts of

the south; the horses were known for their finicky demeanors, unparalleled intelligence, and unswerving loyalty to their partners. He was well worth the trouble.

Kieron nuzzled my shoulder—his “thank you”—and we proceeded out. At the edge of the stable I briefly scanned the stable-yard and the road beyond it—no one in sight. With another deep breath, I headed out in the direction of the road south, Kieron padding softly behind me with his muffled hooves. Looked like a clean getaway from here.

I didn’t appreciate how much I needed to eat those words until the girl from earlier popped out from behind a tree a mile south of the village, sending Kieron skittering sideways. I sat back and quickly calmed him down, though he snorted loudly, protesting my request to approach the “wild beast” that had materialized in front of him.

Kieron settled quickly after I halted him in front of the girl. She reached out and petted his nose, instantly soothing him. That amazed me; usually Kieron wasn’t fond of strangers touching him. I eyed the girl, waiting for the ultimatum. Which secret does she know? Does she even know a secret?

She was garbed in a travelling cloak and breeches she must’ve stolen from a boy a good amount bigger than her. She just stood there, arms crossed in front of her, with an expression that managed to look plaintive and defiant in the same instant. I could see a satchel tied to her back, and it didn’t seem to be stuffed to the brim with her best gowns, like a few girls that had tried to run away with me. I absent-mindedly shook my head at their folly. Honestly, who would bring gowns to wear on the road and in the woods? As she stared on, with growing confusion at my reaction, I noted

dryly that those silly-minded girls were a lot easier to get rid of than she probably would be.

Truth be told, I could be a mile away, or more, by now, galloping down the road and leaving this girl in the dust, but something stopped me. Maybe it was the underlying sadness in her bright green eyes or the mysterious, yet tenacious way she’d been going about this whole thing. Or maybe it was something in me. Who knows—introspection isn’t one of my strong suits.

“Not big on talking, are you?” I asked, an attempt at changing the subject—which was rather stupid, since she hadn’t spoken a word. Once again, I’m an idiot.

The girl smiled faintly, then shrugged in response. After a moment’s consideration, she seemed to make a decision, and opened her mouth wide. No tongue. Or, rather, the majority of her tongue had been cut out. Hence the lack of talking.

Stunned, I slid off Kieron’s back. Hand on his neck for moral support, I walked over and stood at his head, trying to think of what to say. Her muteness definitely took me by surprise. And her reasons for not running off on her own became abundantly clear. People, very rarely, were born mute, but more often, it was used as punishment for a wrongdoing or to further incapacitate slaves. So the second she tried to communicate with anyone outside her village, it would be clear she was either a criminal or slave. The girl would wind up in jail or right back where she started.

So here I was.

Well, not exactly. She didn’t see the real me.

Scrubbing my hands through my hair, I debated the merits of the idea that had popped into my head. Aww, hellfire. With a snap, I tossed aside the illusions I carefully cultivated

No tongue. Or, rather, the majority of her tongue had been cut out.

for years. What was left, was the magic-wielding, runaway horse thief by the name of Bran.

She blinked rapidly several times, jaw slightly agape, as if not quite believing her eyes—I couldn't blame her. After seeing Eachann, I knew Bran was a bit of a letdown. The hair and eye colors were retained, but instead of a self-assured, self-made, handsome magiker that could make every lady swoon, there was a raw-boned, half-starved man-child of seventeen. Eachann's luxurious curls translated into matted locks, the golden tan into the pallor of someone who never had quite enough food or sun, and perfectly muscled frame into one of whipcord over bone.

Self-consciously, I scuffed the ground with my boot and muttered, "My true name is Bran. I'm sorry I'm not what you thought I was. But I can barely feed my horse or myself, let alone you."

The girl recovered quickly, I'll give her that. She didn't seem as shocked as I'd expected. Actually that might answer which secret she knew: I can do magic. Kieron, now his true shade of gleaming bronze, nudged my arm expectantly, and I rubbed him distractedly, knowing he was right. Now to come clean.

"I stole Kieron when I ran away from home," I said, though my throat threatened to close in fear and block the words from leaving my mouth. I swallowed noisily, then added, "I was his groom in the royal stables, where his name was Sulien, or Sun-born. But when they discovered I had magic, I couldn't leave him behind. He was the only family I had left. I can never use our real names or show Kieron's true color. Stealing a horse of the royale lineage has a death penalty. As does using magic in my native land."

Without even realizing, I started to shake, the effort of finally telling my and Kieron's secrets equally terrifying and freeing me. A knot in my chest—one that had been there since I ran away years ago—loosened, and I

slowly regained my composure. I continued, "I'd be just as much a fugitive as you, if not more—you don't wan-"

Resolutely, the girl suddenly stepped forward and grabbed my hand. Images and words flashed through my mind in whirlwind, before they settled down into a steady stream that made me suddenly appreciate my early apprenticeship in the royal stables as a young orphan.

As swiftly as the images came, they receded, leaving me staring into those luminous green eyes, awestruck. She grinned wickedly at my utter shock as she retracted her hand.

Her name was Lalia. At the age of five, she'd been orphaned and left in the care of her abusive, semi-deranged stepfather. At six, Lalia was accused of witchcraft—unwittingly manipulating the thoughts and actions of those around her with her words—and had her tongue cut out as a result. That did stop her unconscious manipulations of those around her, but it didn't remove her magic—it simply curbed it some. Today was the first day she'd seen someone else with magic, aside from her long-deceased mother, and she seized the opportunity.

Lalia was a true magiker. She could project thoughts. I could cast illusions and speak with animals. Those words echoed through my mind, until they finally clicked.

