

INSCAPE 2014



INSCAPE

2014

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Inscape is the literary magazine
of Pasadena City College.

It appears once a year in the spring.
PCC students serve as the magazine's editors:
editors market the magazine, review
submissions, and decide the layout.

All PCC students—full or part-time—are invited
to submit their creative writing and art or photos to
the magazine's faculty advisor, Christopher McCabe.
Submission guidelines and information regarding
Inscape editorial positions are available in the
English Department office in C245.

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Inscape 2014 Award Winners

Short Story

A Big Fan
by Alysha Alberts

Poetry

1923 Johnston St.
by Manny Moreno

Nonfiction

Damages
by Dez Wilder

*Special thanks to
Yingchao Xiao
for her generous contribution
to the Inscape Awards*

Dedication

The editors of *Inscape* would like to dedicate this issue to one of the most genuinely devoted professors we know, Christopher McCabe. Without his leadership in the beginning of our editing process, we would not have had the confidence to follow through with this year's publication. Unfortunately, misfortune befell *Inscape* when the editors heard that Professor McCabe would be on sick leave for about half of the fall semester. His guidance and leadership were what made previous *Inscape* magazines a success, but now he would physically not be there. Upon receiving the news, the editors were immediately saddened and hurt, for they felt that Professor McCabe was more than just their professor; he was their friend; he was the friendliest mentor anyone could have asked for; he was indeed an open minded individual who listened to his students; he was, perhaps most appropriately, the leader that *Inscape* needed. However he trusted in us, his loyal editors, to take over the magazine and ensure the issue would be released in spring of 2014. It has been a daunting task, but with Professor McCabe's tremendous support and the help he has provided from home and even from his hospital bed, we are proud to say that we were able to make this year's issue a joyous and triumphant reality.

It has been a true privilege for us to work under the guidance of Professor McCabe, who, in all his benevolence, showed us how to piece together this creative writing magazine. Not only has it been a privilege to learn under Professor McCabe's instruction, regarding the publication of a literary magazine, but it has also been a tremendous privilege to get to know him as a person. The editors of *Inscape 2014* are profoundly touched by Professor McCabe's good will. His kindheartedness, helpfulness, and genuine concern for others will leave a lasting impression upon us, as they very likely have for students past. Therefore, with great honor, we present this year's edition of *Inscape* as a tribute to Christopher J. McCabe.

We hope the magazine does justice to your mentorship, Professor McCabe, to our campus tradition, and to the creative process that has brought us all together on this project.

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Words for Writers

From Denise Hamilton

PCC's 2013 Writer-in-Residence

Denise Hamilton is the best-selling author of five contemporary crime novels in the Eve Diamond series and *The Last Embrace*, set in 1949 Hollywood and inspired by the real-life disappearance of starlet Jean Spangler. She is also editor of the Edgar award-winning short story anthologies *Los Angeles Noir* and *Los Angeles Noir 2: The Classics*. Her crime novels are widely praised for their gritty and glamorous portrayal of her hometown Los Angeles and have been finalists for almost every mystery award. Prior to writing novels, Denise was a *Los Angeles Times* reporter and Fulbright Scholar; she also writes a monthly perfume column for the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*. Critics have called *Damage Control*, her latest novel, “excellent” and “her largest and greatest triumph.”

Ms. Hamilton completed her residency on campus in October. Asked to give advice to beginning writers, she offered the following in response:

Try to write every day. Don't go back and start rewriting, because some of the best writers I know, they'll write like 60 pages or 30 pages or 100 pages, and then they go back to the beginning and they start rewriting. You cannot do that. Force yourself to keep going until you reach the end, because until you get to the end how can you assess the work? And also, rewriting is like a trap, because it's comfortable. You feel like you're writing, but you're really not moving forward.

And the other thing I would say is try to write every day, at least a page. Don't set limits for yourself, like, “I have to write a thousand words, or I have to write five pages.” Just think, if you write a page a day, that at the end of the year you'll have 365 pages. Even if you throw half of it out, and you know you need to rewrite, then at the end of two years, you'll have 365 pages. But the other thing is, don't freak

yourself out by saying, “I'm writing a novel.” Tell yourself, “I'm telling a story, and when the story is done, I will know what I have.” A story, a novella, a novel.

You don't have to outline. If it works for you, and you have that kind of ordered mind, outline! But if you're going to do that, then allow yourself to veer away from the outline. Just because you did the outline doesn't mean you have to stick to it. In fact, most writers I know, about half do, and half don't. Even the ones that outline, don't necessarily stick to the outline, because your characters will kind of wake up, and develop secrets and back-stories, and motives, and hidden relationships with each other that will only become apparent once you get into it. You can't plot it all from your outline. The outline is so two-dimensional and static. Once you get into it, your characters get in there and shake things up and interact with each other. It's like a chemical combustion, you know, reaction, and weird stuff will happen. So, outline if you feel like it. If it feels right, don't outline chapter to chapter.

I just worry about what's going to happen next.

In terms of your writing style, feel as though you are sitting at your kitchen table telling your best friend a story, and write it like that. Don't find the perfect word, or the perfect sentence structure. Just *tell* the story, and everything else can be second draft stuff.

SHORT STORY



A Big Fan

AWARD WINNER

by Alysha Alberts

Bill pulled the pistol out from his trouser pants and began to finger the trigger, never pulling it all the way. He was drunk, leaned up against the outside wall of a surfer bar where he was becoming a regular. It was winter in some sandy beach town, not a touristy one, but a beach town where there were only two colors: beige and tinny blue. It was a place where he didn't have a name, a job, a friend, a car, a bed.

Bill left his hometown--where he had resigned as a minister with a Sunday morning public broadcast of mediocre popularity--after his wife Lauren and daughter Jeanie died in the accident two months ago. He'd gotten it into his mind that he should have died too. For this reason he started carrying a Colt 1911 around in his pants, sensing its powerful metal grace his leg as he wandered along the seaside.

He'd just thrown away the rest of his money as a tip to the barkeep. A solitary woman turned from the jukebox to watch him leave the bar for the last time. He'd look crazy now even to the late-night people passing by. The sun was long gone, his back was bent up against the front of the bar, but the dark steel camouflaged with the shadows. A few young people circulated in and out of the place without seeing him. In the lack of light, it was hard to see that he was there, with a gun; it was just the vague form of a man barely distinguished from the vague form of the night.

Sitting on the pavement with whiskey for blood, Bill was a man who sounded like a default exhalation. He was about to sound like the union of explosion and silence, a bullet making a ditch in time and space and flesh. He was about to be transported, his concrete surroundings would no longer seep into his awareness. It was right.

The black hole of the pistol's edge was now touching his temple. It's what it would feel like if the universe could touch your mind. All that possibility. All that never. All that is. The Colt felt like a long-lost best friend next to him and they were going to go out together, true to each other. He prepared to squeeze the trigger when a woman interrupted him.

It was the woman from the jukebox who had watched him leave.

She came out of the bar to light a cigarette. She had watched him for a few moments before stepping over and kneeling down beside him without his notice. Her hand came between his temple and the steel.

"Didn't you ever love anyone?" she asked Bill.

"I dunno." Bill said automatically, slowly, hypnotically. He was caught off-guard. He unconsciously removed his pointer finger from the trigger cage. All of a sudden he realized what was going on. He shook his head and breathed inward as if he were coming out from under deep waters. He saw the crouching woman for the first time.

"Woman, are you insane?" he asked, pushing her hand away from the line of fire.

"Maybe I am," she said. Then, after a pause, "but you're the one with the gun to your head." She observed him calculatingly, with her head to the side. Her eyes were a rare color. She was even more out of place than Bill was.

"I guess you're an angel." Bill slurred a bit as she firmly pulled the gun from his hand, analyzing it. The air smelled of salt and a heavy wind from the nearby sea blew past them. The dull roar of voices from within the establishment could be heard on the street.

"No, I'm Margaret." Bill heard her, but he also heard ghosts in his head, absences.

"Daddy loves Jeanie," he would say to his daughter every night at bedtime, tucking her in with William the Rabbit. For a while, Jeanie had night terrors and wouldn't be able to sleep if her dad wasn't there waiting next to her. Once or twice Bill thought she was asleep when she wasn't and left the room, only to hear her crying for him to come back. Was Jeanie able to sleep now, wherever she was?

"Why're you here huh?" he asked the woman. He should be dead. He should have been dead two months ago. He felt like he'd missed a bus or a plane. "Why'djou stop me huh?"

Bill's face cleared and conveyed a last-resort sort of hope and expectation. Maybe this woman had answers. If she was crazy enough to put her hand in front of a gun, she probably had something interesting to say. The woman looked up from the machine in her hand. She inhaled from the cigarette in her other hand.

"I recognize you. You're Bill Hartley. I didn't get the chance to introduce myself inside, before you left. I know your sermons."

Bill sighed heavily.

"That doesn't matter," he said. He saw the gun sparkle between them briefly in the neon light of a BUDWEISER sign.

"It matters to me," she said. She was very close. He noticed a delicate sterling cross around her neck. Her hair floated fog-like about her face.

"I don't even know you, okay," Bill said.

"You don't have to," she said.

"Lady, you don't understand. That gun is supposed to take me to another place," he said, getting angry, "and you ruined that by saving me." He painfully brought himself up off the ground using the wall for support, precariously expressing his full height. The woman simultaneously stood from her kneeling position and tossed the cigarette.

"I understand more than you think I do. Besides, I didn't save you," she put the gun back into his hand. "You can go and die, go right ahead" she laughed— "but I watched you for five minutes and you didn't do anything. Why don't you just do it? Really do it, then." She pulled off the chain around her neck and threw it at his feet.

Bill stared down. There was silence. The stars were grey and twisted above them.

"That's what I thought," the figure said. Then softly, "but I forgive you," and went away.

I don't even know you. Bill sank back to the ground, into unfathomable thought. The ghosts were restless in his heart. The fully-loaded gun rested in his lap. His stupor was wearing off. The bar was about to close and people were heading home. The stranger's crucifix glittered sharply on its chain before him. He picked it up.

The marine air was very cold by then and he sat for a long time shivering.

Anything, Please

by Jordan Wheatley

She awoke in her usual place under the bus stop canopy on Washington Boulevard. The morning air was frigid and demoralizing. The layers of blankets she had wrapped about her were so tightly wound around her limbs that she could hardly feel her arms and legs. Along with the subtle warmth, these coverings brought restrictive security that was only found in the tight folds now embracing her. As her eyelids cracked open, and her dry mouth took its first conscious breath, the weight of the world began to press down upon her stomach. No—wait—that wasn't the world that was causing her insides to churn. It was last night's bottle of Night Train.

She began to panic, trying desperately to peel away the blankets that were shackling her appendages. The vomit was slowly rising up her throat, just waiting to escape the purgatory that was her gut. As she was finally able to break free from her tepid chains, a warm flow of whisky evacuated her stomach. She sat relieved in a pile of her own disgusting insides.

This was the start to another glorious day.

The sun rose, and the buses ran their frantic morning routes. Bus 125 arrived at her stop amidst her vomit-induced confusion. As soon as the irritable, balding bus driver caught sight of her, he stopped and came huffing out of the opening doors. "Louisa!! What the hell do you think you're still doing here lady? I told you yesterday what would happen if I found you here again," said the aging bus driver, reprimanding her with the wag of his finger. His jowls shook in caffeine-deprived anger, and his eyes bulged nearly out of his skull.

"I'll leave," replied the woman, in a voice so dejected that it was practically inaudible. She gathered up her sick-soaked belongings and began her daily peregrination.

"Alive," she thought as she began her slow walk up the

sidewalk. Her knees grinding in her skin, bone against bone, from years of lonesome wandering.

She had accepted the world's pitiful view of her. As she looked down upon the dried puke that stained her tee shirt, she knew the disgraceful presumptions were true. She had thrown everything away for a midnight score and a bottle of whisky. Years of her life lost in a memory unremembered. The tears streaming down her face were hardly felt through her rough, exhausted skin.

Her head was bowed down as she lifted her dry, calloused hands to wipe the tears from her cheeks. She slowly raised her head from its despondent position. As she looked up, she saw a familiar face. A face that brought a trickle of light to her otherwise gloom worn day. It was Sarah, the only friend she had left amidst the worldly turmoil that so blighted her every day. Sarah came walking towards her with open arms and an unforced grin; her teeth shone so brightly in contrast to her weathered skin. As Sarah embraced her, the weight of the world slowly began to melt away. Louisa ran her fingers through her friend's blonde hair that reached all the way down to her knees. Her tear-stained cheeks were wiped clean upon the shoulder of the woman who had whole-heartedly succumbed to the beauties and atrocities of her prostrate reality.

"How's it going Sweet Pea?" Asked Sarah. She'd called her Sweet Pea ever since their first encounter. Louisa's eyes sparkled like sapphires every time she heard her say it.

"Oh, just another day in the neighborhood, you know. The bus driver gave me a real hard time this morning... again," Louisa replied.

"I swear to God, that man has another thing coming! He won't even know what hit him after I'm through with him!"

"Gee thanks Sarah, but you don't gotta do that," even though Louisa wanted nothing else but to rid her daily routine of his predictably cruel sentiments. She knew Sarah would always be there for her. Sarah was the only spark of solidarity in her increasingly tremulous existence.

"Well, if he gives you a hard time again...you best let me know, ya hear?"

"I will. I promise. Doing anything exciting today?" Louisa asked, trying to quickly change the subject.

"As a matter of fact I am! I'm heading downtown in just a couple minutes. I have a few bucks, and I'm hoping to come back with much more, Sweet Pea! Wish me luck!"

"Good luck," Louisa replied with a teary smile. She knew how hard that journey was for women like the two of them. Begging for change on board a train or a bus was a dangerous maneuver. Ridicule and deprecation were a certainty. If something were to happen to Sarah, an overwhelming emptiness was sure to cloak every one of Louisa's last heartbroken days.

The two women came together for their last embrace as another flow of tears began sliding down Louisa's face. She couldn't help it. Holding Sarah in her arms brought warmth to every crevice of her hardened heart.

"So long, Sarah."

"See you soon, Sweet Pea."

The two parted ways, and headed out to fulfill the remainder of their own fateful peregrinations. Louisa, with cheeks wet once again, was headed to the only place that she knew she could make enough money to get through the rest of her day.

She headed towards the highway off ramp, wiping the useless tears from her cheeks. "I have to make a few dollars," she thought, "just enough for another bottle of whisky. Just enough to remain almost entirely forgotten."

Just before her knees began to buckle, she arrived at the off ramp. Digging through her bag of belongings, she was able to find her cardboard sign. It didn't say anything substantial. It brought forth nothing religious and nothing really to bring pity upon her. The pity came rushing over people like a goddamn waterfall when they were courageous enough to look into her eyes. The brightest blue anyone could ever imagine, yet they made you feel so dark. Those eyes made

the weight of the world crash upon your shoulders so quickly you would think your spine was shattered into a thousand pieces. One glance from her, and your wallet was empty. Involuntarily, you would find yourself reaching into your pocket and handing her the last dime you had. As your hand touched her filthy palm in the exchange, she would show no emotion. Nothing. You just saw those icy blue eyes reflecting to the back of your skull.

She stood at the corner with a sign that read, "Anything, please."

After merely two hours, her pockets were full.

With a fresh bottle of whisky in hand, she began the nightly peregrination to her splintering solace underneath the canopy on Washington Boulevard.

Don't Go Out Tonight

by Chuck Rios

"Orders up!" Ted shouted, as he rang the diner's bell with his greasy palm, leaving a fat streaked handprint across its chrome like only a short order cook could.

"Thanks," Clair said, "I'm sure the burger will be great, Ted." She picked up the bagged food and cherry soda from off the counter.

"It always is, sugar." Ted winked at her. "Say, I almost forgot. You coming to my haunted horror house extravaganza tomorrow night? Rickey and I set up some scary stuff for you all this year."

"It depends," she said. Clair checked her phone, fired off some quick text with one thumb and glanced back at up at Ted. "Can Eric come too? He's into spooky stuff."

"Everyone's welcome, sugar. He's a nice guy, bring him along, but make sure to tell him there's a five buck cover charge at the gate."

Clair frowned. "Do we gotta pay?" She gave him the kind of look all cute girls give when they want to get away with something.

"Fear ain't free, sugar." Ted scratched his belly, sucking in air through his teeth making a quick, curt whistle. "But tell you what, seeing as its Halloween tomorrow, I'm thinking there's no telling what will happen. Maybe a miracle? We'll see how it goes."

"Sounds good!" Clair said. "Gotta go, staving over here. See you tomorrow maybe."

"Yup. Enjoy the food." Ted gave her a nice, solid smile as he waved goodbye.

Outside the diner, the sun was setting over the foothills, blanketing the valley with a gray haze. Oak trees lined the streets. Orange and brown leaves fell like a kaleidoscope rain fall covering cars and lawns alike. The chill of a late October

breeze fondled Clair's hair sending a shiver up her spine. It made her nipples poke out from under the red Casimir sweater she wore.

"Clair, wait up!" Eric came running up from behind her. "Where you headed, cutie?"

"Hey!" She hugged him, kissing his cold, rosy cheek. Eric never wore a jacket, even on nights like this when the temperature dropped down to the low fifties. She remembers him saying something one time about how a real man doesn't need a jacket, when he's tuff.

Stupid male machismo, she thought. "I'm heading home. Walk with me, ya?"

"Of course, baby."

Later that night they sat on Clair's couch in her living room. She told Eric about the haunted house Ted and Ricky were throwing and about her trying to get out of the five dollar cover charge with her gaga eyes. "I tried to get us in for free, but we'll see how things go. I don't think he was having any of it."

"I don't know, Clair. I never liked that Ted guy. He's a damn creep, ya know?"

"How so?"

"That sick mother looks at my little sister Chelsea like she was a piece of meat! I told him if he looked at her again like that, I'd knock his teeth out of his skull."

"Eric!"

"Well, I'm just saying what I know."

"Hey! Watch your language, mister!" She playfully slapped him. "Ted is always nice to me when I go in there. Don't think he ever looked at me like that though."

"Well, I don't like him. And his stupid goon friend Ricky isn't too bright either. Heard he fucked his own sister." Eric crawled over onto Clair and made an air hump motion, complete with grunts and snorts like a hog.

"That's disgusting, Eric, stop that!"

"And that creep Ted watched the whole thing too," he added. "It's true. It's what I heard, anyhow. Besides, I don't want to go."