The world suddenly seemed a little less bleak and infinitely more possible to survive in. Grinning widely, I reached out and grasped her hand, pulling her towards Kieron. We'd figure out the food thing when we got the hell away from this village.



STORY TIME
Photography
Anthony Marshall



ABANDONED
Photography
Brandon Schuermann

FINDING MY SOUL

Bridgette R. Hawkins

Do the fires of souls remember me?
Do they share my spirit that was left with thee?

I hope they don't forget what they left behind
For I'm lost within myself; I cannot find.

They departed this world with their lives left, oh, so brief
My heart pours and bleeds with all of this grief.

I thought that time would be my friend,
But he deceived me so and won't let me mend.

Will I ever find a happy place?
Will I ever be able to fill this empty space?

If my heart could only see and if my eyes were blind,
Time will only tell if it's me that I can find.

For allowing my soul to see, through the briars that bare,
Will take me to the place, which will show it cares.

It will show my heart how to mend and learn to love
And give my soul the freedom like the great white dove.

Loving with my heart and not with thine eyes,
Gives my soul the truth and frees me from the lies.

Do the fires of souls remember me?
Do they share my spirit that was left with thee?



ODDEST NAPPING PLACE

Photography

Kyle Hutchinson



SHOCKER
Photography
Joana Sandoval



SPLIT EMOTIONS
Photography
Joana Sandoval



VULTURE
Oil on Canvas
Jonathan Rice

ON MEETING A DEAD BODY

Julius Robledo

For he on honeydew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise!
Kubla Khan – Samuel Taylor Coleridge

From a psychic Reptilian

Deep Surfing Alligator
sailing through the blue ripples
like they were made for you
but never fear because it's here
soon you will feel the wrestle
of that familiar vessel
of which you thought
you'd gotten rid.

The truth about the past

Sooner or later
all the dead bodies must surface
full of their gaseous stink
to break the water tension
and show their rotten skin.

On meeting a dead body

It's okay once you see it
recognize the emerald drab
be still and know it is here
last time your attention it will grab
as it floats down the river
bloated with juices, ready to blow
excited from treason
of the warmest of hues and tones.

On meeting the Vigilant scavenger

It first spots it from afar
high above in the sky
this scent is something he can never forget
as the corpse is ripe with pride
floating and bobbing
it's way down the river Alf,
not even he could resist such wondrous price.

The Feeding/The giving

When it first appeared
it circled above it.
Making a crisscross pattern
of eternal gratitude
as it finally landed with its talons
to feed on the floating corpse
found rising from its deep repose.

Payment

Gases explode from the wounds
the scavenger is wrapped
eviscerated intestines
now clip its wings tight
unable to fly
he sinks down to the bottom
along with its wondrous prize.

On a random meeting

Such is the action
of life and death.
An action begs for reaction
and in turn
it all succumbs to an end.

End Curtain

COMATOSE

Jessica Rae Pulver-Adell

Calamity seizes hallowed fragments of thought
Solace forever denied
Ravaging tendrils ensnare
Beckoning madness burrows unto sullen hearts
Tormented amid the bowels of ill fated desires
Languishing fetters of the realms fall away
Eyes forced to gaze upon the truth

The unrelenting tether of love engulfs
All the sense of the world
Thought and reason fall unto enthralling madness

To part is to forfeit the essence of my humanity
And yet the trill and tenor of your voice
Purloin my will to progress
Eternally stagnant in the euphoria
Of your imposed perfection

Forever with me remain
In the seraphic comatose



FREDDY
Ceramic
Nadine Yanes

DARK DESIRES

Rey Rey Rodriguez

In the world of Fetishes and S&M, dominance and submissiveness are games,
Played while exploring both pleasure and pain, making them one and the same.

It begins with the attempt of making your wet dreams a reality,
By breaking free of the traditional conservativeness taught by society.
And understanding that it's okay to shy away from our normal routine,
Because we all have hidden desires that we haven't experienced or seen.

All of the little details that your imaginations' eye candy entails,
Are things that your flesh will continue to crave until you prevail.
It takes an open-mind to open Pandora's Box, to see what lust it holds,
Like the sting from a rubber whip, and the darkness from a blindfold.
The sounds of the screams, cries, and moans from torturous pleasing,
From spanking, smacking, slapping, hair pulling, grabbing and squeezing.

Scratches, knee scrapes, handprints, hickeys, and bruises from bites,
The look of a beaten woman with a smile, an obvious sign of a good night.
The piercings, tattoos, and choker, worn on the pigtailed girl on her knees,
The erotic uniforms, costumes, and toys, that never fails to please.

The vibrating tongue ring used with force to stimulate the clit,
While being held down with leather restraints, till the climax hits.

The bad girls' wickedness, the good girls' playful innocence,
The officer that puts you in cuffs before committing your sexual offense.
The black outfit made of latex, with a zipper covering the mouth on the mask,
The Roman emperor that lets you live as long as you do what he asks.

The doctor, nurse, or paramedic, whose tools are used for penetration,
The muscular female wrestler that steps on you and specializes in humiliation.

The morbid Goth-girl, the nun that sins, the thug that looks tough,

The feeling of being caressed while receiving or giving it rough.

The prostitute that listens to her pimp, the stripper that does it all for a dollar,

The naked woman crawling, that likes to be pulled by her dog collar.

The firefighter with a big hose, the widow with the short black gown,

The boxer that stares you down and says he's ready to pound.