"Please babe? They said it was real scary. A horror fest extrav...extragavge..."

"Extravaganza?"

"Yhea, that's what he said." She wrinkled her nose, "I hate it when you correct me."

"That's stupid. They're stupid, Clair. They wouldn't know scary if it popped out of their asses and landed in their mouths."

Clair just shrugged at the comment as she picked up her food with both of her hands and took a bite. A stream of juice trickled down her chin from the corners of her mouth.

"Og... swheet gogd... dis bahurger tits oh guud!" she blurted, her mouth full of hamburger. She moaned. A strange mix of pleasure and food fantasy engulfed her. Then, with the gulp of her soda, she swallowed it all down. "You want some, babe?" She put the burger up to his face.

"God no! No, thank you, though." He pushed it back up to her mouth.

"So," she said, "can we please go, baby? Love? Please?" She tried the gaga eyes again and this time they had their intended effect. Her looks always worked on him.

"Fine, I'll go, but I am not eating anything that fat pig makes." He pretended to be gagging as if he was poisoned, then he smiled a toothy grin at Clair. "But hey, listen, if I have to go, then I'm going to show those two what horror really is. I'll scare them so bad they'll shit their damn pants!"

Clair just rolled her eyes at his comment as she slurped the last of her drink down.

Norton Street seemed deserted as Eric rolled the car up to the stop sign. "He lives over here? This part of town is the dumps! Look, it's Halloween and there isn't even kids out!"

"Stop it!" Clair said. "You said we could go. Besides, it's too late now, we're already here, see?" She pointed to their destination. The two trees in the front yard were covered in

toilette paper, its white strands hung down from the branches like tentacles and swayed in the air as if they were planning to grab someone up like a spider on its web.

"Park over there, babe."

Eric parked their car across the street from the property Ted's family had left to him in their will. Ted never said how his parents died. Only that they weren't very nice parents and that he was glad to have them gone as he had expressed many times to anyone who cared enough to ask. He came from money and was no stranger to wealth, but he drank his inheritance away and was forced to work. The diner and the house were all he had left.

Eric pointed over to the side of Ted's house. "I bet that's where that Ricky punk porked his sister."

"Shut up with that! You said you'd be nice."

"Did I?"

She playfully slapped him again. "Come on. Let's go, tuff guy."

Before Eric got out of the car, he felt his side for the silver buck knife he had brought along. The knife was tucked in his belt loop and he pulled his shirt over it, being careful not to let Clair see.

When he got out of the car, Eric looked the place over. "No one's here, Clair."

"But, the lights are on in the garage. And look, there's a sign." She pointed to a single bright red balloon tied to the mailbox with the cardboard sign taped on to its side. When they got closer to the sign, Clair read it aloud. "Five dollar cover charge for the dudes. Ladies are free, of course. Entrance at side of house. Good luck! Signed 'The Management'."

"Oh, real scary," Eric said. "Pfft! And good luck? Please."

"Well, come on," Clair said. "Let's go, my macho hero." She pushed him forward in front of her.

They walked to the side of the darkened house. Black tarp covered everything, creating hallways leading out to the backyard. When they reached the steel black gate, there was

a table with a mason jar on it. Another sign was there instructing anyone who wished to enter, to leave the entrance fee in the jar and let yourselves in.

It also commanded you to "have a spooky time".

A recording of screams and horror movie sound clips blared from one of the many hidden speakers as Clair turned to Eric. "Should we pay?"

"Nope," he said, "no one's here to collect the money. Besides, the jars empty and the gates open. Nobody's showed up yet and with these guys reputation in town I doubt anyone will." Eric stuck his hand into his jean pocket and pulled out a five dollar bill. "You know what? Screw it! I feel sorry for these bastards. Maybe with this money they could afford a better Halloween CD."

They opened the gate and stepped inside, walking into the darkness of the plastic tunnel. A full assortment of skeleton props and cobwebs hung from various corners. A cheesy re-enactment of a famous slasher film was interesting though. The victim was a store mannequin with fishing line attached around its neck making the mannequin bob up and down with a jerking motion.

"Hey," Eric said, "looks like that doll is blowing Michel Meyers! Told you these guys were stupid. Let's see what's in there." He motioned to the stairs leading down to the back entrance of a basement.

They walked to the entrance and down the stairs into the basement. Strobe lights flashed erratically, leaving floating ghost images that burned into their eyesight.

"Careful with those steps, Clair." A hand came out of the corner behind the heavy basement door. It rested on Clair's shoulder.

She screamed.

The fake hand dropped to the floor and Eric laughed at her.

In between the flashes from the strobe they saw streaks and puddles of red paint, chains with hooks and more of those mannequins.

"They even found it in their budget to get some fake blood. See, my five's already paying off." Eric leaned over to one of the props and swabbed it with his finger. "Stuff's like candy, babe."

"Eric, don't."

"See." He put it in his mouth and licked it clean. Then, he spit it back out. "What the fuck is this?" He gasped, spitting some more. "Fucken disgusting!"

"Are you ok?"

Eric spit some more. "It's not fake, Clair..."

Somewhere in the pulsing lights and loud music, the basement door slammed shut.

"You like what I've set up for you?" a voice spoke. The voice seemed to come from all around them.

"Clair, come here," Eric said.

She held him tight as Eric felt out for the door's handle.

It was locked.

He shook it in frustration. "God damn fuckers!"

"Who is it? What's happening?" Clair said, the panic was thick in her voice as she squeezed Eric tighter.

"It's that fucker Ted, or his buddy," Eric said.

"Eric, I'm scared. Tell them to stop. They win, if that's what they want. They scared me."

"They're here somewhere. Stay by me. I got a surprise for these bastards."

"Please. Let's go home, please."

"Stay close to me."

Eric ran to the corner of the basement near the door. "Help me find the light switch." He ran his hand along the wall for endless minutes. Blood covered everything and Eric got it all over his fingers, forearm and palms as he made his way back to the basement door. "Hey fuckers!" he yelled, pounding on the door. "Let us out! Turn this shit off and let us out, NOW!"

The power went off.

The music stopped abruptly and the flashing lights darkened.

The basement was silent, cold and black.

"Eric?" Clair whispered.

"I'm here. Hold my hand." Blindly he felt out for her till they held each other again.

Eric pulled out the buck knife from his belt loop and gripped it in his free hand.

The voice came once more.

"Clair? Did you like the burger? It was my old buddy Ricky. Tasted good, didn't he? You're a sick bitch, sugar." Ted laughed. The microphone he used started to feedback. Then it fell quiet again.

"Wha- Ted? Oh god, I-" Clair vomited. She fell to the floor at Eric's feet and cried and shook.

"Why don't you show yourself?" Eric yelled and waved the buck knife in the darkness. "I'm gonna stick you like the pig you are!"

Clair wrenched from her stomach. She had eaten Ricky. To cope, she curled up into a fetal position and rocked back and forth.

"You want to hurt me?" Ted said, as more feedback came from over the speakers.

"Show yourself and see!" Eric shouted.

"No," Ted said. "I wanted you Clair, but you didn't want me. I would have told you that I wanted you, sugar, but-"

A loud thud came from up in the house.

Ted grunted.

"Shut up!" Eric yelled.

"I can't have her," Ted continued, "It's a damn shame. But Eric, you know who I can have?" Ted wheezed and coughed. Another loud thud came. This time it was fainter and followed by a muffled scream of terror. The sound of cries being ripped from a young child ensued.

"...I can have your sister."

"Chelsea?" Eric pulled at his hair, the knife still sweaty in his hands. "I swear, if you touched her I-"

The power turned back on.

Ted's voice was louder now as it came out of the speakers.

"She's dead, man! But don't worry, I'm gonna serve her up nice and rare. As for you two... you both can rot in hell!"

Eric tried the door again. He panicked. It was still locked. He kicked it over and over. It did not budge. In the madness, Clair's cell phone had fallen out of her pocket and cracked on the floor. Eric felt around at the ground at his feet and picked up the cell, hoping it still worked.

It was dead.

Eric screamed and screamed, stabbing at the door with the knife.

"Bye, bye, sugar. I loved you, sugar. I loved you."

And that night, in the basement, the music played on and on and on...

Four days later the paper reported Eric and Clair's disappearance, along with his sister Chelsea. The two lovers bodies were eventually found when joggers passing by smelled something bad coming from Ted's house and reported it to police. The Coroner said in his statement that they were eaten alive by an animal, possibly a wild hog. He noted this as their official cause of death.

Chelsea's body was never found and by the time the police came looking for Ted, he was long gone.

Six years later, back at the diner, business was blooming under new ownership. Children even ate for free on Tuesdays. Eventually, Life returned to normal for the small California town. The memories of the "Halloween horror house" murders were distant, but you never forget.

You can't forget.

"Orders up!" the cook shouted.

"That was fast! Thanks!" The cute girl in the plaid two piece bikini reached out for the tray of food. "My boyfriend said these burgers are the best in the west."

The cook lifted up his hat from his eyes with one greasy finger.

"You got that right sugar... they sure are."

Friendly Fire

by Joseph Lusnia

It was bothering her to no end, the oil sliding down the side of her neck, working its way to her breast, then down her back, but there was very little she could do about it with the room afforded her. Only six inches of space stood between Grace Tunney and the undercarriage of the blue '83 Ford F-150 pick-up.

She tried desperately to screw the new oil filter back on, but it wasn't catching. When she inherited the pick up from her husband, along with his badge and his father, she never thought she had inherited oil changes, fence mending, roof patching, porch painting and God knows all the other shit that goes along with not having a husband. That's not including cooking, cleaning, window washing, floor sweeping, curtain sewing and God knows all the other shit that goes along with being a woman. She missed her husband a whole lot, but on days like today she missed him a bunch more. Not because she couldn't deal with all this crap. No, she just wanted to rip him a new one for not seeing that cow standing in the middle of the road when he was doing eighty miles an hour just to get to town because some kid busted the light outside the Stop and Shop with a BB gun. Why he had to go running out like that at one in the morning she never did understand. It made for the worst night of her life.

They met at the University of Wyoming. She was the captain of the womens Rugby team and John played on the men's. He convinced her to join the National Guard in their senior year. It was more of a four-year courtship than commitment; four days after their discharge they were married and he brought her here, to Lysite.

She tried latching the filter on once more. Her hands were now slick with oil and she could feel her fingers begin to slip. She heard the phone ringing from inside the house, but kept

on with the task at hand, willing her fingers to grip that filter. She knew the old man would answer it and take a message, but not because he was being polite and wanted to help her out. No, for him it was like relaying an order: "Jake Longgardner called. His lawn jockey was stolen. He wants you to come by and take a look " or, "Clara from the Laundromat called. Someone broke into her machines and stole all the change out of them. She needs you down there right away." Whatever it was this time could wait until she finished with the pick-up.

"Oh for Christ's sake John..." she whispered, saying it like he was lying there next to her looking up at the engine right along with her. She had stopped drinking six years before he died; they were the best six years of her life. Now she drank just coffee, black no sugar. She didn't think she would have taken the Sheriff's job if she were still drinking. No one really knew how bad it was, but John did, and she did, once she quit. When the town council voted her in, it was only three weeks after they buried him. It wasn't like they needed a sheriff, but she was the closest thing to John that walked the earth. Sure there was the old man, John's father, but he was more piss and vinegar than anything else. If they didn't appoint someone sheriff then the State police would put the town under their jurisdiction. After six weeks of training with the U.S. Marshalls in Laramie, Grace was sworn in, seventy-one days nine hours and thirty eight minutes after her husband's death.

When she finally got that filter to stick, she slid herself out from under the truck. The air was warm and felt good against her skin. The bright sunlight made her eyes blink. She slammed the hood of the pick-up and went into the house.

She knew not to ask the old man about the phone call as soon as she walked in, that would come in his own due time. Instead, she asked him if the coffee was hot.

"Coffee?" he barked. "I haven't drank coffee in three years, ever since my doctor told me I had to cut out the caffeine on counta my heart was palpating all the time."

"I didn't ask you if you wanted some, I asked you if it was hot." Even though he didn't drink coffee he was the one who made it, every day, sometimes twice a day depending what was going on. Grace lifted the pot. It was full. He must have made it within the last fifteen minutes.

He watched her from his perch at the kitchen table, "You're getting better." he said. "It only took you about forty-five minutes this time." He pointed his finger in the direction of the pick-up truck.

"Thanks for the encouragement." She took a sip of the coffee; it was hot.

"Sally called. Injun Joe is throwing rocks at the windows down by the school, she said you need to get down there right away. He's drunk."

Injun Joe wasn't his real name. His real name was Carl Little Feather. He was an Arapaho Indian who refused to live on the Wind River Reservation; to him, living on the reservation, all fenced in, was just like living in a prison. He said Indians should be free, not contained by fences and borders, so he moved to Lysite, saved his money, and bought a house. He took the nickname Injun Joe himself, just to piss off the other Indians.

Carl wanted his kids to grow up in the Whiteman's world with Indian values. He felt this gave them the best of both worlds. Carl saw that the world was changing, it still had a lot more changing to do, but it was better now then it was thirty years ago; he couldn't say the same for the reservation. Six days ago Carl and his wife Sally got word that William, their only son, was killed in Iraq by "friendly fire."

William Little Feather was stationed in Iraq at Camp Duke, about 30 miles north from the city of Najaf, where a major ammunition depot was located. His platoon was on a routine patrol, assessing checkpoints around the city. On their way back to base his platoon was hit by an armed U.S. drone, which had mistaken them for convoy of unfriendlies. William and another boy were killed, and his body was due to arrive tomorrow at the airport in Casper and then be trans-

ported to Riverton where Carl and Sally were going to meet the body.

"Did she say if anyone was hurt? Where there any kids around?"

"No she did not Sheriff!"

"Shit." She threw her cup of coffee in the sink, "And don't call me Sheriff, you never called John, Sheriff."

"That's because he was John, my son. You, you're the Sheriff."

"Thanks a lot pop." She wanted to get this done quick so decided to skip washing up and ran a kitchen towel over her face, "Do me a favor, call Denis and tell him to meet me down at the office in twenty minutes, let him know I'm bringing Carl in so he can sleep it off tonight, I need him to babysit."

He answered her with a salute; she grabbed her gun out of habit and buckled it around her waist and headed for the door.

The words "Be careful Sheriff," followed her out as the door slammed shut behind her, and she answered back, the middle finger of her left hand raised high in the sky.

She climbed into the pick up in one fluid motion and found herself staring back at her reflection in the rearview mirror. She couldn't tell whether she looked old or young, whether the skin on her face was worn and wrinkled or tan and thin. She tried to look at herself through her husband's eyes but couldn't.

John was always telling her how beautiful she was; she could be scrubbing the toilet after the old man had one of his episodes and John would tell her how beautiful she looked, or at the church picnic as she was selling raffle tickets in the hundred degree heat, he would tell her how beautiful she was, or the time his father had his first heart attack and she sat there in the hospital holding his father's hand as he silently slept, he told her how beautiful she looked. But he didn't just tell her. He showed her too, like when that bus broke down two miles outside of town with those cheerlead-

ers from the University of Wyoming and she helped with the cooking, that night he made love to her in ways she never imagined they could, just the thought of that night made her heart quicken. Hurriedly, she put the key into the ignition and started the truck, and then she remembered, shit, she forgot to put the oil back in the engine.

The old F-150 finally made it's way onto Badwater Road, the sun still hanging high in the sky as the never changing landscape floated by. It takes all of ten minutes to reach the town; Grace glanced over at the passenger seat next to her, and saw the radio lying there. She thought about calling the Tribal Police, but shook that thought out of her head really quick. It's not something she does often, but from time to time they do come in handy. Like the time Bill Deerslayer and Rodney Slocum were selling un-taxed cigarettes out back behind Gilroy's Western Wear. She knew that was more of a problem for the Reservation than the town, because more than likely they were stolen off Resz and they were the ones losing the money. So she called the Tribal's, it was six weeks before Bill Deerslayer showed up in town again. This wasn't their problem.

The school sat just about the center of town. It wasn't a big school but it was their only school, two stories, it went from kindergarten up to junior high. They didn't have enough kids to support a high school. For that the kids had to go to Danville, about twenty miles east of Lysite. Grace could see quite a few broken windows as she drove by the front of it. From thirty miles away the Grand Tetons shimmered on whatever glass was left, then nothing but empty darkness. Grace knew that Carl would pay for the cost of replacing the windows no matter how long it would take him. She was just about to get out of the truck when Ruth-Ann Watson spotted the pick up and came running over. "Grace, Grace!" she shouted, waving her arms every which way they could go.

"Not now Ruth-Ann, I'm trying to find Carl, have you seen him?"

"Grace I need you to talk to him about Walter's customers, they are taking up the spots behind my shop, some days my customers have no where to park." Ruth-Ann owned the Quilt Shop, the only store within a hundred miles dedicated to quilting. Walter owned the Sportsman, it was one of two dozen stores within a twenty mile radius that was dedicated to hunting and fishing, in other words guns and ammo, with an occasional fly rod thrown in.

"Ruth-Ann, I promise you, I will talk to Walter as soon as I'm done here", knowing she wouldn't, not today, not now, "I'm looking for Carl have you seen him?"

Ruth-Ann looked up at the school, her eyes filled with wonder and amazement, pointed and said, "The windows in the school, they're all busted out. Grace did you see that?"

"I know Ruth-Ann" Grace said slamming the door shut as she got out of the truck, "that's why I'm trying to find Carl, do you know where he is?" Ruth-Ann just shook her head, never once taking her eyes off of the school. "Do me a favor if you see him tell I'm looking for him, I'm heading around back." Grace left Ruth-Ann looking up at the school trying to remember why she was there and when she did it was too late, Grace was already gone.

Grace found Carl sitting back behind the school his head up against the wall. She saw the glint of a whiskey bottle caught in the sun dangling between his legs. "I knew you'd come Sheriff", he yelled across the schoolyard.

"Don't call me Sheriff, Carl,"

"You know why Indians do things? Indians don't do something because they have to, or because they want to. They do it because they are Indians; good, bad, or indifferent. You're more Indian than you know Grace."

She moved closer letting his words find their meaning, watching his eyes as she closed the distance between them. She asked if everything was okay and before Carl could answer she knew it wasn't. What she thought was a whiskey bottle was now clearly a nine-millimeter pistol dangling be-

tween Carl's legs. "What are you doing with a gun Carl, you don't need a gun?"

"Both my children went to this school and never in a day in their life were they ridiculed or mistreated for who they were, at least not to their faces or that they could tell. That is the Indian way to accept our differences and to embrace them, as we are all one people..."

"Carl why don't you just put that gun right there on the ground, just let it slip from your fingers."

"Maybe I should have stayed on the reservation, let my son grow up to be a no gooder, hanging around with the lazy asses all day drinking and chasing ponies. Then he wouldn't want to become a marine, fight for his country. He might still be alive."

"Carl, PUT...THE...GUN...DOWN!" Grace moved deliberately, like a mother trying not to wake a sleeping baby, her hand slowly reaching for her gun.

"I was so proud that day he came home and told me he wanted to be a marine, my son the warrior. I used every penny I had, and then some, going to see him graduate boot camp. Your husband John, he was part of that and then some, him and a few other people from town. Just so me and Sally could see our son. What a day!"

"Carl, what happened to William is terrible. I know it's tearing you apart inside. No parent should have to go through that. We have to talk about this Carl, Sally is waiting for you, today is not the day for this."

"Today is as good as any day." Carl raised the gun. Grace drew hers and aimed, "No Carl don't," she screamed. Carl fired. Grace fired back. The bullet from his gun went nowhere near her; she heard the crack of tree splintering about ten feet to her right. She saw a cloud of red dust fly into the air as her bullet found the red brick wall just the left of Carl. Without even thinking she ran towards him.

It was well past midnight as Grace pulled off Badwater road and made the quarter mile run up to the house. Darkness had all but blanketed the Tetons, and she could barely

make their outline if it weren't for the stars edging them against the night sky. She had spent the past six hours with Carl and Sally in the emergency room at Sky Country Memorial hospital in Danville. She had broken Carl's hand in three places. Her shot ricocheting off the wall afforded her just enough time to get to Carl and kick the gun out of his hand; it was more of a reflex than a voluntary motion from her rugby days. The doctors said he was going to need surgery, but that they could hold off for a few days until after the funeral. Denis was with them now at the hospital.

The lights were still on at the house. She didn't know if John's father left them on for her or just forgot. She could use a drink and not just coffee. It was the first time anyone had ever pointed a gun at her like that let alone shoot at her.

When she opened the door she found him sitting there, right where she left him. Only now he was wearing a white tee shirt, what he usually wore when he went to bed. "I poured you a cup of coffee," he said, pointing to it as she sat down at the table. Grace picked it up knowing it wasn't what she wanted but was what she needed. "If that was anyone else out there he would be dead right now. It had to be you Grace. Some State Police or U.S. Marshall would have shot him dead. That's why you're the sheriff. Why even the Tribal Police would have killed him".

Grace took a swig of the coffee and let the bittersweet blackness flow down along with the words she was hearing and smiled, "What makes you think I wasn't trying to?"

Home

by Michelle Ordway

I wake to her standing over me. Her beady, sunken eyes peering out of her distorted face; she is almost unrecognizable now, but I know it's her. The hair on the back of my neck stands up. She knows the effect she has on me when she does this, but I think she secretly enjoys it. No matter how loud I scream, she doesn't flinch. She just stands there staring at me. I avoid making eye contact, but she waits. My breath becomes short and my chest rises and falls rapidly. I know what she wants. I draw in a long breath of air, and lock my eyes into hers. She squints just enough for me to notice. Then, when she's satisfied, she slowly turns and backs away. That's when she shows it to me, something I could describe with my eyes closed. She lifts up her hand and displays a shiny silver pistol. "Do you have to carry that everywhere?" I ask. The right side of her cheek lifts a little, but she says nothing.

She moved into my neighborhood during the third grade. Her family had purchased the biggest house on the block, and it took four moving vans to transport all of their belongings. She sat on her new porch with her parents, wearing a bright yellow dress, sipping on an ice cold Shirley Temple. It wasn't until she was assigned the seat next to me in class that we became friends. There wasn't a day that passed when we didn't play together: we rode bikes, we played hopscotch, and we had our own secret handshake to our own secret club. We were best friends.

She ruined our friendship in the fifth grade when she came to school with a blackened eye and a deep cut across her cheek. Everyone tried to find out what had happened to her, but she offered no explanation; they had no choice but to provide their own. A drunken father and rape were the two most popular. She no longer wore the bright frilly dresses she

normally did, but instead covered herself in jeans and oversized sweatshirts. She stopped talking to everyone at school, including me. She would lock herself in the bathroom during recess, and she wouldn't talk to me during class. I would ride my bike to her house every day after school wanting to play, but her father would send me away. After only a few weeks, I stopped trying. She faded into the school walls faster than her cheek could heal.

Her solitude lasted throughout high school, except for the time she thought she had a boyfriend during sophomore year. He was a transfer student from another school who made the mistake of picking up her dropped textbook in the hallway. She showed up the next day in a big pink dress and bright cherry lip gloss painted on her lips. She looked happy, the way she always did when we were kids. Before the first bell rang, she hunted him down and handed him a five page love letter. His friends copied it and plastered it all over the campus. By lunchtime, everyone had read it. It was no surprise to me when she left school early that day, and returned the next in her sweatshirt and jeans. She would learn that her words would haunt her for the rest of her high school years.

She didn't cross my mind again until the day of the Homecoming dance my senior year. I was painting a new polish on my friend Rosa's nails when my mother returned home from the grocery store.

"You'll never believe who I ran into," she said. "The mother of that girl you used to play with all the time. I can never remember their name though." She searched the kitchen ceiling for a last name.

"That's nice," I said.

"Well, anyway, she said their car is in the shop, and she doesn't have a way to get her daughter to the dance tonight. I told her you would give her a ride."

"What? No way! This is my senior year and I don't want to be seen with her!" I bulged out my eyes towards Rosa, who did the same in response.

"I promised you'd give her a ride and that's final."

"Why can't they use all their money and buy her a car of her own?" I asked.

"You either give that nice girl a ride or you don't go to the dance." She put away the last of the groceries and flashed me one of her cold smiles before walking away.

After Rosa left, my mother stood in the doorway of my bedroom holding the car keys. "Are you going to give her a ride, or should I order us a movie on pay-per-view?"

I hated when she talked to me this way; she acted as if I was still a child, and she could still tell me what to do. If I hadn't spent so much time getting ready, I would have gladly skipped the dance in order to avoid doing what she said. "Fine, I'll take her." I grabbed the keys from her hand and stormed out of the house without saying goodbye.

I stopped the car just long enough for her to jump in. "Thanks for picking me up," she said.

"Yeah."

She was wearing the same pink dress she wore the day she brought that letter to school, but this time she didn't look as happy. Neither of us spoke another word.

I pulled over a block away from school. "I have to be home by one, so meet me here at midnight." I looked over both of my shoulders and into the rearview mirror to make sure no one saw her getting out of my car. "I hope you understand."

"Thanks again for the ride." She climbed out and slammed the door. I thought I heard her mumble something, but I didn't care to find out.

My friends and I were only at the dance long enough to take pictures so that we could prove we were there if our parents ever questioned us. We all snuck out of the gym and took shelter under the bleachers at the football field. We usually just smoked our cigarettes and complained about our parents, but that night was different. The quarterback managed to swipe a bottle of whiskey from his father's liquor cabinet. We burned our throats and blew smoke out of our mouths until we heard "Take My Breath Away" blaring through the gymnasium speakers. This was always played as

the last song at every dance. We buried our cigarette butts in the dirt and finished off the whiskey. We tried hiding our indiscretions by chewing cinnamon gum and spraying ourselves down with body spray and cologne. We said our goodbyes and headed to our cars.

"Are you ok?" she asked on the way home. "We're going a little fast and you're swerving."

I smiled at her. I pressed down on the gas pedal, and the needle jumped on my speedometer. The engine roared and I zigzagged through the cars on the freeway. Her grip on the door handle tightened.

"I think we should slow down," she said. I heard my mother in her voice. She was too young to be so uptight.

"Have a little fun!" I said. I reached over and unbuckled her seatbelt. "Stick your head out the sunroof. Let yourself go!" I could only laugh as she struggled to buckle herself back in. Her face turned pale, as if she had just seen a ghost. "Stop being so-"

I would have been able to avoid hitting the disabled car, had I not been so interested in watching her panic. I swerved, but still clipped the side of the bumper, and sent my car soaring over the edge of the freeway. Everything went black.

I woke up in a hospital bed. I had been knocked unconscious, and was lucky enough to escape with only a broken arm. I tried asking about her condition, but no one would give me an answer; the more they ignored my questions, the more I was convinced something tragic had happened, for which I was responsible. I didn't find out until my mother came to visit the next morning.

"She hasn't woken up yet, dear."

"Wha?" I struggled to sit up. "And where have you been?" I asked.

"Shh! You need to rest." She was about to say something else, but there was a knock at the door, and two policemen walked in.

"We just have a few questions to ask, ma'am."

I answered their questions as best I could, lying about speeding and being under the influence. Once they believed this was only an accident, I was convinced I was off the hook. The doctors released me and I walked out wearing a yellow cast on my arm. I was able to pretend like nothing had ever happened, and I returned to my normal life the following Monday. I never told my friends about that night, and my mother never brought it up.

She wasn't so lucky.

She woke up from her coma two months later. She had severe nerve damage and was paralyzed from the waist down. The school agreed to make every change possible to accommodate her wheelchair, but she would have to repeat her senior year because of the number of days she had missed. Her parents never questioned the school's decision to hold their daughter back another year, but she couldn't accept it.

On the day that should've been her graduation day, she was found in her bedroom, wearing her cap and gown, with a single gunshot wound to the head. The gun was still dangling from her fingers when her mother found her.

I didn't attend her funeral because I was embarrassed and because I was mad at her. After her suicide, the news of the accident spread, and everyone started to harass me. I received threatening phone calls, and a news crew was constantly parked outside my window. She had done this to herself, yet everyone was pointing the finger at me. I'm not the one who pulled the trigger. I had no choice but to cut off all communication with everyone, except my mother. I decided to move away to college two months early with the idea that a new city would provide a fresh start. I was wrong.

The first few weeks were great, but then I started catching glimpses of her in my classes and in the hallways. I was sure I was losing my mind and I tried ignoring it, but she began appearing more frequently. Every time I saw her, she was more and more deteriorated. Within weeks, I was seeing her everywhere. This was when I started waking up to her. I became afraid of falling asleep because I was scared I would wake up

to her face in mine. As a result, I wasn't getting enough sleep at night and I was constantly nodding off during class. I ended up failing all of my classes and, after just one semester, I knew it was time to return home.

That was about five years ago. I still live with my mother now, but nothing has changed. I still see her: I see her every morning when I wake up, I see her in the reflection of my bathroom mirrors, and I see her when I drive my car. She follows me everywhere. No matter what I do or where I go, she is there, reminding me of my past mistakes. I cannot escape her and I fear she will be with me forever. I just can't live with this guilt anymore. I feel I have no choice but to resort to something I never thought I'd do.

I lift the gun up to my temple, but before I can pull the trigger, I see her. She looks even worse than she did this morning. Her dress is in ruins and her face is distorted in an unrecognizable mess. I couldn't even make out the features of her face. I've lived with her all this time, and it's never been this bad. I realize that I owe her something; I have to take her to the place I failed to take her years ago – home. I lower the gun and slip it into my purse. I grab my keys and walk to my car. With my purse tucked safely beside me, I start the car and drive away. I don't even have to look to know that she's in the passenger side seat staring at me while buckling and unbuckling her seatbelt.

I drive through the gates of the large wrought iron fence and pull up to the attendant at the booth. "Name?" the lady asks, still looking at her clipboard.

"I'm here for Jennifer McCauley."

The lady punches the name into her keyboard. She hands me a map with a highlighted trail.

I follow the map to the area that the lady marked with an X. I take out the bouquet of carnations I picked from my mother's garden, before shutting the door. The freshly watered lawn squishes under my feet. I search the ground anx-

iously until I see it. A red marbled, freshly polished marker that reads:

JENNIFER McCAULEY
1985-2003

Seeing her name in stone makes me think back to when we were friends, and, for the first time, I cry over her. I think about the time when we were little and did everything together. I remember how happy I was with her around. She showed real affection towards me in a way that my mother never could. I place the carnations next to her grave, and tears stream down my face faster than I can wipe them away. I kneel down in the wet grass and place my hand on her headstone. My body falls weak and I sob uncontrollably. "I'm sorry." Almost a half hour later, I walk to my car, still wiping my eyes. I start the engine, but let it sit in park while I gather myself. I turn to the passenger's seat, but she isn't there. I look into the rearview mirror. She's standing at her grave with a face as perfect as an angel and wearing a beautiful pink dress. She smiles at me, and I smile at her. I reach my hand out of the window and wave goodbye. Then she is gone. I drive through the iron gates and turn west toward the highway, toward home.

Hygiene

by Rachel Inlan

Lola impatiently watched the clock; could the day go by any slower? It was a Friday and everyone at work was going out to the Red Onion. This time she had been invited to join. She hadn't asked her mother to watch Frank because she knew what the answer would be if she asked early in the week. Lola was taking a gamble. Tia Berta usually came over for dinner on Fridays; if she asked when she was there her mother would probably agree to watch him. For some reason she seemed to acquiesce if there was an audience, especially if that audience included Tia. If Lola asked when they were alone the blame game rhetoric would launch: If only Lola hadn't gotten pregnant so young! If she had waited for someone good that would have been a father to Frank and a provider for them both. Did Lola know how much it cost to feed that kid all week long? She should be on a cruise and enjoying life, not watching a kid for her kid – she had raised her children!

Lola sighed, returned to the present, and called the next patient. Cleaning teeth wasn't the best job, but it paid the bills. While she waited for Mr. Clark to walk up, Jackie, the receptionist, asked her if she was going out with everyone that night. Lola shrugged her shoulders and said she didn't know, she hadn't lined up a babysitter yet. Jackie smiled and mentioned that Dr. Cranston had asked earlier if Lola was going. Lola tried to not show a reaction, small clinics and offices loved gossip about people like her who think they might improve their station by marrying. She hadn't invested much energy into developing work relationships into personal friendships. Her lunch hours were spent running errands, calling Mama to check up on Frank or taking a nap in her car to try to catch up on the sleep that she never seemed to be able to have enough of. Besides, she didn't have the

money to go to lunch and preferred for people like Jackie to know less about her, not more. She was relieved when Mr. Clark made his way to the doorway where she was standing, providing her an escape from Jackie, who watched Lola leave with the eye of a cat that had narrowly lost a sparrow from its clawed grip.

Dr. Cranston was the new dentist. He was young and fresh out of college. He played ice hockey in Los Angeles, which fascinated Lola who had never seen snow, let alone an ice rink. He read poetry and literature, authors she had never heard of before, on his lunch break. They had had passing conversation, which at times made her think that he was flirting with her. Recently he complimented her hair and the dental scrubs she was wearing. Since then, she had taken more care than usual with her hair and makeup when she knew he would be working with her.

She wondered if he was interested in her. Then again, why ask if she was going to be there if he wasn't? She wondered if he knew about Frank. She shook it off as she told Mr. Clark that they were going to start and asked if he was comfortable. It was the one thing she liked about her job, when she worked on someone she didn't think about anything other than the task at hand.

Finally the clock said 5pm. Lola rushed to punch her time-card and get to her car. She was expected at her mother's house by 5:20. One day her mother had picked her up and timed how long it took to return to her home. It was a fifteen minute trip; her mother gave her an extra five minutes "in case there's un choke." It wasn't worth being late, so Lola was always on time. She drove with the bar and Dr. Cranston on her mind. She began to fantasize about him. Her imagination took her to dinners in restaurants that she had read about in the food section of the paper with real table cloths and menus that weren't laminated. She thought of ice rinks, skating and hot chocolate. Maybe Frank could play ice hockey. She wondered if Dr. Cranston's curly brown hair was as soft as it looked.

Before she knew it she was at her mother's house where Frank was looking out the window waiting for her. By the time she parked the car and got out he was running to her yelling, "Mama! Mama! Guess what happened today?"

She knelt down, hugged him hard and said "Did you try to be a good boy?"

He hugged her in return, his thin brown arms didn't encircle her body, and she felt his hands grasp the back of her arms. Frank was confident in his reply, "Yes!"

Then she pulled away and stared at him and asked "Were you a good boy?"

He looked away, his shoulders slumped and he said "No, but I tried. I really did try."

Lola stood up and said "Well, I hope it wasn't too bad. I was hoping to go out tonight and Nana may not watch you if you were really naughty."

Frank's shoulders seemed to completely disappear under his favorite Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle t-shirt with the information that his mother wanted to go out. This was news for him. Weren't they going to rent a video, get Little Caesars' five dollar pizza and spend the night watching cartoons and gorging on pep-pepper-oni? He loved pizza parties with his mom, they had one every Friday night. It was their routine.

"What do you mean you're going out? I thought we were going to have a pizza party! I wanted..." his sentence trailed off as he realized his mother's attention had switched from him to going inside and dealing with Nana.

They walked in and Lola said a prayer to St. Lucy for the lost cause she was facing. When she saw her Tia Berta sitting at the kitchen table she was relieved. Finally something was going her way. Her mother was standing at the stove frying chile soaked tortillas for enchiladas. Lola walked over to kiss her hello, even in the hot kitchen her mother's cheek was cool.

"Hi Mama, how are you?"

Lola's mother shrugged, "The same, Aqui no mas."

"Hi Tia, it's good to see you." As Lola walked over to Tia, she stood up, they embraced and kissed each other on the cheek.

"You look so good Lola! Mire su cara, estas Hermosa, que bella." Tia regarded Lola with the eye of an old woman who appreciated youth without the envy of lost opportunities. Lola loved Tia. When she was with her she felt good about herself.

She was Mama's aunt who knew everything, which was good and bad for everyone in the family. Since she had never had children, those of her brothers and sisters were hers. Tia was at alternate homes every day of the week. Mama was Tia's favorite of them all, and she was never shy about declaring it to anyone. So, some of her "children" saw her every other week, some once a month, but Elsie was visited at least once a week – usually on Friday.

From the stove Mama began the run-down of the day, "Dolores! That Frank! I tried to go to Target today and do you know he had a fit when I told him I wasn't going to buy him a toy. You have got to stop spoiling him! He's terrible! He's three and a half, not a baby anymore. That kid embarrassed me in front of todo el mundo. When I got him to the car I pinched his leg and told him if he was going to cry I was gonna give him a reason to! Dios Mio, kids these days – you would've never done that when you were little."