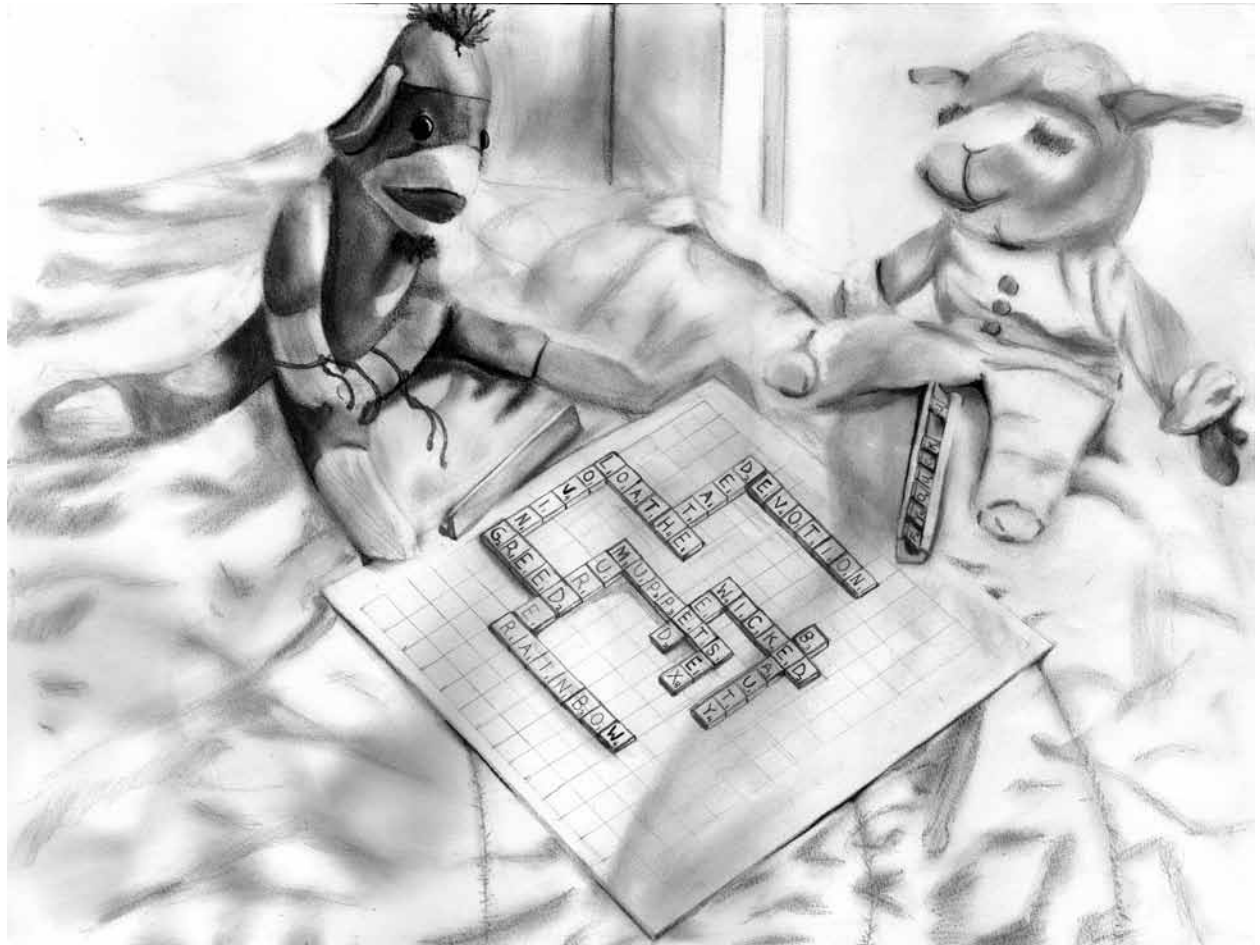
The high heels, corsets, and fishnet stockings on the French maid,

That also wears crotchless panties when you're the master and she's the slave.

The perverted conversations, and all the obscene language used,

The ability to seduce someone while inflicting the painful abuse.

Enter the world of darkness and make your fantasies exist,
Allow your body to indulge in all of the sexual bliss that it insists.



BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Graphite
Melissa Frascati



SELF
Photography
Teo Genao

I AM A MUSLIM

Zukhra Supijeva

Imagine a shy ten year old girl trying to fit in. She just recently moved to a new town, and made only one friend. She kept a low profile, and talked to people that would talk to her. On a beautiful sunny day in Maine, I was sitting in class when a teacher ran in and told us to turn on the TV.

On Sep 11 2001 Al-Qaeda hijacked United States aircrafts, and crashed them, killing many innocent people. It was like a horror story, something that happens in movies, you don't expect it to happen to you in real life.

I am from Kazakhstan, Almaty. My parents are Asian. My religion, Muslim, is used loosely after 9/11. I couldn't mention being Muslim or from Asia, without being called terrorist, or being told to go back where I came from.

The real terrorists made being Asian or Muslim look like outsiders and it was difficult for me to even tell people where I was born. People are supposed to be proud of their cultures, their backgrounds, but because of 9/11 attacks, and the war that began, my family could not smile proudly. A young child does not deserve being treated harshly by other children, or even teachers just because of their nationality.

I was in 4th grade when 9/11 happened. I used to take the school bus with my best friend Christina, she asked me where I am from, and I answered Kazakhstan. She wasn't my friend anymore. Walking home from the bus stop she would taunt me, and called me names such as terrorist, bomber, killer...etc. We stopped being friends, every morning I heard scary rumors about me, even threats to get beat up.

I used to come home crying, telling my parents I want to move, but that was impossible. I felt so horrible, I wanted to disappear. I cry to my mom, and make her take down anything that was from our country. I started to hate school, and would fake sick until my mom caught on. My parents told me to toughen up, and to never let words hurt me.