Lola looked at her and thought of the time that she had ran in a circle in her Grandmother's house screaming at the top of her lungs when she was four. The interior of the house was built so that she was able to run around and around. From the front room she ran down the long skylighted hallway, through Abuela's bedroom, then the bathroom, into the kitchen, out the breakfast nook and back into the front room, where she began again. After Lola's fifth cycle, her grandmother shut one of the doors and stood in front of it. She asked her what she was yelling about? Was she okay or loca?

Lola said "I just wanted some attention."

Hours later, when Mama came home from work to pick her up, she was told what Lola had done. Right there, in front of everyone, she pulled Lola's pants down and spanked her with her shoe.

She yelled, "You wanted attention, you're getting it now!"

When she was done, she turned Lola around, grabbed her shoulders and asked her "Do you want more attention? I can give you more! I'm not tired yet!" Her mother's lip shook when she spoke and Lola felt her anger course through her fingers into her body. She didn't remember what happened next, but she never ran that circle again.

Lola reflected on the past and said, "No, you're right, I wouldn't have done that." She thought about Frank and knew how he must have felt. She came to his defense and said "But he doesn't do that with me, if I explain what is going to happen ahead of time, before we go into the store..." Her mother glanced at her from the corner of her eye and Lola could see that the conversation was leading into an argument, so she changed the subject. For a minute Lola considered not asking her to watch Frank, but then she thought of Dr. Cranston and suppressed the feeling.

"Mama, at work today I was invited to go out with some friends. It's been so long since I've been out, I can't remember when it was. I was wondering if you would mind watching Frank and I'll come for him before I go home tonight or tomorrow first thing. Please..." Lola couldn't help the whining quality that had crept into her voice.

Mama looked at her with disgust.

"I have been watching this little boy all day long, and now you're asking me to watch him tonight too? Do I ever get a day off? I'm old! I never left you when you were little. I worked, I came home to my children, and that was my life." Her rant had just started when she realized she had an audience.

Tia was sitting at the table drinking a cup of coffee and watching it all. When Mama stopped Tia said, "Elsie, she's young... She should go out! We're young for such a short

time and then we are old until we die. I'll be here until 9, I can help you watch Francisco."

Mama looked over at Berta and thought 'Big words for you to say! Who do you watch besides your novio on your favorite novela!'

"Okay. I'll watch him tonight, but I'm putting it on the calendar, so don't ask me again! This time I am marking it. Don't come for him tonight because he might get sick and I don't want to watch a sick kid, but you'd better be here in the morning by 8. Don't stay out too late or you won't get up!"

Lola was elated. She smiled because she had gotten her way. She said "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you Mama! I won't ask again for a while – the last time I went out without Frank was after Tio's wedding and that was last year. Well, I've got to get going, if I'm going to get ready. I want to get there on time because they might decide to do the bar-hopping thing." Lola didn't mention Dr. Cranston. She knew that it would invite an uncomfortable interrogation that Tia's presence would not divert. Questions about his ethnicity, race, does he know about Frank? Lola just wanted to live in a moment that was optimistic and didn't include anything less than all of her forgotten hopes of what a future could include: love, marriage, a home...stability.

She started for the front door and saw Frank standing to the side of it. His head was turned away and he had started crying. She looked at him and saw the obstacle to the good time that she had looked forward to all week, let alone the new development of Dr. Cranston. Suddenly anger and frustration welled up inside Lola and fell onto Frank like a tidal wave. At twenty-two her whole life was about Frank. All her money, all her time, all her everything was driven by him and his needs.

She grabbed him by the arm and snapped "What are you crying for?"

Frank looked at her with tired eyes and said "I wanted the pizza party tonight, I'm tired - I want to go home".

"I spend every single day with you! I never go out and have fun!"

Frank cringed at her words and tried to turn away. As quickly as Lola's anger had come, guilt extinguished it. It was bitter in her mouth, she thought of the time she had hit her dog with a stick because it wouldn't leave her alone. The dog ran around the yard limping for the rest of the day, and afterwards wouldn't come to her if she had anything in her hand. She had been eight, but when she thought of it the shame was as fresh as if it were yesterday.

Lola knelt down and told him "Well, we can do it tomorrow night, okay? We'll rent two videos, and you get to choose both. Frank, I never go out with my friends." Frank knew that she wasn't going to change her mind, so he turned and stiffly walked away.

Lola walked out the door and tried to brush the guilt off like a pesky fly that had been buzzing around her picnic. By the time she got to her car she was back to thinking about going out, having fun and the new possibility of David Cranston. She turned on the radio, imagined dancing and sharing a drink with David.

Janet Jackson came on and sang, "You caught my eye, Thought you'd want to hang for a while, well, I'd like to be with you, and you know it's Friday too."

The rest of the way home she sang while thinking about what she was going to wear, whether to put her hair up or down and what the evening might have in store.

She arrived to the small studio that she shared with Frank. The bed she and Frank shared also did double duty as their couch; it dominated the room. Everything she owned was second-hand and worn. It was neat, but its mean state left her wishing that she had sought out the child support her pride had prevented her from pursuing. She thought forward to a time when she might bring David to this place, she was ashamed of her circumstance. Her embarrassment over an imagined situation dampened the mood, so she employed the technique that had saved her life; she redirected and decided

to think about tonight, and only tonight.

The boring dental scrubs came off and she jumped in the shower. She used the scented shower gel that was for special occasions and smoothed lotion over her body. The pretty bra and panty set came out that hadn't been worn for at least a year. No less than three outfits were tried on and rejected before she settled on something that was tight and sexy, but not slutty. It's a fine line that is walked in the determination of what to wear to attract someone for the long term. In Lola's mind, David was the long game. When she was doing her hair she realized that he had never seen it down, so she curled it lightly. It hung to the middle of her back and had the luster of fresh chestnuts before they are roasted and peeled. On her way out, she looked in the mirror and was satisfied with what she saw. Frank was the last thing on her mind when she slipped her key into the deadbolt and locked the door. She walked to her car, started it and drove away thinking about David.

At a red light, the low fuel gauge came on before Lola even got to the freeway. She had to stop and put gas in her car, or it wouldn't make it to where everyone was meeting up. Lola pulled into a gas station that gave a cash discount. Money was tight and going out tonight was an unexpected expense. The cashier didn't look up when she came to the window to pay, she asked for twenty regular. When she put the nozzle into the gas tank she noticed Frank's booster in the back seat and regretted not taking it out at the apartment. If David walked her to the car she didn't want to have a conversation about Frank before she was ready for it. While the gas was pumping, she opened the door so the seat could be moved to the trunk. Frank's favorite Ninja Turtle figure, Michelangelo, was lying next to it. Lola thought about him at Target with her mother and felt sick. As she put the seat in the trunk, she thought about what he might be doing, most likely watching one of her mother's movies. Mama didn't like to watch anything unless it was black and white. If it was in color, it was "new" and she wouldn't put it on.

Lola sighed under the weight of what she wanted to do, what she thought she should do and the guilt that was generated in between. Once, Mama had said she left Frank the way someone leaves their dog at a kennel. Lola closed the trunk, thought to herself, 'it's only one night' and resolved to continue to the bar. When she got into the car, she realized that she had forgotten to put the figure in the trunk. She picked it up from the seat, put it in the glove box, started her car and continued on.

When Lola arrived at the bar, most of her co-workers were already there; she walked over to the booth where they had congregated and sat down next to Jackie. She hadn't developed close relationships over the last year that she had worked at the clinic, so she was unsure how Friday nights at the Red Onion worked. She knew Jackie the best, which wasn't much at all, so she went where she was comfortable.

The waitress came around to ask what she wanted to order, Lola was stumped until she remembered an article in Cosmo that listed the most popular drinks for that year.

"I'll have a fuzzy navel."

She turned to Jackie and asked what time she had gotten there.

"I've been here for almost an hour. Where have you been? You look so good! Who knew what was under those scrubs? Dr. Cranston was here and asked for you." Jackie smiled and took a drink from her glass.

Lola's chest contracted, "Really? I had to go to my mother's, then go home and get ready. Then I was almost out of gas and had to stop." She was glad that she had decided to come out. Frank would get over it; she could make it up to him tomorrow.

Jackie nodded, "Well, he is somewhere around here – maybe he's at the bar. He'll turn up, he usually does."

The receptionists and the hygienists sat and talked about the various people that had been in the office the last week. They gossiped about patients – their poor brushing technique, lack of flossing and the overall disgust for the nature

of the job they did. They laughed about the family with poor enamel and how much they had spent on fillings, crowns and implants. It was a small fortune that could have paid for one of them to go to dental school, then they could have gotten the services for free. After all, they were always at the dentist's office anyway.

Lola listened, but didn't participate. She thought of how she hadn't even known what dental floss was until she went to dental hygiene school. Her mother had used thread when something was caught in her teeth and taught Lola to do the same. She felt sorry for that family when they came in, but she didn't want to be the person that stopped the fun for everyone else, so she just listened, smiled and nodded her head.

Looking around the room, she finally saw David; he was standing at a table where some of the others from the office had gathered. Marisol was there, smiling up at him and touching her hair every so often. He seemed to be talking to her politely and looking around at the same time. His gaze finally landed on Lola and he smiled at her. Her heart felt as though it was going to crash through her chest and land on the table for all the women to gasp at and talk about. She smiled slightly, looked away and took a drink of her peachy fuzzy navel, which reminded her of the peach rings that she bought for Frank at the Chinese store.

With a drink in his hand, David walked over to the table and said "Hello ladies...out for a night of fun? Everyone has a drink, right?"

The girls at the table giggled and smiled.

He looked around the table and landed on Lola, "Hey, you haven't been out before, have you?"

Lola smiled, "No, this is the first time. I started at the clinic a little less than a year ago, it's taken me a while to come up to speed."

David said, "Well, it looks like all the mamasitas are out tonight. We'll have to have tequila to celebrate!" He smiled broadly and said mamasitas and tequila with a forced Spanish accent that revealed his Midwestern roots. Lola thought that

he must have already had a drink, maybe two to speak that way, she overlooked it.

Lola looked over to the dance floor that had started to fill with people dancing in celebration of the coming weekend and the freedom that it brought. The disco ball reflected the colors of the rainbow on the dancers, it reminded her of Frank's night light that he fell asleep to every night. It glowed shooting stars, moons and spacemen onto the ceiling. She had made up a story to go with all the images for him. Now he could repeat the stories back to her with precision and improvements. She wondered if she had made the right decision to come out tonight.

"Can't help myself, you make me feel so good, I got to, got to, tell you darlin', ooh baby, I think I love you from head to toe" sang Lisa Lisa.

Lola loved that song; on weekend afternoons, when it came on the radio, she danced with Frank. Whatever she was doing, she stopped, went to him and they swayed to the music together holding hands. He would smile at her, they laughed and the dance always ended with them kissing.

David was standing over her, "You wanna dance, Lola? Or should I say, Lolita?"

Lola looked up, she hated that reference. He was smiling down at her, he really was handsome. He had hazel eyes that seemed in constant flux, she had noticed at work when he was intent on a patient and completely focused they glowed amber with emerald chips encased within. He stared at her with those eyes now.

She nodded, and they went to the dance floor where they became lost in the crush of bodies moving in collective rhythm. They danced close, his hand on her waist. Their faces so close, their cheeks brushed from time to time. Lola hadn't been this close to a man since the last time she had seen Frank's father. Her body was electrified with every touch and accidental brush that was made. She didn't want to stop.

AC/DC came on, and it was over. They awkwardly stood on the dance floor while everyone else surrendered it to the

rockers who had become wearied of disco, and wanted equal time to bang their head.

David asked if she wanted to sit at the bar, get a drink and chat for a few minutes before going back to the group. Lola nodded and followed him. At the bar, she learned that he had graduated from USC dental school at 26 and was looking to start his own practice by 30. She was impressed and he knew it. He put his arm around her shoulders and said that he was glad that she had made it, he had hoped to see her outside the office, but the opportunity had never presented itself. Her hands tingled with nervousness at the prospect that seemed to be coming to fruition. She didn't know what to say, she didn't want to ruin the moment by saying something ridiculous or stupid, so she smiled into his focused eyes.

"Did you have dinner before you came?" he asked. "If not, I know this great Southern Italian place that is fantastic. We might have to wait, but they make their own pasta..."

Lola didn't know the difference between Northern and Southern Italian food; her exposure had been limited to Nino's Pizzeria on Century Blvd that had lasagna on the weekend. She knew this place would be like the ones she had read about, wondered about.

"No, I didn't get a chance to eat. Jackie mentioned something about Tommy's afterwards. But, I do love Italian food. Why not? Let's go. Should I follow you in my car?"

He shook his head, "Nah, leave your car, we can come back for it. The parking is tight in the area where this place is at." He raised his hand to call over the cocktail waitress to close out his tab.

"I'm going to go to the bathroom before we leave, I'll be right back"

He nodded and she walked over to the bathroom on light feet.

When Lola walked in she saw Marisol standing in front of the common mirror. She looked over at Lola, smirked and walked out. At work Marisol had never exchanged pleasantries with Lola, who was usually too busy worrying about

Frank getting in trouble with Mama to notice. However, tonight Lola wondered why Marisol had looked at her with contempt. Brushing it aside, while waiting for a stall, Lola freshened up her lip gloss and figured it was jealousy because she must have seen her at the bar with David. Soon enough there was a flush and Jackie emerged.

“Hola Guapa! Where did you go to with Dr. Cranston?”

“We danced...then we got a drink at the bar. He knows an Italian place, so we are going to get something to eat” Lola told her. Immediately she regretted telling Jackie they were going to leave together. She liked Jackie, but she didn’t really know her and suspected that she was the office gossip. The last thing Lola needed was gossip complications at her job.

Jackie chuckled as she looked through her purse for her powder. “So, he is doing his usual routine.” Compact opened Jackie began to smooth the powder that had crept into the crevices on the side of her mouth.

“What do you mean, routine?”

Compact snapped closed. “Oh, that Dr. Cranston. He’s made the rounds with all the hygienists. Last week it was Marisol, didn’t you see her hanging around him earlier? This week it’s you.” Jackie looked at Lola with the satisfaction of throwing a water balloon and hitting someone in the face.

“Marisol says that he is really good, if you know what I mean”

Marisol? Marisol? Lola mentally shook her head to clear it. Marisol, the lazy fat ass with felted teeth who had just walked out three minutes ago? She had always wondered how anyone would let Marisol clean their teeth when hers looked sticky. The first wave of realization hit her as she recalled how Marisol looked at him; it was similar to how she had looked at him at the bar. The image of Marisol and Dr. Cranston disgusted her – yet, it had been her long game five minutes prior.

Then the second wave hit her. What a fool she had been to think that he could have wanted something meaningful with her. She stood there paralyzed and humiliated. Her

feet felt as though they were cemented to the tile with the stained grout. She looked at the sticky stall doors that looked like they hadn’t been cleaned in months. Beside her were women primping in the mirror, desperately borrowing make-up from strangers to repair imagined damage to their painted faces in the hope that they would find a man, chatting about who had just bought them a drink. In sixty seconds the evening ran through her mind like a video, eventually it rested on Frank.

“...she said that he really likes...” Jackie continued on when Lola interrupted her,

“What time is it?”

“It’s almost eight-thirty. You’ll let me know Monday how it went with Dr. Cranston, right?”

Lola thought about Frank. She knew what he was doing. He was sitting in a darkened room watching *Ninotchka*, *Now Voyager*, or some equally depressing movie from the ‘40s.

She looked at Jackie, shook her head and said, “Actually, this mamasita needs to go home. Right now.”

“What? You’re not going to dinner with Dr. Cranston?”

Jackie was confused. There wasn’t one that hadn’t gone with him. Jackie had hoped to dish out the chisma to her all day, but hadn’t had the opportunity because Lola didn’t chit-chat at work.

“I’ll see you Monday morning, have fun.”

Lola walked from the bathroom, out of the bar, and to her car. She didn’t bother to look for Dr. Cranston; she didn’t want, or need to. Everything that she needed to know about him had been revealed to her earlier in the evening, but she had chosen to ignore it and believe something other than the truth that lay before her. She had excused the blithe racially tinted comments, overlooked the nuanced sexual innuendo and fed into a fantasy that was based in her desire to find an escape from her reality. She wanted a place to rest. The cracked leather seats in her car were cold and scratched her legs, her forehead rested against the icy steering wheel as she thought about her next move.

She figured that she could get to her mother's in half-hour; there was time to make a correction. The car started up, she pulled out and began the drive back. While driving she thought of her frustration with Frank and her mother's frustration with her. She was unsure of how to correct all of it, but she knew she had a chance to make tonight right with Frank.

When she pulled up to her mother's house for the second time that evening the windows were darkened. Around the curtains was a muted glow indicating that the television was on, even though the house looked asleep. Someone was up and watching T.V. Lola took the spare key from under the pot with the aloe vera growing in it and opened the door. She stood in the doorway of the front room and saw her mother in the recliner, mouth slack, lightly snoring. Frank was sitting on the couch watching "The Enchanted Cottage" in his Ninja Turtle pajamas holding onto a sweater she had forgotten earlier. He looked over and saw her in the half light.

She smiled at him and said, "I came back for you. I can go out with my friends another time. Do you still want to have that pizza party?" Lola turned on a lamp that stood in the corner which softly lit the room.

Frank ran over to his backpack, picked it up and put it on. Then he ran to where his grandmother lay sleeping and shook her saying "Nana! Nana! Wake up! My mama came back for me. I'm going home for a pizza party."

Mama was groggy from being awakened "Huh? Wha mijo?" Then she noticed Lola and completely woke up. "Why are you back? I thought you were going out."

Lola said "Yeah, I went out, but decided that I'd have a better time with Frank than those guys." She looked over at him standing there in his pajamas, barefoot, backpack on, smiling as though she had never left him; he had been waiting for her. A rush of undiluted gratitude swept away the earlier frustration and guilt, leaving in its wake love that cut Lola to her core and left her weak at the knowledge of how close she had come to discarding something so precious, if

lost, there could never be a replacement. Coupled with that gratitude was the realization that the good time she had been wanting all along was right here, and this little man was who she had been thinking about all day.

I and I, and Notebook in My Drawer

by Nana Okuyama

It was the beginning of the summer when this story began.

When I came back from school, I found a red notebook in a drawer in my desk. It wasn't my notebook, and I had never bought or seen such a deep red notebook.