The attacks made everyday life miserable for my family, and we had nothing do with the attacks. The United States is supposed to treat all people equally, kind, no difference of skin color, religion, backgrounds, a Muslim was someone people feared, even if it's just a kid. We could not put up our flags contently because if we did others made us feel odium.

It's now 2013 people all over United States still look down on Muslims, and all "Stan" ending countries. Asians aren't allowed to

come to United States because of fear that he/she might be a terrorist. At the airport if you look Asian you get searched, or watched more carefully unlike an American. Today when you walk into a restaurant, or job interview, meet new people, you don't state that you're Asian straight off the bat, you break it easily, like it's a disease that has been there since you were born.

I'm currently 20 years old, and am a full time student, and a full time manager at McDonalds. Many people still don't know that I am Muslim. Daily I get asked where I'm from, or where I was born. I lie. I am not ashamed of my country, but am ashamed of the things that have been said. Especially if a person is uneducated they will not know the difference between me and my people, or the actual terrorist. I still remember all the tears, and for five years now my boss still doesn't know that I am a Muslim.

I've been through some tough times, and each day I let go little by little. September 11th helped me get up when I'm down at my lowest. I know I have to keep going. I have to be someone someday and make a difference

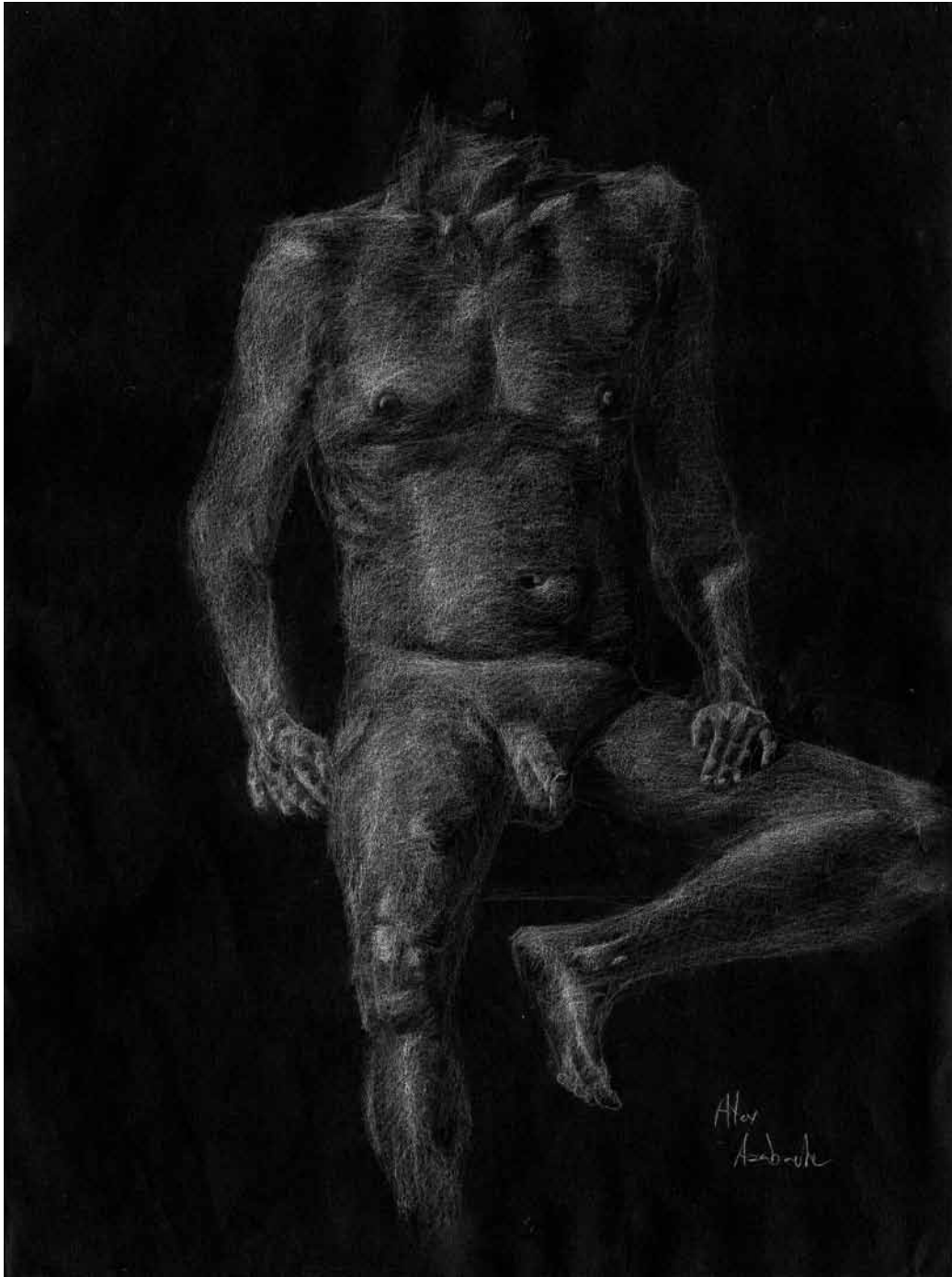
in a little girl's life that feels the way I did. It's influenced me to meet a person before being judgemental of them based on looks, or nationality, to look at everyone's story equally. I learned that life is not always black and white, sometimes there are shady areas. I hope to succeed in life, and although I was bullied as a young girl, I am proud to tell my story.



SIPPING AMBROSIA

Ceramic

Patricia Kobelin



JULIUS LOST HIS MIND

White Charcoal
Alex Azabache



HERA
White Charcoal
Alex Azabache

TO EVERY PURPOSE

Uri Sacharow

Ecclesiastes once told me, in a ‘just between us guys’ kind of way, that there’s a time and place for everything. That just because right now it might seem like a great idea to jump from your roof into a children’s inflatable pool full of spaghetti noodles or stick your tongue into an office fan doesn’t necessarily mean it is, but you never know—it might be tomorrow. I’m paraphrasing of course. I was pretty drunk when he told me, after all.

And so it is I find myself in Sunday service once again with a hangover that can only be described as unconscionable. My only solace stems from systematically torturing my partner until he finally agrees to no more drinking until next Saturday night. Noah’s Bar has “Two-of-Every-Drink Specials.” He pays for the margaritas. A time for divorcing oneself from sobriety.

“I’m having reservations,” I say, holding back a belch that, if gambled upon, would result in the immediate displacement of last night’s poor decisions. A time for liberal intake of Pepto.

“Understandable,” replies Obadiah, the man to my right. Obadiah isn’t my partner. My

partner doesn’t join me on Sundays. I asked him once and he told me, “Jesus and I are just now getting back on civil terms since the breakup. I wouldn’t want to jinx it.” A time for picking your battles.

“I mean, for Christ’s sake, every week I come here and every week this fat old shmuck,” I say, gesturing toward the senior pastor, “explains to me exactly what I’m doing wrong and stuffs it in a neat little package with a lovely cross-shaped bow.”

Obadiah smiles and nods. “It’s somewhat conceited to assume he’s only talking to you, isn’t it? Besides, it’s not about what he’s saying. It’s about what he’s not saying.” A time for cryptic condescension.

“What in the name of St. Peter’s pink satin garters does that even mean?!” I manage to restrain my voice in one of those shouting whispers. “I swear, sometimes I feel like everyone around me has lost their collective minds.”

“One needn’t be a prophet to have a moment of prophetic clarity,” Obadiah sagely advises me in both a grandfatherly and chiding tone.

“I cherish these talks,” I say dry enough to kill a slug.

Obadiah chuckles good-naturedly. I have a sneaking suspicion it’s at my expense.

“The point is,” I practically spit at him, “I’ve been coming here for years, week-in, week-out, with endless patience, a cheery attitude even. I contribute to their causes and bake cookies for the bake sales for God’s sake!” I pause and frown. “Well, Jacob bakes them, but I bring them. Then after, what—decades of service—this walking pit-stain at the altar has the big brass ones to tell me I’m living a life of sin? That my choices are wicked in God’s eyes?” I laugh, but there’s ice and bile in it. “Living in sin’, said the pot to the kettle...” A time for self-righteous petulance.

Obadiah sighs. “You don’t have to be here. You could be curled up with Jacob, nursing your headache with a fistful of Tylenol and a healthy dose of cynicism. But you aren’t, are you? Obviously there’s something keeping you here, whether it’s a faith in the Almighty or simply superstitious tradition. Either way there’s only so much time you can spend blaming the breaking of the world on the words

of one crotchety old man. If everyone gave a damn what their elders had to say the Earth would be a far more tedious place in which to live.” A time for conniption.

I want to scream. I want to curse at him and gnash my teeth and pull my hair. I want to tell him that I can’t help it if the faith that came so easily to me when I was younger just wasn’t there anymore. I want to stand up and tell everyone here...

“...and now Pastor James will lead us in hymn number fifty-three, In His Time.”

My head snaps up at the sound of my name and I blush as I realize I’ve been dozing again. Obadiah is no longer to my right but it doesn’t really matter since I have no idea what I was about to say to him. I reach the podium and thank head Senior Pastor Amos. I sigh, resigned.

To everything, there is a season.

At least that’s what Ecclesiastes told me, one drunken night.



EYE OF THE TIGER

Charcoal & Pencil

Samrin Parvin

COMPASSION: "I'M A FIGHTER"

Cara

She told me to stay home so we could talk when she got home from work.

"What could it be about?" I thought to myself.

My stomach was in knots. Maybe it was because of my little sister deciding to move up to our dad the night before. Maybe it had to do with the fact that my little brother left with my father back up to New York a couple of months ago. She walked into the house, and put her purse down on our kitchen island. My sister and I were sitting at the kitchen table. She stood there for a few seconds.

"I want you to leave. You can't live here anymore." My mother exclaimed.

My heart dropped. Tears filled in my eyes. I could not believe what I was hearing.

"What? Why? What the hell?" I exclaimed. "This is ridiculous. Where am I supposed to go? What about the animals? What about my car insurance? What about my cell phone?" I panicked.

"I'm taking everything and putting it all in your name. You're on your own. You need to figure out what to do with the animals. I'm keeping Daisy." She proceeded to explain. "If you can't live by my rules and regulations than you cannot live here. If you think the grass is greener on the other side, than go and see for yourself." She exclaimed to me.

I could not believe what I was hearing. My sister and I sat there, both questioning her sanity. I did not know what to do but to get up and go to my room. My sister followed. I had class shortly after that. I decided not to go, and headed straight to my boyfriend's house. I could not sit in a classroom at that moment in time. I could not control the emotions that were pouring from my eyes, and my heart.