"Maybe it's Yuzuki's." I thought. I went to my little sister's room and asked her if it was hers, but she denied it and told me she'd never bought a red notebook and even if she had bought it, she had no reason to put in my drawer.

She was right. I went back to my room with a puzzled expression. I wondered why a notebook that no one knew about was in my drawer. I flipped the front cover of the notebook for no reason, and found something was written there.

"Is this connected?"

"What's this? Connected with what?" I asked myself, but no answer came. I gazed at the message a while wondering who wrote it. Then I took out a pen from my backpack and wrote, "It's connected" on the notebook. "Huh, what am I doing?" I smiled wryly and put the notebook back to the drawer. I picked up a book from a bookshelf and started reading, as I lost interest in the strong notebook and message.

Thirty minutes later, I heard a strange sound come from my drawer and woke up. It seemed I dozed off over the book. I walked up to the drawer and opened it. My heart thumped with surprise when I found out what happened.

The notebook disappeared.

"Why?! It was here. I put it here!" I cried. I closed the drawer and opened the others in a flurry. I also looked around the desk, but I couldn't find it. I sat down on the bed in utter amazement, and then...

Rap.

I heard the sound again. This time, I dashed to the drawer and opened it.

The notebook was there.

I flipped the front cover without thinking and found a new message.

"Good. Your name is Yuzuha Kagurazaka. Isn't it?"

As I read the message, I was surprised. Yuzuha Kagurazaka was certainly my name, and it was not so common in Japan. I don't know how this notebook works, but since my name was there, the one who wrote the message should know me. I took a pen again and wrote a message. "Yes, it is. But who are you?" I put the notebook in the drawer and waited.

Then the rapping sound came twice.

Rap. Rap.

As I heard the second sound, I took out the notebook and read the new message.

"I am Yuzuha Kagurazaka also, but I am Yuzuha in a different world from yours."

"What do you mean by the different world?" As I read the message, I wrote a question and sent the notebook back.

Rap.

This time, it came back with a long answer. I see. I didn't know if he was I in the different world or not, but the handwriting was just the same as mine. I forced myself to smile and then read the message.

"Haven't you ever heard about a parallel world or a parallel universe? The world is not only one, but there are an infinite number of them. When you have to make a decision, a world is made, and in the new world, another you will make a different choice from what you chose. The base of this world is the same but there are some differences. It is what is called a parallel universe. Actually, I don't know very much about it and how it worked, but maybe this notebook can make connections and move between worlds. It is not mine. I found it in my drawer when I came back from school and when I heard a strange sound, it disappeared, and a few minutes later, it appeared again. Something like that happened again and again, so I hypothesized that this notebook connects between the different worlds. In fact, this idea was not mine. I

read something about a parallel universe before and I wrote a message as a joke, but it seems the idea was right.”

As I finished reading, I wondered if I was dreaming. Half of me thinks it makes sense in believing the story, but the other half of me just doubted it.

“Wait. I want to believe you, but I can’t. I might be dreaming, or I might write these message unconsciously. I want proof. I want something I can believe.” I wrote and sent it to him.

Rap.

“I was thinking about it too. I have a good idea. Do you know the third book of ‘The Adventure of the Wizard series’ came out? I think your world has the same book. If it is sold in your world too, I’ll go to a book store and buy it. When I came back, I’ll write a sentence from the book. After you read it, you can go to the book store and see if it is true.”

“It’s a good idea,” I thought. The book had come out today. So I don’t know anything or guess what kind of sentences were written. “Yes. I know the book. We can try it.” I answered.

“OK. I’ll be back in thirty minutes. Do not go out. Stay in your room or this plan will fail.”

I was excited as I read the message, and I noticed I in the other world was excited too.

“OK. Please send this notebook when you come back.” I wrote and sent it.

Rap.

Thirty minutes later, I heard the sound. I took out the notebook with an excited expression.

“I bought the book. What page would you like to know?”

“Page 97.” I wrote quickly and sent it to him.

Rap.

“The first line on page 97 is from the wizard of the earth said; ‘Now, you know what. It is the truth.’ Now, it is your turn. Go to the book store and see it is true.”

I left the notebook on the desk and ran to the book store.

When I arrived at the book store, I found a pile of the

third book of “The Adventure of the Wizard series.” I picked up one of them and opened it to page 97.

“Now you know what. It is the truth.” said the wizard of the earth.

I read the first line, and it was what the other I told me. I was so excited and was almost started crying out “I knew it!!” I bought the book and dashed to my house.

I was short of breath when I came back to my room, but I took a pen as soon as I saw the notebook and wrote a message.

“It was true. The first line at page 97 was just the same as what you wrote.”

“I knew it” was reply for my message. It was so short, but I knew he was excited too.

Since I found the mysterious notebook, I was writing to the different world every day. In the other world of I understood me very well. Of course he did, because he is me and I am him, but sometimes, I felt that he is a very different person from who I am. I don’t know why, but I thought that.

As we wrote about ourselves to each other, we found a big difference between the two of us. It was who we were living with. I was living with my little sister and my mother. My father left us when I was three years old, but I in the other world was living with his little sister and his father. He told me his mother left his family when he was three years old. So their parallel worlds were made not only by our decisions, but our parents’ decisions too.

I wonder what his father looks like, because his father means my father. I was sure he thought the same thing about my mother, but we didn’t write anything about our parents anymore.

We were having such a nice time and blank papers from the notebook were filled by our message very quickly.

One rainy day, our joy was ruined. When I opened my drawer as always, the notebook wasn't there. At first, I thought the other I was writing something. So I waited, but it didn't return that day. The next day, it didn't come back either. So I began to think something bad had happened to him, but all I could do was just wait.

The next day, the notebook finally came back. When I heard the rapping sound come, I opened the drawer with lightning speed.

"Sorry for being late. I was very busy for the past two days. By the way, is your sister doing well?" he wrote.

I was confused when I read the message because he didn't ask about my sister before as he didn't ask about my mother.

"Yes, she is. But why? How about your sister?" I wrote back.

Rap.

"Well, two days ago, she was involved in a traffic accident, and since then she hasn't woken up. That's why I wondered about your sister."

I was shocked. I thought about my sister. She went to the city library with her friend today. If she were involved in a traffic accident... I felt chill as I thought the idea of involving in a traffic accident.

"How was she involved?" I asked.

Rap.

"Well, she went to the city library that day. She was riding her bicycle. On her way back, she went down a steep path, but the bicycle brakes were broken and couldn't stop. Unfortunately, a truck came when she arrived to the bottom of a steep path. If the truck hadn't come, she might have only fallen down and get a slight wound, but the truck did come at a bad time..."

I was surprised by his story, because his sister went to the city library just like my sister did today. My sister went there with her bicycle too... I thought. I remembered about two

days ago, it was rainy. Do people ride bicycles when it's rainy? I was scared to ask. My heart thumped very quickly with terror.

"Two days ago, you mean Friday, right? It was rainy on Friday. Why did your sister rode a bicycle?" My hand was shaking as I was writing. I put it in the drawer and heard the sound which tells it went to the other world. I forced myself to calm down. I may have been worrying too much. It must have been my misunderstanding.

Rap.

The notebook came back. I was still shaking. I forced myself to open it and read.

"No. Two days ago, it was Sunday and it was sunny. As you say, I remember last Friday was rainy, but it was four days ago."

I dropped the notebook. It was what I thought. My world and his world had a time lag. My world is two days before his world. So, the traffic accident will occur today.

"It's Sunday today here. My sister will be involved in the traffic accident today. What time the accident occurred? I have to stop my sister." I wrote in a flurry.

Rap.

In one minute, the notebook came back.

"It was about 3:45. A steep path is the one in front of the city library."

It was three on my watch. It will take thirty minutes to the city library from my house. I took my bicycle and hurried to the library.

3:30, I arrived there. I entered the hall and looked around, but my sister was nowhere. I looked at my watch, it said 3:40. There were only five more minutes. I was almost crying because of panic, and then, I saw my sister. I saw her through the window.

She was outside walking to her bicycle.

"Wait!!" I cried, but she didn't notice. I dashed to the outside and went after her. I called her name, but still she didn't notice. I cried her name again as I ran after her. I could see the steep path.

It was 3:44.

"Stop! Please stop." I cried, and then she noticed.

She turned back and tried to stop. "Why?!" She cried as she found the brake was broken. She dragged her legs to stop, and the same time, I caught her in my arms.

Her friend screamed as my sister and I fell down.

It was top of the steep path and I could see the bottom of it.

Now, the truck passed there without any trouble.

I sighed with relief and asked my sister if she got hurt.

"No. I'm fine," she said. She looked shocked, but she seemed alright.

"Good," I said.

"Thank you. But why did you come here?" she asked.

I was perplexed because I didn't know how to explain.

"Well, it's a secret. But there is someone who worried about you. Please thank him, and wish that his family is doing well." I answered.

She looked confused, but then, she smiled as always and said, "OK."

"I could save my sister. Thank you. How is your sister? Did she wake up? I wish she did." I wrote. Then I noticed it was the last page of the notebook. There was only half of a blank paper left. I leafed through the notebook, and then something fell off from it. It was a small piece of paper. Maybe it was put between two pages of notebook without my noticing. I thought, at the same time, a wonderful idea flashed into my mind. I searched for a picture of my family and wrote "Thank you" on the back of it. Then put it between the pages and sent it to the other world.

One hour later, I heard the rapping sound. I opened my drawer and took out the notebook.

Something fell to the floor. It was a picture.

"So, it worked..." I smiled. The one who looked just like me was standing next to his sister, and on the other side of her, a man who also looked like me but much older was standing.

"Oh, he's my father..." I muttered.

They were all smiling happily.

I put it on the desk and read the message on the notebook.

"Great!! Well done. I have good news too. My sister woke up just after you sent me a message. That's why my message was late. She doesn't have any after effects. Doctor said she can come back to our house tomorrow. I thank you for worrying about her. I wish your family does well."

It was great news for me. I picked up the picture again, and turned it back.

There was a message, "Thank you."

I smiled again, and put the notebook and picture together in the drawer.

Next morning, when I woke up, the notebook and the picture were gone. Somehow I knew they would never come back, but I didn't feel sad or sorry about it. They were gone, but the memories of them are still in my heart.

"Thank you," I said as I thought about this mysterious experience.

Stop and Go

by Ofelia del Corazon

It had only been a week since my friend Jonny's funeral. He was killed in a car accident after a long night of partying and doing drugs, and there I was, business as usual. I backed out of my driveway to drop off some drugs across town, when my friend Vivian called me to hang out. It was Saturday night in Los Angeles, summertime, the perfect combination for making easy money. Vivian only lived only a few blocks away from my apartment building, so I decided to pick her up on my way.

Vivian and I had a lot in common. We were both in our early twenties, both college dropouts, both came from broken homes, and we both loved to have a good time. Vivian and I both grew up pretty poor and had distant relationships with our families. It was my junior year and she was a new freshman and didn't have too many people to hang out with. I took her out a few times and we started partying together and became pretty close. She was outspoken at times, but I generally enjoyed her company. Someone had to keep me entertained while I made my rounds.

Vivian was waiting outside of her rundown apartment building as I pulled up in my grey, 98' Nissan Sentra. I never was one for the flashy and expensive things in life. I kept it low pro. A car behind me honked and sped past as I drove up to the curb. She waved to me and put her cigarette out on the floor.

"You really need a new car," she said, as she got into the passenger seat. The smell of vodka and tobacco entered with her. She leaned over and kissed me on the cheek as we pulled away.

"Where are we going again?" she asked.

"Sarah needs a sack."

"Fucking crack bitch."

"It's money. I don't see you paying my bills." Being a full time student and having to support myself is what really got me into selling drugs in college, it was the easiest way to make money I knew. I had been homeless before and there was no way I was going back to that.

"I just think Sarah should spend some of that money on diapers for her kid or something," she said as she reached into the back seat for a magazine. "But what the hell do I know, right?"

"It's not like you would do any different."

"What's your problem?"

"Just saying."

"Whatever. Pull over up there yeah? Let's line it up. I've had a crappy day, I'm sure you have too."

I pulled the car onto a secluded street and parked. Vivian grabbed a dollar bill from her purse and looked up at me, her eyes full of expectancy and impatience. I pulled out my baggie filled with cocaine and racked up some lines on the magazine surface. I always provided the coke, I figured it was better to do it with a friend than be that creep who gets high alone. Vivian's nose was like a vacuum, she inhaled all of my drugs, not to mention my rent money right along with it. It pissed me the hell off, but hey, that's what the drugs were for right? A line of this, a hit of that, and bang, no more worries.

Nights like those always got me depressed. We would sit around in my car for hours sometimes doing absolutely nothing. We talked but didn't really say anything meaningful. We preferred to have our empty lives waste away in the company of other losers. I guess it made us feel better about ourselves. Sometimes I would look over at Vivian, or whoever it was next to me, as they would stare out the window, wishing they were anyone else except themselves; wishing that they were anywhere but in my car. I recognized that face because I saw it every morning in my bathroom mirror before I took a shower. I used to have some hope in life, but after watching all the crap my friends went through, the addictions, the suicides, and everything else, these last few years really changed my outlook on life.

After we finished our chemical feast we drove to the nearest liquor store to pick up a fifth of whiskey. The little Korean man always smiled at me when I paid. He would ask how my day had been, and I would smile back and tell him it was great. I knew he didn't really care though. I had a little business experience myself, so I knew what it all really meant. All he cared about was my money, and all I cared about was his alcohol. It was a mutual understanding. I always thought of liquor stores as peculiar places. I found it funny that children's candy and adult "good time" supplies were always right there next to each other, it was a win-win kind of thing for everybody.

I got back into the car. Vivian had her seat reclined and had taken off her black sweater. That was just like her. Show a little skin when you wanted something. It worked for her though, I usually gave in. She had the most beautiful soft, tan skin and full red lips and she knew exactly just how to use them, it was an offer I could never refuse. We each took a few swigs until our thirst was quenched and headed out.

The night was quiet. There weren't too many cars out on the street yet, but then again it was only nine o'clock. The windows were rolled down and I had my iPod playing through the car stereo system. The air was warm outside. I was high and should have felt satisfied, but I didn't. Instead I thought about how many times I had gone through that exact same routine. Red light- stop... green light- go, over and over again until you got to your destination, which isn't really where you wanted to be anyway.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"What do you mean? Do with what?"

"You know, Life- everything. Is this all there is to it?" Vivian's face looked puzzled, as if taken off-guard by my question, unsure of where it came from or where it was going.

"I don't know. I try not to think about it too much."

"Don't you, like, have any plans?"

She didn't respond. She was too high to answer, or she just didn't care, or both.

"Did you hear me?" I asked and looked over at her. She looked back at me, her eyes were dark and empty, and her face was cold and unchanging, as if frozen in time.

"Well fuck it, you want to suck me off?"

"What the hell? Why would you ask me that?"

I was surprised at the quickness of her response. "I'm just thinking..." I pulled the car over, "I mean, you're gonna be kissing ass and sucking dick to get by for the rest of your life anyway. May as well get used to it."

Vivian looked at me in a way she never had before. I didn't recognize her anymore. Perhaps I had cracked the mask that she had worn for the better part of her life.

"You know, you've really been acting like a jerk lately. Fuck you." She opened the door and got out of the car. She walked down the street, into the darkness. Part of me wanted to go after her and apologize, but part of me really didn't care anymore. I wasn't sure if she was even my friend, or if she just used me like everyone else I had ever known. Like all the other people who just wanted what I had to offer, and didn't want me anymore when I had nothing left to give. I hated bottom-feeder scum like them, but I realized other 'normal' people were boring, and at least my friends were fun to hang out with. I did another line of coke. I got a text from Sarah- Hey let me know when you're coming. I started the engine, turned up the music, and drove away.

I got on the freeway to blow off some steam. Nothing helped me to feel freer than driving really fast on a dark highway at night. There was a long stretch of freeway that ran along the hill between Glendale and Pasadena which over looked my part of the city. Everything looked so beautiful from the distant view. The sky above me was clear enough to see the stars; the moon was full and glowed a brilliant, bluish-yellow light, a rare sight in the city of Angels.

I saw a haze of red light up ahead. There was traffic. Just my luck. A fire truck and an ambulance crept passed the traffic in the emergency lane, their sirens and lights were going off; it reminded me of the carnival rides I went on as

a kid. I turned the radio down as I drove by what appeared to be a horrible car wreck. A pick-up truck and an over-turned SUV blocked the two right lanes. Blood and debris covered the black asphalt. There were two black bags next to the ambulance, and a man in handcuffs with a confused look on his face, talking to police officers and paramedics. My stomach felt sick and twisted in disgust. I had seen car accidents before, but never anything like that. My heart told me that it could have just as easily been me in the handcuffs. Tears streamed down the side of my face as I thought about all of the people that I had known and that had died, or disappeared out of my life. I thought about all the times that I could have died; an idea that used to intrigue me, but that became too real in the face of that accident.

I got off of the freeway and back onto the streets toward my neighborhood. There were more cars out by then and I felt the pulse of the city beginning to throb and come to life. I drove down the main street and saw people walking around from restaurants, to bars, to liquor stores. It was the same faces every weekend. Young college students out looking for a new thrill. Hobos with brown paper bags, hanging out on the corners, talking with each other. Older sophisticated couples getting out of their BMW's, and Mercedes Benzes, going into restaurants to eat meals that the rest of us could never afford. It was all a show to me, and I was a part of it all, and I didn't even have top billing.

As I turned a corner to figure out what I was going to do next I noticed a girl walking down the street by herself. She was walking in the same direction that I was driving in. I pulled over and watched her as she slowly made her way down the street. She stopped every few steps to look up at the sky, and then continued to walk; she seemed lost. A car playing loud music zoomed down the street, which got the girls attention. She turned to see what the commotion was and I saw that it was Vivian.

I opened my door and jumped out of my seat to catch up to her. My pipe fell to the floor and shattered into a hundred

pieces. I ran to Vivian, seemingly unnoticed by the surprised look that she gave me when I called her name. She had been crying.

"What do you want?" she asked, as she raised her forearm to wipe the tears off of her face."

"I was just parked over there, and I saw you and- I don't know. Are you okay?"

"Leave me alone."

"Why are you crying?" I could tell something was really wrong in the way her arms were crossed in front of her chest.

"Leave me alone, Alex. Please, just leave me alone." She fell to the ground, sobbing. I bent down to hug her and could feel that her body was shaking.

"Did something happen to you?"

"Some fucking asshole stole my bag and starting grabbing and touching my body," she said with a burst of tears.

"What are you talking about? When?"

"Right now. I was just walking down the street and some guy ran up behind me and pushed me to the ground-"

"I'm sorry. I don't know what the hell I was thinking. I shouldn't have let you walk away on your own."

After a few minutes she stopped crying and we walked to a café down the street. I ordered us some coffee and we sat at a table on the patio out back. I told her about the car accident that I had seen, and how it scared the hell out of me. We also talked about Jonny's death.

"You know," I said, "everything tonight has gotten me thinking about things."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure, but that accident really got me thinking about Jonny."

"Yeah, it really sucks, I feel partly responsible for some reason."

"Nah, it was that freaking idiot Mike's fault."

"Wait, what do you mean Mike's fault?"

"Well I heard that Mike was with him that night, and kept giving him some pills cut with who knows what and-"

“That’s not possible though,” Vivian said as her eyes began to swell and redden, “I gave Mike those drugs. It’s the drugs you gave me earlier that day.”

Hearing Vivian say those words tore my heart to pieces. I knew I really was partly responsible for the death of my friend. I wondered how many other people I had hurt in my selfish lifestyle. I always thought being a rebel was about having fun and not caring about the consequences, but that changed that night.

We talked for an hour before I got another text from Sarah- Hey wher r yooou? We r stil waiting for you. You cuming? Hurrey. I knew she was drunk. I thought about all the times I had driven up to her house before. There were always young men and women hanging out on the front porch drinking beer, and listening to crappy music over broken speakers. Kids were always in the front yard chasing each other and laughing. Oblivious to their sad and fucked up situation. I knew I was just as much to blame though, people like me kept the wheel turning.

-Not Tonight, I responded, not tonight.

POETRY



1923 Johnston St.

by Manny Moreno

The street Dolores, big-boned and zaftig in
curlers and culottes, scanned for her wayward husband.

The street of Louie's doleful lemon tree,
the largest living thing I'd ever seen.

The street girls roamed in knots and packs, Ceci
with bows in her hair, compact, chocolate,
and lisping.

The street where my brother pushed
a temperamental mower, a bronzed and shirtless
Rasputin sweating in the summer glare.

The street our psychotic tabby prowled, attacking
legs and darting up an oily-leafed tree with milky
sap we spat at each other.

The street of the eight car pileup, seven of them parked,
houses emptying in search of the fleeing driver. John Two Eagles
came downstairs, shook his somber head, tsked
and went right back up.

The street deserted enough to play football with an old sock
or a tennis ball, where Martin rolled back, back, out of the
pocket, pumped once, again, and threw a slow, lazy, arcing,
impossibly long Hail Mary.
No, longer.
No. Longer.

They fixed the potholes, added speed
Bumps and bright white lines. Cars rumble past on the street still
black and smooth, as if freshly paved.
A cat darts outs of a yard, changes its mind and
disappears under a car.

The Light

by Dez Wilder

The world has been dark for so long
the presence of light is scarcely recalled.
The soul, choked and smothered by the blackness,
leaving only pain.
The memory of happiness is fleeting.

A dream forgotten as soon as the mind wakes from slumber.
A goal to lofty to be real,
it slips away with each passing day.
Where once there was hope, now dwells only despair,
an emptiness that fills a shell of what once was but no longer is.
The pain has become eternal.

Life has become nothing more than a waste of death.
But even death brings no peace,
for it too breeds pain.
And so it goes, an empty soul drifting through the night,
lost and alone, broken and hopeless.
But the night is darkest before the dawn.

Faint at first, a glimmer, a speck, a pinprick of
brilliance in eternal darkness.
Unfamiliar, strange, even frightening,
the glimmer shines in the distance.
There is nowhere left to float in darkness but toward the light,
it's warmth and brilliance burning my eyes and flesh.
It's beauty captivates me.

I try to shut my eyes, to look away, to retreat from
the pain brought forth by it's brilliance,
to descend to the comfort of darkness and the familiarity
of a pain I know so well.
But the world has been forever changed.

The eyes, having seen the light,
can no longer live in the dark.
The skin, having felt the warmth so long missed,
can no longer live in the frigid cold.
The world has been dark for so long,
but the light glimmers brilliant in the distance.

A Dark Hotel Room

by Daniel Cordero

For the lost word
For the seeking of what isn't
A face painted on the traverse
The characteristics of a soul
And open window
Gusts in unknown
As I sit miles away
Alone in the sorrow of many
The web that laces the soul
Heart beat to heart beat
Cold rock to putty
Plush rabbits that scream out your name
The shaking hands that braze my face
Countless times
Valentines eye
Gold and red
What is it worth but Everything

Atlantic Avenue Shuffle

by Joseph Lusnia

From the land of the less fortunate
To the land of the fortunate less
Where we sit on plastic milk cartons
And play dominos till our sons go down.

Our bodies like paper flutter in the wind,
The darkness of our skin breaks,
With every breath
Our mouths move but never open.

We are forgotten, old and dead,
Living in a place we can not remember
Watching the moon rise like a golden coin
Held in the palm of a black hand.

The ground beneath our feet beats with rage
As the children of our children dance themselves to sleep
Not knowing who they are
Or why they are here in the first place.

Our bellies long for the food of love
That no one seems to cook anymore
They have forgotten what it was like to go hungry
How can they not remember what lives inside their soul.

From our rooftops we cry shouting our existence
As we disappear from the landscape
Leaving nothing behind
But empty eyes and hollow tongues.

My Darling Daughter

by Monica Wolfe

My daughter born from love.
My daughter with eyes of blue skies,
eyes that turned to grey blue clouds,
with seasons past.
She has lashes that curl at great length,
lashes that follow the curve of a dark shadowed wave.
My daughter with a round,
porcelain,
button nose.
My daughter with a small, gentle kiss,
a kiss that resembles the touch of a butterfly,
pure beauty gracing my skin.
She has soft, pink rose petals that rest on her lips.
Her smile is lined with small white pearls,
pearls that reflect her personality.
My daughter with skin composed of warm peaches,
and sweetened cream.
Her hair is soft,
brown,
and wispy like the feathers of a sky lark.
Each strand of her mane defies neatness,
and prefers to be let down wildly,
like a foal.
My daughter with a voice like a soft melody,
and soothing like a lullaby.
Her words are warming to the point of melting,
and her laughter floats, like bubbles drawn from a bath,
She has hands that intertwine mine,
each finger perfectly modeled from human clay.

My daughter with mice for feet,
her toes always scurry across the floor.
She is filled with young tigress energy,
She has imprinted circles on the floor surrounding me.
My daughter, the image of fictitious royalty,
those imagined in fairytales.
She is the vision of an elegant scene,
more elegant than the rising sun.
She is the light at the end of a dark journey.
She is the rare blossom that came from an average bouquet.

Overdue

by J. C. Abac

I borrow my heart
I borrow my lips
from one not afar
who enters my gist

I borrow my mind
I borrow my limbs
from one just behind
of this hidden mist

I borrow what I know
I borrow what I show
I borrow what I wear
and all that I glow

I borrow my fingers,
my nails, and ears
I borrow my vision
to defeat my fears

I borrow my good—
all of it whole;
I borrow my sleep
that I cherish in full

I borrow my breathes—
each time getting deeper,
from within my breasts—
the soft warm, my heater

I borrow my eyes,
my nose and shoes
I borrow my cries
to fulfill my use

I borrow from all
all of that I am
I borrow from all
what I don't demand

I borrow for minutes
I borrow for years
I borrow not for seconds
and feel for who hears

I borrow this letter
I borrow these words—
all of that's holy—
to go through this world

and in borrowing,
I know; yes, I know
that when the time comes
returning must flow:

Return your sight.
Return your might.
Return all your living.
Not a thing to hold tight.

Or, yet, unless
you prefer to digress,
farewell to progress
and die in distress.

that what you borrow
shall take you in sorrow
and your cries shall follow
no end of tomorrow.

so borrow, my sweet,
borrow them slow
and borrow from all
and float and flow. . .

Williamsburg / Williamsburg

by Joseph Lusnia

In the land of the Jews
With their ribbons and long black sorrows,
They keep their women covered,
Their children fill the streets with song.

From around Delancy and Hester
They came, carrying boxes full of regret,
Seeking a place they could call their own.

They were not happy,
Until someone had a better idea.
They were strangers in a strange land.

They tried to make it their own
And for a while they did.
It was easy pretending
There was someplace worse.

There was someplace worse,
It was easy pretending.
And for a while they did.
They tried to make it their own.

They were strangers in a strange land.
Until someone had a better idea,
They were not happy.

Seeking a place they could call their own
They came, carrying boxes full of regret,
From around Delancey and Hester.

Their children fill the streets with song,
They keep their women covered
With ribbons and long black sorrows,
In the land of the Jews.

Garden

by Sean Nesler

Underneath the putrid skies,
Where wandering spirits often roam—
Where shadows stare with unseen eyes,
And solemn specters make their home—
The rusty leaves of autumn lie
Above the soft, untrodden loam.

The standing slabs of marble cast
Stand firm against the whispered breeze,
While stirring winds arrive at last
To whistle through the winding trees,
And call things back from out the past—
From deep and endless spectral seas.

Here, nameless souls of faceless men
Slumber under numbered plates,
And waken time and time again,
From splintered beds and buried crates,
To wander through the constant rain,
Or rest upon their stones, in wait.

How Is It There

by Bané Obrenovich

Plastic chairs
The consulate room
Wooden chairs
One last view of the classroom
Cloth chairs
Hungarian airplane
Line with no chairs
Black face with the stamp
Concrete and no welcome
New York

Yugoslavia is whispering goodbye

Television and war
Bosnia and smoke
Crooked faces and cries
Yugoslavia is gone
And I

Truck and boxes
Skinny fingers and sweat
Foreign faces
Foreign

Yugoslavia is broken
On the ground it lies
And others laugh

Concrete canyon
Unfriendly faces
Rush
Lights but darkness

No dollar and a quarter
The night the legs and the bridge
Manhattan is for the smiling ones
My bed is in Queens

The phone
Questions through cries
My answers are confused

It's foggy in Belgrade
It's midnight in New York

Cruzada

by Manny Moreno

The undulating crowd
snakes around itself, swirls
anti-clockwise. No space personal, every
space intimate.
Take small steps.
Milonga.

A man sings a question: “*¿Porque?*”
The fiddle and squeezebox grieve
and sigh. No asking, “May I
have this dance?” Contact in steps:
Eyes. Hands. Shoulder. Temple,
Clavicle. Suprasternal notch.
Salida.

There are no reversals
in line-of-dance, no back
leading. Floorcraft is about initiating
the right lead. Allege to be the same
people who laughed at the stumbles, blushed
at the sweaty proximity, sliding
against one another.
Sacada.

His bird will not
sing for him. His friends
stop coming ‘round. The Sun
shines elsewhere, till seeing
him alone, the little
dog leaves him. “*Si supieras.*”
Cortado.

Three dances to a partner, the delicate
etiquette. But you
leave—
Cruzada.

In the Wake of One Morning

by Christine Carreon

If all walked blind,
there would be no judgment
for the mind to say.

No faces, no surface, nor mirrors
to view;

plainclothes critics their
words far astray.

If the morning has left me
aching and bruised;
my arms strung across me
a barbwire fence reused,

as my peers see me now, even then,
who’s to know the hurt I’ve gone through?

I didn’t ask for an awkward quiet,
the subtle rejection of a group.
I would wish for someone to listen,
to hear of my morning
that has left me this way.

The flicker of a frown,
my decrescendo of words;
descending, sharp hail falling down.
Must a house bathed in fire
have something to say?

Id

by Sean Nesler

Beyond the flimsy fog of sleep,
Forgotten, formless monsters creep
And crawl from out the sullen deep,
Of our unconscious, haunted mind.

They care not that we've sleep to keep,
So through our skulls they squirm and seep,
And from our minds they writhe and leap
To unknown lands, for us to find.

They creep up on us while we nap,
And bridge an ever growing gap,
To slither onto ocean maps,
And mark where no man's ever stood.

They spread across stone cavern walls,
And lurk within forgotten halls;
And from the deep they writhe and crawl
Beneath the mesozoic mud.

Since we were young, these creatures hid
Within the darkened walls, amid
The other visions of the id—
As real as truth and deep as fear.

And though we spread to distant lands,
To break upon untrodden sands,
We still our hearts and fold our hands,
And feel the monsters drawing near.

Face in the Mirror

by Joyce Sin

Passing by a mirror I chanced to see
A familiar face but thinner than me.
Had the sweet smile but not her glee,
Her broad forehead was wrinkles free.

Cheeks were less full and no longer rosy.
Deep lines framed chin with signs weary.
Loose skin around neck showed aging.
Dopey eye lids gave the look of calming.

Sparkle on her face faded with passing years,
Gone was the fire under this feisty flyer.
Looking closely at this face in the mirror,
Sad to say it belongs to me not any other.

Ravaging time crept as night thief without fear.
Under sun ray, I found he had stolen my years.

Body and Mind

by Valerie Longo

A crippling mind and lucid body plan
Arms able to wrap and reach, and hang down
Useless, static, buzzing with energy,
Ready to punch, but lackadaisical.
Onward in motion, toward your skull and mine.
Actions bother, but your voice makes me scream
Into pillows and fists, leaving me bare,
Dissatisfied, licking wounds and my chops.
Next sentence hangs off my lips. You stop me.
And I wonder, is it worse, to possess
Bottled power, inward drive, flaming mouth,
Tongue sharpened with metallic resentment,
Yet smolder, extinguish, like so many
Dwarf stars whose idea frightens, but name
Invites your laughter, lightness, disinterest?
To give you limbs to pull, to poke, embrace
To mannequin my position, stand there
No genitals, mouth painted shut, cut hands,
A spectator in blood-sport, so wanton,
A passerby, my own desire shines,
Reflected in the mirror-like windows
Of segregated stores, unwelcome homes,
My rage, a brick through the panes that bare your
Name, so vile and acidic on my plate,
So sensitive to my butter knife's cuts.
When all I see is red, and you agree.
Guttural sounds, innocuous mutters.
I say I love you, like a baby doll
Who walks and talks the way they want, and need.
I want to say I hate you, though I love

To squeeze you greasy and blemished, you peach.
My hands know the way, they've been there before.
Weighed down with cracked voices, hollow hellos,
Your little warm words that make me ponder,
Is it my scraping nails that pull my hands
Toward your incessantly vibrating throat?
Can burning thoughts shadow muscles' movements?
Or could I survive, with an open mouth,
And no hands to kiss your face raw and bruised?
You hold me close, yet look away, no face
To view my glassy eyes, burning bile,
Or taste my coated tongue, calling you names.

Untitled

by Daniel Cordero

Through open doors and broken windows
The bright light shines giving light to shadows
Crimson stains mark tides that once moved
Chips of wood flat on the floor
All that lay a reminder of the lost soul
A broken home
Sorrows door
What do I have which gives you light?
What do I possess that keeps you by my side?
My golden haired treasure
Whose eyes give peak to eternity's blue seas
The only thing I can define as Gods own eyes
Tears

NONFICTION



by Dez Wilder

Hey Baby! I'm on the way home for the afternoon. I'm going to go to dinner and a movie with Paul tonight.

The text seems innocent enough, but I know that it's a lie. Not a white lie, but a blatant breach of trust that will soon be bathed in blood.

*Ok darling. Have fun! How was your day?
It was pretty good...*

Another lie, this one more forgivable than the last. She doesn't need to know the details about my day. She doesn't need to know how it is that I'm really feeling. She doesn't need to know that I'm seeing red and that I have a plan. She doesn't need to know that she's part of the problem rather than the solution. If she knew what was really going on inside of my head right now she would have every right to be concerned. Concerned because she cares about me and about my safety. Her concern is the last thing that I want tonight. She needs to rest easy, the truth will come out when I'm ready to share it with her. I am in control.

If she knew then she might ruin the plan. The razor blades are nestled safely in my back pack and I intend to put them to good use tonight. I can't have a loving girlfriend getting in the way of things.

I send the same texts to the members of my family who might be curious where I am when I don't come home this afternoon. Dinner and a movie will buy me a few precious hours alone and that is all I really need. And dinner and a movie with a friend gives me every excuse in the world not to

respond to a text or a phone call. Can't you see that I'm busy catching up with my dear friend Paul? I wouldn't want to be rude.

The train ride to my car seems longer today than on most afternoons. The anticipation of the sweet satisfaction of tearing flesh and dripping blood is overwhelming as I sit staring out the window watching the same buildings and houses fly by as I do every afternoon. They're moving in slow motion today. I need to get to my car and get to a hotel room before I lose my nerve. Have I lost my mind? Possibly. A hotel room? This is the nature of such things. I can't simply be satisfied with the destruction I've already caused. I need more and each time I feel the need to bleed, it must be more elaborate than the last.

I'm being watched at home. I am a high risk case with a history of self-harm and suicide attempts. I need to be watched. If you don't keep your eye on me then nights like this one are bound to happen.

I say goodbye to my girlfriend as I step off of the train. It's nearly time now and my hands are shaking and sweaty with excitement. It's been nearly a year since a blade has touched my skin but I haven't forgotten just how it feels to be set free by the sharpened edge of a razor. It's the most beautiful thing imaginable, to be set free in moments when all the world seems to be resting on your shoulders. One quick flick of the wrist and everything you feel inside is free to flow out of your body and into the stillness of the night. Magic.

"I think you need to go back to the in patient unit Dez," the program director said to me earlier today. She has no idea just how badly I need to go back. But I'll show her and I'll show everyone else that I do belong there. I will wear my wounds behind those locked doors like medals of honor, medals that show the doctors that I'm just as crazy as the next patient in the psych ward.

"Give it some thought," she said to me. "Let me know what you think about the idea tomorrow. It might just be easier to break some of your compulsive habits if you were upstairs on the unit." I know that. I had already considered it myself. There is no way that I'm simply going to will myself to get better out here in the real world on my own. But how could I show my face on the unit without a real reason to be there. I need something that speaks for me before I ever open my mouth and last year's scars simply won't be enough to do the job. I need something new, something fresh and real to show that I am sick enough to be there with the rest of them. Hence the razor blades in my back pack.