Before you question why I was kicked out

of my own house, you have to understand my family situation. My parents separated shortly before I graduated high school. All my life, I was a witness to their arguing and bickering. I was always a second mother to my younger siblings, and sometimes their only mother. After my parents separated, my father moved into his own apartment. Then, my younger siblings and I were subjected to my mother's metamorphosis. She started to date my brother's best friend's father, which quickly ended their friendship. She began to go out, almost every night. She would drink, come home and act like she was not intoxicated, and go to bed. We wanted to be with her; watch movies and play games, but she acted like she did not want to be our mother anymore. Three months after that, my father decided to move back to New York, our old stomping grounds. My brother, who adored my father, decided to move with him. Two months after that, my sister decided to tag along. She did not like my mother anymore. I could not blame her.

At one point my mother was an amazing person to be around, though she had her moments. She was always the artsy, creative kind. My mother could take anything, an old piece of furniture, for example, and bring it back to life. She loved her seashells. She always dreamed of living in a tropical environment. Florida seemed like the place for her; little did we know our family would forever change. Her drinking quickly emerged. What had seemed like innocent fun turned into an evil escape.

I began to feel sorry for my father. Although he had done his fair share of creating problems, I felt sorry for him. He was lost. He did not know that life would end up this way. He admitted to his mistakes. He did not make life easier, but he was man enough to

admit his faults. He did not know that because of his actions, my mother would spiral out of control and become this monster. Overnight, he became a single parent, taking two broken children at the ages of 12 and 14 and starting all over again. Those young ages are when both parents need to be involved in their children's lives. My mother was selfish. My father took on both roles. He was a survivor. He was a fighter.

I did not know where to go. I was torn. I wanted to be with my family. At the same time, my boyfriend was my best friend, and had been there for me through all of the drama over the years. His mother graciously opened her heart and her home for my dog, my two cats, and myself. She had a full house to begin with. Her elderly mother and their cat were living with them as well. I unfortunately had to give away my other dog. It would have been too much to handle at once.

The next few weeks were filled with schoolwork, cardboard boxes, and slowly saying "goodbyes." My sister was packing up her stuff, and I was packing up mine. During that time, my mother made no effort to help, or to try to make things better. In her mind, she was the sane one. She was asking her daughter to leave because her daughter would not put up with her adult decisions. Drinking, staying out late, those were adult decisions, right? I began to see who my mother truly was, outside of the "mom" role. The sound of beer bottles began to chip away at my heart. I did not like her. I did not like who she became.

My father drove down from New York, and helped move everything. When it was time to say goodbye, my mother was a wreck. She said her goodbyes to my sister, but as for me, she did not care to say goodbye. More of an, "I'll see you later," approach. I took it for what it was. She was a broken person beginning a broken

life. I said my goodbyes to my family. It was not easy, but I knew that my siblings were going to a good home. It was a safe, quiet home. It was a home where they did not have to worry about a drunken mother starting fights. They did not have to feel alone. They had a father who would provide for them and care for them. They did not have to be afraid anymore. Although they were losing their mother, they were gaining a whole gang of family and friends that would help along the way.

I also knew that I would be starting my own life with my boyfriend and his family. I would be attending college and providing for myself. All my life I helped take care of my siblings, so it was a chance for me to live

my life. It was almost as if I was going away to college, without the extra fees. I too felt secure, and happier. I slept

easier at night. I felt comforted when I walked into the house. I found joy spending time with his family. Although I did not live with my family, I knew that they were OK, and I would be too.

To this day, I still do not speak to my mother. I tried numerous times to work things out, but in the end it was not meant to be. She is too far gone with who she has become and the life she has chosen to lead. I am living on my own with my boyfriend, and my family is doing great.

My mother kicking me out of the house was a blessing in disguise. It allowed me to see her for who she truly was. One of the hardest things to cope with is dealing with the loss of a parent. Although she did not pass on, she is not a part of my life, so it feels like a loss.

I often wonder about her, what she is doing, where life has taken her and her new husband. I reminisce about our days of shopping and grabbing coffees. I laugh when I think about

We have had a taste of what hell is like.

We spit it out.

the nights we would dance and sing to corny 80's songs. I long for her cooking, because sometimes mine does not come out as good as hers. I cry when I think about all that she is missing. I smile because those were the moments that I had my mother. That is whom I choose to remember my mother as. That was my coping process.

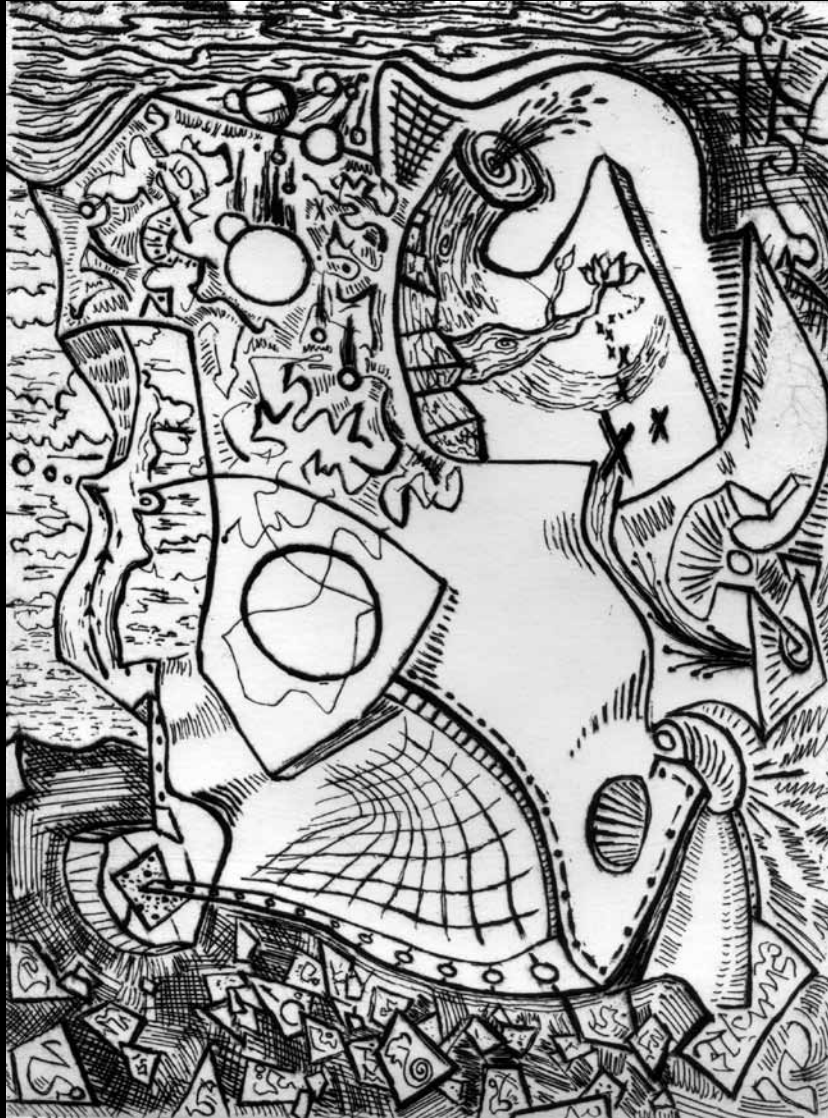
I now have so much to look forward to when I go to visit my family. We continue to make the memories. We dance and sing to corny songs. We gather around our dinner table and stuff our faces like we have always done. We tear up when we say goodbye. Our love has become stronger. Our hearts have grown. We understand what it is like to lose someone you love and care about. We understand the meaning of 'moving on.' We have had a taste of what hell is like. We spit it out.

I look at my life, and how far I have come, and I am blessed. I am blessed for my father, my brother and my sister. They have overcome so many battles throughout the years, and in my eyes they came out on top. I am blessed for my boyfriend and his family, for without them I do not know where I would stand today. I am blessed for the rest of my family, who stuck by me throughout the ongoing troubles between my mother and I. Where there is a loss of compassion, there is always someone there to give it right back.

Terrible situations are presented to people everyday. It all depends on how you deal with them. Do not be a victim of your circumstances; be a fighter.

JOHN BOCCINO

Featured Artist



ANTI-VERSE
Etching



BIMINI SISTERS
Etching

DANDELIONS ARE MADE FOR WISHING

Julius Robledo

For Melissa

A thought followed by
a softly whispered kiss
from tender lips
which sends seeds flying
into the wilderness of the world.

Within the beautiful chaos
a white ball explodes
into a thousand pieces,
each holding part of that wish.
Aching to reach into the ethereal,
to grow inside paradise.

Carried past mountains,
rolling hills,
and soft plateaus;

A gentle wind
finally lays them to rest
within the crevices
of a valleys crescent navel,
where rivers of life
flow deep.

Here a soothing breeze
and warm sun
nurture them into robust wishes,
just waiting for the moment
they will continue on the journey,
a tender caress from breaths unspoken,
a brilliant chaos
and into the world.

Because it's as if dandelions
are made for wishing
and nothing more.

ELUCIDATION

Jessica Rae Pulver-Adell

To dream or not to dream
Tis the mire of lost and besotted desire.
Pernicious fear of demise refutes those of
Staggering resolve.

To wish, to yearn till pregnant with purpose,
Till vision blurs ambition from dream
Reality from stoic stagnation,
Wrought about inaction,
Till hands lay trembling to numbness.
Bound, even still amidst queer like trance.

Actualization falls away to marrow where
The bone hath rot and maggots crawl among
Long since decimated haste;
To be left alone amidst grandiose disgrace.

O! To live a piper's dream
To flee and prance, perchance to sing,
And to dance, and yet still feel failure's lance.

Fettering all but the talentless
Unto exodus of the famed, and yet glory lies
Debaucherous of name.

Who may purloin the hearts of those yet divine?
Doth the tamed and chasten light as gorgon
And smite those damned before inauguration?
If fate is so to be not defied,
Why do we dream in lieu of manifestation
When it is fruition that we seek?

It is essence in which dreams reap
An oblivion absent dreams halts transcending thought
In which elucidation fades to dreams.



DUSK'S FALL
Photography
Lennish Shah

WHEN THE DEVIL CALLS

Rey Rey Rodriguez

As tension fills the apartment, I whisper, "Lord, not again,"
While I grip the cross that hangs from my neck, causing it to bend.
She calls my name from my room, then says, "Come in and close the door!"
I pray, "If there's a God please help me, my body is still sore."
The neighbors never stop this, and I have no friends or family to call,
My little sisters are sound asleep on the other side of these walls.
I see the belt in her right hand, that's when urine runs down my leg,
I plead to her, "I'm sorry Ma! Can I please just go to bed?"
She tells me to come close, so I obey, shaking as I approach,
The seconds before it happens is when I freeze up the most.
As I stare at the floor, I ask myself, "What did she create me for?"
"If this is how it'll always be, I don't care to live anymore."
She tells me to look up, so I glimpse into the familiar evil from her eyes,
Then I shut them closed and think of happy thoughts, as I begin to cry.
As usual, the left backhand comes first, causing my lips to swell,
Followed by a painful sting to my left arm from the folded leather belt.
Warmth trickles down my chin, as the blood stains my pajama shirt,
As I try to relive my grandmother's hugs, which helps soothe emotional hurt.
The pain keeps coming throughout my back and legs, as my hands cover my mouth,
Out of fear that during the punishment I may block her hits or shout.
The burning intensifies all over, as if my skin is about to melt,
And my shirt begins to feel tighter as I grow welts on top of welts.
As I stand there, without moving, feeling alone, and wishing for death,
A small comfort comes over me, as she begins to run out of breath.
After a couple more swings, and hair pulls, there is always a push in the end,
From the floor, I look up at her and promise to not be a bad kid again.
She lays the belt on my dresser, turns off the light, then walks out of my room,
Which sits there as a reminder to me, that this lesson may reoccur soon.
She says, "Don't let me hear you, just go to sleep!" as her goodnight shout,
Then when her silhouette moves from under the door, I let it all out.
Throughout the night I stay awake, in physical pain, and full of fear,
This is the hand that was dealt to me, throughout most of my childhood years.
I've seen the Devil through my mother's eyes many times when I was small,
And although he chooses to hide these days, in my thoughts he still calls.