I walk to my car at a pace just short of a run. The urge to bleed is so strong that I can taste it in my mouth. I can feel it crushing me from the inside out. I need it so badly that I can barely breathe. I look down at my right forearm and examine the scars already there. They are small, most of them barely noticeable thanks to the stitches that the doctors put in last year on that oh so dreadful night. But they don't count. They don't matter simply because they were taped and sewn shut. If each cut were a mouth, opened wide to scream out to the world all of the things I can't bring myself to say, then these would be mouths forever closed, unable to speak their truths. Tonight my wounds will speak again and they must speak forever more. Tonight will be different than the last time. It's all part of the plan.

I'd do it right here in the car, but the car is new and I can't imagine bleeding all over the upholstery just yet. Give it a few more months and I might feel differently. I drive past the park where I hiked yesterday in an effort to clear my thoughts. One last chance to save myself from self destruction tonight. I could turn into that parking lot and go lose myself in the woods for a couple of hours until the urges pass, purge my system of all of the hatred that I feel by sweating it out. I could, but I keep driving.

I pass by a motel with "Vacancy" lit up on its sign out front on my way to Safeway. I'll be right back, don't rent my room. I didn't want to raise suspicion by buying razor blades and bandages in the same transaction at the CVS on my way to the train earlier this afternoon, so I still need to make one more stop before relief can finally be mine. My heart is pounding in my throat as I pay the cashier at Safeway for my butterfly bandages and sterile gauze wrap. If this isn't self care then I don't know what is. If I was really feeling self destructive wouldn't I have skipped the bandages all together and just allowed myself to bleed to death? See, I'm not as sick as you thought.

The hotel room costs me \$90 for the night. Such a waste. I'll only be here for a couple of hours before it's time to run back home and pack my things for my stay in the psych ward. Room number six. Check out time 10 a.m. Oh don't worry about little old me, I'll be long gone by then.

I grab my back pack from the car and run to my room. My hands are shaking so badly now that I can barely get the key into the door. It's a run down little place, but it has just what I need. Cool, dark, loneliness. Away from the bother of the people who care about me and away from anyone who might have the good sense to try to save me from myself. I won't be bothered here.

I grab the package of blades from my backpack and rip it open. I feel the calming familiarity of the cool hard metal between the thumb and forefinger of my left hand. I'm still trembling and I've stopped breathing but it won't be long now. But I pause. I wait for just a moment and I take my journal from my back pack lying on the bed.

This is it. I really have lost my fucking mind. I'm going through with this. I'm excited. I hate it. I know I have a choice, I do, but I don't feel like I do. I feel compelled to do this, to be just as sick as the rest of them when I go back. Fuck it, here goes...

I want to be able to look back on these desperate and insane moments and know exactly what it was that I was thinking. I want to remember this night forever because this is the very last time that I will live through a night like this. You can never be satisfied with just a taste. If it were possible then I would have been satisfied long ago. But each night like this one gets uglier and nastier and darker and more distorted and sick and someday there will be only one place left to go; eternal darkness. That day is fast approaching and I won't let myself go there. I want to hurt. I want to bleed. I don't want to die.

I put down my pen and take up the blade in my hand once more. One deep breathe and then it's time. One, two, three, four, five, faster than you can count. Five new ways to remember who I am and where I have been for the rest of my life. Five new questions from strangers. "What happened to your arm?" They'll ask. Oh, don't worry about those. Of course they're not self inflicted. What do you think I am, crazy? But it's not enough and the blade finds my arm three more times as waves of sweet euphoria wash over me as though I were dropped into a warm ocean of honey. The joy is thick and beautiful and the relief is instant. There is no question in my mind that this is exactly where I need to be in this moment. This moment is perfection.

There is a brief moment of sheer bliss after a wound has been opened, before it can fill with blood, and before the weight of the decision you have just made crosses your mind for the first time; and I stand for this moment of sheer, exquisite, overwhelming pleasure, and take a deep breathe, the sweetness of which I have never known before in my life. In this moment, standing inches closer to death, I feel more alive than I believed it was possible to feel and I let euphoria wash over me and carry away everything that I have ever worried or cared about, leaving me free and clean and untainted by anxiety and distress. In this moment, I am pure.

But the moment is over before it even begins and each new cut fills quickly with deep red as I make my way to the bathroom to fully examine the damage of those few fateful seconds. A slow smile creeps across my face as I look down at the thing which I have done and a desperate need to experience the rush of that perfect fleeting moment again drives the blade into my arm once more. Longer and deeper this time, with more passion and meaning than before, three new gashes are opened in the space of as many seconds. Hysterical laughter overtakes me as the blood drips down my arm, off of my fingertips and into the sink, each crimson drop defiling the purity of the white porcelain as they splatter their brilliance across the virgin surface. Euphoria wells up within me and I have to steady myself as I become dizzy with the pride and satisfaction in the accomplishments of the last few moments of my life. In this moment, the world is right, and the pain that is pulsing through my arm with the beating of my heart allows me to feel worthy of existing.

I just stand here in the bathroom, gazing into the mirror and watching the blood spill from my open wounds. It's as if I can feel the emotions leaving my body as the blood escapes the confines of my skin. The anger, the hatred, and the fear trickle out of me and flow onto the floor of the motel's tiny bathroom. I'm thinking of nothing but how amazing it feels to finally be free again. And these will be mine. I will not go to the hospital. No one will know about tonight until long after it's too late to stitch these wounds. They will speak volumes about my life in the moments when I remain completely silent and they will speak a language of compassion when my soul knows only hate. These wounds are not for anyone else. They belong to me.

But the euphoria subsides, and the sense of freedom gives way to fear once more as the bleeding continues moment after moment. Have I gone too far this time? Will I last until tomorrow without medical attention? I've had enough now.

I've seen enough blood and the fun is over for the night. I'm ready to clean up and go home, ready to close this chapter of my life forever now and move on to better and brighter days.

I already want to take it all back, but there is no going back once you've gone this far. The last few precious moments of my life will last forever, written like a sad story across my skin for the world to see. Perhaps there is beauty in the sadness and perhaps I can find strength one day in the weakness of these moments, but not tonight. Tonight belongs to the tattered broken soul of the creature standing before you in the mirror, and to the fear that drives the motions of the blade.

The Baton

by Paula Elliot

The memory comes so vividly to mind. I am five years old and lying in my bed. I am younger by nine years than the next sibling, the baby of the family. There is a commotion outside my bedroom door. The sounds are loud and clamoring, yet indistinguishable. In my quietness, I hold my breath as if to make the commotion fade. Familiar voices become clear, those of my mother and father arguing. I gather up the troops-my stuffed animals-and circle them around me, something I learned from watching Gunsmoke. I hear my sister and brothers false attempts to quiet my parents. Defeated, they retreat to my brothers room. I gaze into the darkness above me, and I see beautiful colors, I create designs with them and command them into shape of a large veil, adding protection for my army and me. I hear the creaking of the hardwood floors as footsteps approach my bedroom door, and I hear the turn of the doorknob. I can't see who it is, but as the hand reaches down to embrace me, I know it is my sister. She turns on my bed light, and the colors evaporate like vapor as my eyes adjust to the warm glow. My sister gives a comforting glance, reaches up on my bookshelf, and brings down a "Princess and The Pea", "Rapunzel" by the Brothers Grimm, and others I can no longer recall. I close my eyes and picture myself high in the sky, perched on Rapunzel's tower. My long braided hair rests upon the pavement below, waiting to be climbed by my prince, who will rescue me and take me away. When I open my eyes, it is quiet, and a new day begins. As months pass and the arguing becomes more frequent, reading becomes a ritual, shared among my siblings, passing the baton to one another as if in a relay. Each one offers his or her personal flair to the stories, keeping me interested and captivating me in a fantasy world far beyond my earthly reach. The stories sparked my imagination, something

my mother often said I had too much of.

Now, my siblings are gone, my father is gone, and my mother, with glue in hand, struggles to paste us together. I have become an only child. The imagination is of value and sometimes lost too quickly amidst the throes of life. I attempt to recapture my childhood imagination and long to see the colors within the blackness of my room. I no longer can find them; they are lost with my childhood. What does remain is the shelf on my wall, now filled with various books: *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*, *the Von Trapp Family Singers*, *Jane Eyre*, *Of Mice and Men*, plus an assortment of whodunits. Reading is a constant force that provides an escape route for me from the chaos that resides between the walls and the magnificent depression that dwells within the house. A U-turn.

I love to read. Now, I carry the baton. I've read to my children and my granddaughter, hoping to spark their imaginations and enthusiasm for knowledge within the printed words. My children and I exchange books on various topics, history, politics, fiction and non-fiction. At times, we read together, a few chapters at a time. We discuss the story and exchange our critiques. These moments are a precious escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, like a pause button on a DVD player.

My son Eric is sick, terminally ill. He has difficulty with reading. I recall a time during one of his hospitalizations, he asked me to get a book. The title was *Tuesdays with Morrie*. I heard it was on the bestseller list, but did not know much else about it. I remembered my mother had the book, I called her, and asked to borrow it. With relief she replied, "Yes! Oh, I am so glad he wants to read that book. It will be healing for him." I took the book and went to the hospital and began to read. Within a few chapters I understood why the book was important to him. It's the story of one man's courage and optimistic outlook to death that awaits him. This book opened the door to dialogue yet to be had; a dialogue that been sealed with large bolts and chains with several locks, like a treasure resting on the ocean floor. I read, we cried, and we

talked. Eric is empowered to orchestrate his last wishes. He ends this wish list with bits and pieces of literature that are important to him, literature he would like to have read. If not for the love of reading, imagination, the exchange of books and stories, these moments would be lost to the great abyss.

I receive a call from a hospital. They inform me that my son is there in critical condition and on life support. My heart sinks, my knees weaken and I freeze like a stone statue. I take a deep breath and remind myself I have been here before, as if to offer some sort of comfort to my emotions. I reach for the phone and make some calls. My response is the usual tone "yes, I am okay. I can drive myself. I'll fill you in once I've spoken to the doctors." As I hang up the phone, my head begins to swirl like a top spinning aimlessly across a floor. I suddenly can't find a thing- my wallet, my keys, my senses. I begin praying to St. Anthony, the keeper of lost things, and to God to bestow grace upon Eric and me. I come to. I locate my wallet and keys and run through a mental list of necessities to bring with me to the hospital. I look on my dining room table and there is the book from my English class at Pasadena City College, Professor Rose's class that I need to read. I quickly clutch it in my hands and head out the door to make my way to whatever fate lies ahead. Upon arriving and hearing the news that Eric is critical but stable, I am relieved, I sit in his room, book in hand, and proceed to open it. My mind reads the words, but I am unable to make sense of them. I close the book and place it on the table.

Today, I sit in the Intensive Care Unit at University of Southern California Medical Center in Los Angeles. I hear commotion and the distant voices of doctors and nurses hard at work saving lives. Eric's room is cold and sterile. It is filled with large equipment, assorted bags hung to metal hooks with medicine and fluids to help him stay alive. We adorn the room with a red candle of Archangel St. Michael and cards of love and encouragement. Pictures of his daughter Francesca are spread amongst a table in the room.

My son continues to be on life support, but appears more aware than previous days. I tell him I brought a book that I need to read for one of my classes and ask if he would like me to read it to him. With a slight nod of the head and what I see as a smile, I open the pages and proceed to read Gardens of Water, hoping we embark on a journey to Turkey.

I hear the humming of the ventilator and-with the baton in hand-I hold my breath as if to make the sound fade.

In Loving Memory of Eric Charles Clignett, who taught me the essence of courage, forgiveness and unconditional love.

*Sun-Ray Convalescent Hospital, Los Angeles, California
December 2011*

The Bliss of a Memory

by Laura Alvarado

The ability to have a memory grants us the ability to continue to live; I have learned this first hand. Call it luck, a miracle, or even science but I truly believe that it is phenomenal how even when the brain is at its weakest state memories from the past will resurface and can once again bring that smile back to what it once was. Whether it is a recent memory or a current one, the confusion of the mind will never abolish some of the most cherished moments lived. Growing up and taking on so much responsibility would make me question myself as to why I was put to walk this path? But as I mature and get older I realize that I should stop asking myself why and start accepting that the path in which I am on, is the one that was paved for me to walk on, and just as I saw her relive a memory I too will look back at that moment one day as a cherished instant.

As another long work day had finally came to an end my day was only halfway done, and although it was a nice sunny day with pillowy white clouds, my emotions were those of a gloomy cold evening. Every visit to see grandma was always one that made me anxious, I never knew if she would be in a cheerful mood or if she would carry that blank look that showed a void of emotion. I knew she wasn't thrilled about her new home, sadly she was diagnosed with dementia and as her only grandchild and caregiver I had no other option but to place her in a home. The idea of doing so killed me because I was always one to bash those who would place their family members in a home wondering how they could put a loved one in such a place. But I realized it was in her best interest for me to place her there when she overdosed on a medication she had believed she hadn't taken, working full time and being a part time student didn't allow me to be able

to care for her in the way she needed me too. As much as I would have wanted to be with her 24 hours a day monitoring her medication and mood swings, as a 23 year old I couldn't do so. Badly I wished I had an aunt or uncle that could care for her but being that she only had one son who was my dad and had passed away a few years back, left me to be the next person to step up to the plate.

Luckily when I arrived at the home, I easily spotted her through the narrow door window with such a huge smile as she sat patiently waiting since she knew I was on my way to pick her up for an afternoon outing. As I walked in to greet her she walked towards me in such a rush to embrace me and from that point on I knew this was going to be a good visit. Just that in itself enlightened my day so much, that feeling exactly is one of the many reasons as to why every day I try to remember not to take the small things for granted. After embracing her, I asked her what she wanted to have for dinner and she said to me in a Spanish whisper that a coke and chicken nuggets sounded really delicious. I couldn't help but laugh at her childish ways and told her, then chicken nuggets and Coke it is. We drove to McDonalds which was up the street from the home and she still carried her smile, I figured she must have had a really pleasant day. We had good conversation once we got there and she asked me the same questions she always did.

I learned to just answer them for the 100th time because I knew she didn't do it purposely, it was the dementia taking over. I asked her how she liked her food and as she sipped her ice cold Coke and raised her eyebrows she said, "esta muy bueno" meaning it was really good, since she couldn't eat such a big meal I got her a happy meal, I thought she would bypass the plastic wrapped Ice Age character, but she actually was really curious in seeing what it was. I opened it for her and just like a child she thought it was the cutest thing ever. I snapped a picture with my phone of her and her toy be-

cause she was so happy with it; to this day I look at it when I am feeling down so I can relive her happiness. A few minutes later she was ready to call it a day, as her dementia progresses she gets uneasy when the sun starts to set because she feels it's too late, so respecting that we started heading back to the home. In such a short 5 minute ride I saw the power of a memory. My grandma often forgets a conversation that could have just happened seconds ago and many times when I try to talk to her about someone she knows she gives me a blank stare and seconds later pretends to know exactly who I am talking about. The drive back was fairly quiet with the exception of KOST playing on low volume, I concentrated on what a pleasant visit I had just had with her, and then out of nowhere she asked me if my dad or her mother was going to come to see her. It caught me off guard because both of them have been passed for many years, and she asked me with such certainty if she would be seeing either one of them, I couldn't break her heart and tell her she would never physically see them so I smiled and said "I don't know grandma maybe you will see them later." She then began to say she saw my dad the other day and described him in such great detail that I was shocked that she could remember so many of his features considering it had been at least 14 years since she last saw him. She described his smile and other traits of his and I even started to picture him. I realized that his memory would probably never leave her side. We had reached the home and I walked her in as I always did, she was excited to tell the nurses how much fun she had on her outing and showed off her new Ice Age buddy. The nurses said she was glowing with happiness and thanked me for visiting her. I took her to her room and I gave her a hug and kiss goodbye.

I walked away that day feeling so overwhelmed with emotions that I did shed a few tears on the drive home. Dementia had taken over my grandmother's life and caused her to lose control of her independency. She now had to rely on others to care for her 24hrs a day. The one thing she still had left

that no one could take was her memories. Through that she is able to live and be at peace with herself, I see her struggle with the idea of her having to be dependent on others and many times she gets frustrated saying she doesn't know what's happening to her. It breaks my heart to see her struggle with this emotional distress but remembering the smile she carried as she talked about her son in great detail does put me at ease knowing she still has the ability to keep her memories close to heart and that is something dementia or no one can take from her. Losing almost everything she once had she still lives through her memories.

The Cards You're Dealt

by K. Joyce Herrera

My ID card is about the size of all of the other cards in my wallet. It is white in color, 8 centimeters wide and 5 centimeters in height, 0.75 millimeters thick, and is rounded around the edges. The text on it indicates that I am a California resident, standing 5 feet and 4 inches tall, am currently 22 years of age, of the female gender, have naturally black hair, brown eyes, and weigh around 118 pounds. There is a picture of my face: my lips are pursed in a tight smile, I am sporting a dyed shade of brown-reddish hair, and I'm not wearing my glasses. Of course, there is more to a human being than the physical characteristics defined by a mere piece of plastic. My ID card does not tell you anything about my personal character, my achievements, or that I'm having a college-age crisis, feeling like a loser in this game of life. However, the importance of having an ID card is undeniable. In a world where matter fades, it indicates that I still matter. It tells the world, and reminds me, that I exist.

I live about a mile away from the house that I first lived in. Today, my mother's siblings live there. My aunt, her husband, and my cousin occupy the level floor. There is a kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. On the bottom basement level, there is a vacant space where the washer and dryer sit, and where the boxes of old family memorabilia collect dust. This is where my uncle, my mother's brother, resides. My uncle works all day, almost every day, earning an under-the-table salary as a certified nurse assistant. He cares for elderly patients, making their beds, bathing them, and cleaning their trails of bodily waste for an hourly pay, which is just over the minimum wage. When he's at home, he reads the many verses in the Bible, yet he only speaks a few words aloud. Like a piece of furniture, he is quiet and still. He is living

and breathing, but for many years, according to U.S. records, ceased to exist.

Back in 1989, my uncle left his wife and five young children in his homeland of the Philippines. He came to America on a 10-year visa and, like many immigrants, was determined to find work to provide a better life for his family back home. My mother, a naturalized U.S. citizen, petitioned my uncle for a permanent resident status; a green card. Although hopeful, my uncle knew that his chance at obtaining a green card was never guaranteed.

My uncle worked and prayed and sent the fruits of his labor back home to his family for years. In 1998, he flew back to the Philippines to visit his family for a few months, where he ended up adopting a baby orphan. In 2000, he overstayed his visa here in America and was deemed an illegal immigrant.