SPIRIT VESSEL
Ceramic
Nadine Yanes





MEAN STREETS 22
Photography
Karen Robinson

WHY ART MATTERS

Allison Nading

As you read this, a battle is currently being waged across the globe. In classrooms where art is taught, kilns are fired, and monologues are presented, the troops prepare against the enemy. The supposed foe, you might be wondering? Society itself. In a world ever-increasing in appetite for money and technology, an art gallery is seen as less a place to display talent and more a gruesome exhibit of wasted potential and squandered ability. Fiction and photographs are no longer perceived as tangible representations of creativity and passion, but that of horrifying evidence. Evidence--not of souls brimming with emotions and ideas--but that of theft: stolen time.

How has it become so that Art has been deemed as disposable? Many who tout the benefits of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) program make arguments that consist mainly of what can be physically measure. How can one deem the profession of, say, an art teacher, as one residing upon a plane elevated above that of a brain surgeon? Is the swipe of a paintbrush in any circumstance more important than that of a scalpel's clean incision?

Perhaps, instead, other questions should first be entered into the equation: Are the strands of our DNA any less intricate than those found within a finely woven tapestry? Are the fingers of a pianist any less skilled than those of one nimbly dissecting an organ for research? Is the plotline found in an operating theatre any less riveting (or literally heart-stopping) than that of one filmed to entertain an audience of millions? Have we truly considered the possibilities that might ensue if our society--so obsessed with severing the ties between the right and left hemispheres of our minds--instead began to embrace a concept in

which each side is intrinsically and irreparably intertwined with the other?

Thus, to respond to the question the title of this essay broadcasts in bold: art matters because art IS matter. It takes up space, it can be found in every object, spotted in every glance. There is nowhere it isn't: In everything we touch, we feel, we see. We are living, breathing, pieces of continual expression; a three-dimensional canvas which extends far beyond the walls of a gallery or encased within a frame. Art is in the arch of a hawk, swooping to capture its prey from a vast expanse of blue; and it's also in the fact that the radius of that arch can be precisely calculated with formulas centuries-old. Art is in the graceful waltz conducted by a room of gowned figures whose eyes peer over surgical masks to delicately place one heart into the chest of another... art transcends location, action, or object.

Art matters because it can't be placed within a particular category. It breathes life into whatever it inhabits: in an orchestra's crescendo, a hand-molded vase, a complex math equation. It can never be subtracted from any iota of anything, for it permeates every aspect of every thing. With every inhale and exhale, we expel our identity into the environment around us, contributing to a cumulative masterpiece of humanity that extends beyond the smooth beauty of a statue's marble profile, the fine lines of a delicate suture, or the vast height of a skyscraper.

One must embrace all aspects of life to fully ascertain the fact that there is no one way to define what is form and what is function, what is art and what is plain. The juxtaposition between that of logic and aesthetic in and of itself can be defined as art to some extent, can it not?

Contest Winner

As our ancestors traveled along paths and valleys of vast expanse, we find ourselves as humans now often trapped within the confines of a society and setting filled with boundaries and borders. Thus, we must find new ways to wander: not with weary footsteps or upon horseback, but with our minds. Art permits us to expel our mental creations into something that we can share with those around us. With an image, we can alter somebody else's perspective. And, with a poem? Perhaps somebody's entire mindset.

Art matters because it touts the role of not solely that of a tool, but one of a comforter. It can be the calming presence in a room that was once solitary, it can serve as the inspiration to one otherwise aimless. Art permits us to release the toxins within and re-attain a balance, to share our faults and fears without shame, in a manner that might inspire others to do the same. It assures us that it's okay for us to take pride in ourselves and in what we can make from what we have and who we are. From shell-shocked soldiers to recovering addicts, art permits anybody and everybody the same pace, patience, and time for whatever they need

to make and simultaneously discover about themselves.

Life is fleeting, and in the end, evidence of our existence can only be found in a small pile of dust and a slight imprint upon the memories of a few. Yet, Art permits us to defy such a morbid fate. In the faint smile of the Mona Lisa, in the sculptures of Michelangelo, the studies of Marie Curie--we find individuals able to live on in what they created and in the discoveries they made. To defy nature... To live--in a sense--even when the skin has cooled, and our heartbeat has slowed to a stop, to touch the lives of those who were born hundreds of years after we already departed this Earth, what more could matter?



FAMILY MINE

Photography

Who_Leo

THERE ONCE WAS A FELLOW NAMED HOWARD: A LIMERICK

Uri Sacharow

There once was a fellow named Howard
Who boasts it's been years since he's showered
He says "it takes skill
And an effort of will
And if anyone asks, I'm from Broward!"

P'AN KU STAFF

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