For thirteen years, my uncle hid away from authorities, living quietly and keeping to himself. He made sure to keep a comfortable distance among potential friends, for fear of being discovered and deported. Even his routine unintentionally bled into our intimate conversations, diluting them to small talk. "Good" was his answer of choice, the expected response to any of my genuine inquiries. He spoke more to God than any human being. Despite his tranquil demeanor, he was always actively and anxiously waiting to be approved.

I can only imagine how my uncle felt, never wanting to get caught, yet also dying to be recognized and accepted by society. He very well could have never seen a green card or the greener pastures that he came in search of, here in America. He could have never seen his family ever again. He very well could have worked to his death. He knew this, and yet, he did it anyway. He knew that his loss of identity and burden of loneliness was worth it for the life- the existence- of his entire family.

For thirteen years, my uncle lived as an undocumented immigrant. Then, this year, he was finally granted his green card; his identity.

"Montano Orgas Pena" it reads on my uncle's permanent resident card. It is 8 centimeters in width and 5 centimeters in height, 0.75 millimeters thick, and is rounded around the edges. Like the shade of American currency, it is green in color, only it's beyond priceless. The image of his face shows him with smiling eyes and a closed-mouth grin, as if he's trying to contain the happiness and relief within. The text on it indicates that Montano is entitled to rights, privileges, and real opportunities to a better future for him and his family. This card represents a dream fulfilled. It proves that he is a living, breathing human being.

Today, my Uncle Mon is much more talkative. He may have lost most of his hair and his jet-black hue is now a lackluster shade of gray, but his spirit is more vibrant than ever, his soul is more full of life. He's had the joy of seeing his family again after all these years. His children are now adults, parents of his grandchildren. He's also expressed excitement at having the option of looking for a new job and is proud that he's remained faithful to his wife and to God. He's told me that he isn't fearful anymore, that he's enjoying the liberty of being himself. And that's what I've learned. We are all human beings, but not everyone has the freedom to be.

In my twenty-second year of life, my mere struggle is being an undecided college student. While trying to figure out who I am, at least I can say that "I am." Whatever my desires, however far-fetched, I have the privilege to not only dream it, but also pursue my happiness. I look back at the cards that I've been dealt, and I see that I have a good hand. Then I think about those living in the shadows, those unable to see their reflections in the mirror, those without cards, and I realize that I've already won.

The Nose Knows

by Patrick Grant

In the early 1950's a lot of fighting went on at our house, not dysfunctional family conflict but rather the art of self defense: boxing. At an early age my two brothers and I were issued puffy, kid size gloves and subjected to Dad's instruction in the rudiments of the manly art. Our basic education included the use of the jab, combination punching, footwork, bobbing and weaving to minimize the target and the effects of body punches on an opponent's ability to breath and move.

While my brothers were older than me, we would spar with each other using the techniques Dad taught us. The sparring matches involved not only how to throw a punch but also how to take one. We usually pulled our punches during these sessions, but occasionally a solid shot would land. I vividly recall the effect of a blow to the nose. More devastating than the pain was the effect it caused: the eyes would fill with tears virtually shutting down one's ability to see the next punch coming. We also became aware of the potential damage to ones hands, contact with an opponent's skull or jaw could cause and why professional fighters taped their fists and wrists.

Friday night fights were mandatory viewing at our house. Not of the progressive school of parenting; my father saw no harm in exposing his kids to a form of violence which matched two physically fit individuals in a contest with rules of fair play. Every Friday night we sat in front of a 13 inch black and white TV with "rabbit ears" wrapped in tin foil, watching black and white fighters pummel each other. Boxing was an early form of reality TV, totally unrehearsed except for the occasional "fixed" fight. I can still hum the

Gillette Cavalcade of Sports jingle! We would pick a favorite boxer in each match and if it was a championship fight bet some change on the bruiser we selected. The banter or "trash talk" would fly back and forth in an effort to root our guy on or belittle the "palooka" he was fighting. Everything was fair game, from the length of the guy's shorts to his clumsy style or physical looks. While boxing is now frowned upon in many quarters, the 40's and 50's were a golden age for the sport. After many great years Joe Louis was nearing the end of his career in the early 50's, while Sugar Ray Robinson and Rocky Graziano were peaking. Boxing was a great form of father-son bonding long before the psychologists applied the term to family relationships. But the best was yet to come in the 60's. Unfortunately my Dad had passed away and never saw Muhammad Ali, the greatest of all, match skills and wit against other great fighters like George Frazier and George Foreman in desperate struggles that made boxing history.

Fights on TV gave us acute awareness of the physical damage a fist, even when encased in a glove, could inflict on the human body; an awareness which today's violent video games fail to provide young people. The blood, welts and bruises were real. In most states a professional fighter's hands are legally considered to be deadly weapons. This was brought home to me in the late 1950's when I met heavy weight boxing champion Floyd Patterson. We shook hands and I could not believe the size of his sledgehammer fists. He virtually swallowed my hand in his bear size paw.

Despite my father's efforts at preparing us to defend ourselves, we were never encouraged to fight and only to do so as a last resort. We lived in a 12 unit row house in Queens. It was a typical working class neighborhood with a characteristic New York City mix of ethnicities. Many heads of household were naturalized citizens or returning World War II veterans. For most families this was their first house, having been apartment dwellers all their lives. Given the di-

versity of the neighborhood, friction and conflict might have been anticipated. But that was not the case. Looking back, I concluded that the tolerance and civility which generally prevailed in the neighborhood was tied to a common sense that each family had struggled and made similar sacrifices to achieve this measure of the American Dream: home ownership. Peace and prosperity seemed to finally be at hand, after many years of severe economic hardship and a brutal world war.

Over the course of my early years I recall getting into maybe a half dozen scuffles in the neighborhood or at school. The contest would generally start with a round of verbal abuse, then some pushing and shoving and finally a wrestling match. Little damage to either combatant would result and there was rarely an opportunity to employ one's boxing skills.

However, on one occasion in my early teens, I actually did get into a toe to toe exchange of fists. Walking home from P.S. 45 I met some guys from the local Catholic school and while we generally all got along, there would occasionally be confrontations between the "catlics" and the "publics". This one took place in the middle of the street about a block from my house. My would-be opponent was a guy by the name of Artie Aragon (not to be confused with the great professional boxer of the 1950's Art Aragon). Artie was my size with red hair and a mouth that would not quit. He was a verbal bully. I can't recall the specific circumstances which triggered the fight. There was undoubtedly a verbal exchange. Such back and forth chatter could run the gamut from one's nationality to whether it was the mailman or the milk man who was your daddy. I also don't recall who threw the first punch; but before I knew it, the supreme test of my pugilistic skills was at hand. What followed was all instinctive and in slow motion. All Dad's great instruction and the experience gained from sparring with my brothers, went out the window. The fine art of the jab and the nuances of footwork were no where to be

seen. Instead I was squared up, presenting a big target to my opponent and swinging away. I was throwing lefts and rights like a windmill; displaying neither style nor strategy. The encounter probably lasted about three to five minutes but it seemed like a half hour. I can recall flailing away while desperately warding off my opponent's blows. After launching a dozen or so punches, most missing or bouncing off Artie's elbows, shoulders or sides, one punch landed squarely on his nose and there was a virtual explosion as blood gushed hither and yon. The next thing I remember was Artie lying on the pavement. To this day I don't know whether the blow put him out or he fainted upon seeing the blood and realizing it was his own!

After a minute or two Artie revived, sat up and with some assistance shakily got to his feet. He seemed to be OK other than the blood splatter on his white shirt and caked blood on his nostrils and lips. A dozen or so neighborhood kids had watched the melee and a few cheers from my public school friends greeted me as I walked away in a daze. I was in shock at what had happened. I had Artie's blood on my shirt and tie and when I reached home I went straight to my room to change clothes before my mother could get a look. Alone in the room I sat down on the bed, started to shake and broke into tears. What was wrong with me? I was the winner. This was not the way I was supposed to feel. I should be savoring my victory and not dwelling on the fact that I had injured another human being, perhaps badly. A couple of days later I found out that Artie's nose was not broken. However he did have a black eye or what we called a "shiner" or "mouse".

Years later a couple of my friends, who fought in the Police Athletic League's Golden Gloves boxing tournament encouraged me to join the program. But the experience fighting Artie was to be the sum total of my boxing career and I declined in the interest of damage control to myself and possibly others. Artie and I eventually became good

friends, despite my smashing his nose. Even more amazing is the fact that the friendship lasted beyond a football incident which occurred a couple of years later. During the fall and winter months we played “rough tackle” on a neighborhood sandlot. We would choose up sides, with 6 to 10 men on each team. Only a few of the guys could afford pads or helmets. On cold winter days, the ground was frozen solid and being knocked to the ground was like landing on pavement. It was a true test of one’s fortitude. On this occasion Artie was on the opposing team. He was a fast runner and strong for his size. I was playing safety, my job being to stop anyone who broke through the line. Early in the game Artie received the handoff, went left, successfully avoided a tackle or two and turning came toward me. I hit him waist high, but he did not go down, so I extended my leg and pushed him over it. Unfortunately his leg did not go with him and I heard a snap and a scream. I had done it again! I had put him in a cast for six weeks.

Those two violent episodes convinced me that a non contact sport such as baseball was probably what I should be playing and I’m sure that Artie was glad to hear of my decision! As much as I still enjoy watching a good professional fight I am still in awe of the courage of these warriors and humbled by the damage one punch can do.

Brenda

by Maria Daleo Baldasseroni

It was early Sunday morning and a lovely sunny day in the middle of the winter in Los Angeles, California. I was kneeled on my couch leaning outside my window watering my just bloomed, bright pink, orange and red geranium plants; the phone rang, it was my upstairs neighbor Meg; she sounded particularly stressed and agitated. “Hi honey, it’s me Meg. Am I disturbing you? I hope not”

Meg tends to be very intense, a single older lady living alone with her two dogs. She must have been a beautiful woman in her youth, her eyes are ice blue, the kind that gave her an intense but also scary look and granted her a lot of work as a horror movie actress. Unfortunately life wasn’t easy for her and she never made it big. This took a toll on her mental health and drove her to drink for many years. Now that she is older she is sober, but on antidepressants and she smokes like a chimney. Pru, her miniature pomeranian dog, is in and out of the vet for lungs problems. Meg gets easily transported and everything becomes a real drama with her. This time, though, I kind of knew it wasn’t a small matter what she had started describing to me on the phone. She was hyperventilating and was having a hard time letting the words out of her mouth.

“Oh God! I would feel terrible to bother you. But I have something important to tell you. Listen, I...I don’t know how to tell you this, but something very upsetting just happened to me and I thought you wanted to know what’s going on.”

“Meg, please calm down, breathe” I tried telling her “please or I cannot hear you, take a deep breath.”

As she calmed down enough to explain herself, she continued: “Oh my God! I just spent an hour talking with your friend Brenda, I met her outside the building, across the street as I was walking the dogs, she was devastated.”

Brenda, who lived on the fifth floor and below Meg's apartment, had spent an hour in front of her parked car explaining to her how she was feeling distraught because she was harassed and persecuted by certain people who were lasering her at night and couldn't sleep. For that reason, she explained, during nighttime she had to cover her head and all of her windows with silver foil. Brenda also desperately begged Meg to stop bringing so many men over her apartment because she kept hearing their loud voices all day long and it was disturbing to her, plus their back and forth walking was keeping her up at night. I don't think Meg has had a boyfriend in more than ten years.

Meg listened to all of this speechless and tried to stay calm until she ran up to her apartment and called me to share her astonishment with me. Honestly, I already felt that something was going on with Brenda, so I wasn't completely shocked hearing the kind of things that were coming out of her mouth.

Nonetheless this was my dear friend Brenda we were talking about. My lovely, older friend, late sixties, white hair, big smile, ex-hippie and flower child, who had lived in communes and raised her four kids against the system. Brenda, my Buddhist pal with whom I shared many profound thoughts and night talks, enjoying homemade pizza and red wine; with whom I had many girl talks in the early morning hours accompanied by fresh made coffee and French style croissants; my warm hearted and kind friend, Brenda.

A couple of years prior to that infamous morning, Brenda had moved into my building after having visited many other neighborhoods in Los Angeles. She had lost her apartment over an ownership change and increases of rent and had decided to move in a nice guesthouse behind her daughter's apartment in Eagle Rock. She had lived there merely a year and that's when she started asking me questions about my building and telling me she didn't like her daughter's neighborhood and all its ethnicities and wanted to try the Koreatown area. Having helped her tediously pack and unpack

all of her belongings during her moving, I knew how demanding, nerve wrecking and energy wrenching it had been for her; that is why I knew something was wrong with her. Being the private person she was, I didn't want to embarrass her by asking her too many questions and just accepted that she was ready to move again. I was trying to look at the bright side of her decision, I was happy she was going to be in my building, few floors above me, so easy to have her over for dinner and being able to visit often with her; isn't that what all decent and sociable people are looking for in a metropolis like Los Angeles? Someone you like and care about, living near you.

Well, as it turns out, the day my lovely friend Brenda moved on the fifth floor of my historical building nearby the beautifully green area of Hancock Park, was the beginning of a disturbing dark period for her. Literally dark: her lights were never on and her window shades were almost always shut. I never saw her. She strangely wouldn't return any of my phone calls. What was going on with her? Did I do something to push her away from me?

Few months passed and I finally crossed her in the hallway. I tried to figure out what was going on with her, but all she could tell me was that she was fine and she had simply forgot to return my calls, with a cold distance that was not appropriate to our friendship. She was giggling loudly, wearing a strong red lipstick I had never noticed on her before, and emanating a strong body odor all around her. No, she was not convincing me. Another day, I saw her entering the building with an older gentleman. They stepped inside the hall of our building and she introduced him to me as one of her best friends. I had never heard of him before, could she possibly have started seeing someone? No, I didn't think so...my mind was spinning around in circle because her behavior's change felt really strange.

That morning as my neighbor Meg was sharing her stunning and revealing encounter with Brenda, I couldn't help it but started crying. That phone call was the answer to all my questions about Brenda's behavior. I knew at that point that

I was losing my friend to some kind of mental illness. I ran to my bookshelf and picked up the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). I read, "Diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia include: a preoccupation with one or more delusions, frequent auditory hallucinations, social isolation and withdrawal, marked impairment in personal hygiene and grooming, blunted, inappropriate or silly affect".

Soon I found out many other people were aware of my friend's strange behavior: the building manager to whom she had complained many times about the many sleepless nights she had because of those neighbors persecuting her with lasers; the police officers from the station nearby, where she went different times to report those unnamed people torturing her in the darkness; and finally her daughter, whom I knew and decided to finally reach out to. Her daughter told me that Brenda had been behaving like that since she had moved into her neighborhood, and that is when she started experiencing serious episodes of paranoia about people of ethnicity and feelings of persecution. Her daughter was devastated and didn't know what to do; she told me her family was aware about her mom's mental health deteriorating and that they had taken her to different specialists about it. The doctors had talked about Paranoid Schizophrenia but they didn't know how to handle it. Her mom didn't want to take any medications and her children were scared of losing her if they would try to impose a forced lifestyle to a woman who had been free all her life.

As reported in the Mayo Clinic website: "Schizophrenia is a group of severe brain disorders in which people interpret reality abnormally. Schizophrenia is a chronic condition, requiring lifelong treatment." According to the online magazine "Psychology Today": "the advent of antipsychotic medication, advanced brain imaging, and molecular genetic studies has confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt that schizophrenia is a biological disease of the brain. Yet it is also recognized that psychological and social stresses can play an important role in triggering episodes of illness, and that

different approaches to treatment should be seen not as competing but as complementary. Thanks to this fundamental realization, the advent of antipsychotic medication, and the shift to care in the community, schizophrenia sufferers today stand a better chance than ever before of leading a healthy, productive, and fulfilling life. Also according to the DSM: "the first onsets of schizophrenia are usually around childhood or early adulthood."

Could this be an illness that my friend has had for a long time and has been a family's secret, which now just got out of hand? Brenda had been isolating and depressed and her daughter was very worried and desperate; she was so afraid one day her mother would just wander off and disappear. She told her mom that she could move in with her if she really didn't feel comfortable in my neighborhood anymore. Not long after that sunny Sunday morning Brenda started packing again, this time to move in with her daughter.

Time passed and after many phone calls unreturned, and finally a disconnected phone service, I have never heard back neither from Brenda nor her daughter. She vanished in the early morning fog of the Hollywood hills, or may be in the dusty and sandy long track of an Arizona railway, or even in the outskirts of Paris in the property of one of her sons, or could she be heavily medicated and locked in a facility for mentally ill people in Northern California? I don't know what happened to her, I think about her often and feel sad. I know she also disappeared from the Meditation center where she was going frequently, and probably there was nothing I could have done to help her or her family, but the truth is that I miss her greatly. I am also hurt that her daughter chose not to return any of my calls. I try to understand her difficulties and be compassionate about her unwillingness to give me any news of her mom, I hope and I pray that she and her family find peace soon.

BFF

by Dez Wilder

I haven't always felt this way. I haven't always sat through class gritting my teeth just waiting for my antipsychotics to kick in and take hold of me, dragging me down into blissful numbness by my ankles as I kick and scream, trying desperately to escape from their claws and from myself. It doesn't make sense. If I'm waiting for them then why am I trying to escape them? If I can think of nothing but the calm that they will surely bring, then why can't I simply welcome these feelings into my life instead of running away from them whenever they come too close?

I should have known that the feelings wouldn't last. I should have known that the peace I felt last week was to be short lived. Another week come and gone and the end result is still the same: so much anxiety that I could choke and die on its white hot thickness, and a deeper feeling that I can't seem to shake no matter how I try. It sits in the pit of my stomach like a vulture just waiting for me to breathe my last breathe and fall gasping to the floor, clutching desperately onto the last dreadful seconds of my pitiful existence. I'm yours for the taking. Come and get me, you scavenger, you sorrowful creature you. Your presence has always been intimately intertwined with death and how long can I hope to outrun you? The grim reaper of the living, breathing, world, you'll carry me off on the wings of death after you've picked my body apart and torn the flesh from my bones.

Escape can't lie within, it must come from without; from something outside of and beyond me. But what? What could possibly tear your claws out of my wounded soul? How can I ever hope to escape you? I've run to the ends of the earth and tricked myself countless times into believing that I'd left

you behind but you're always there, lingering somewhere deep inside, just waiting in the shadows for me to return home. I've never left you behind, just dragged you along with me wherever I have gone.

I hate you now, more than ever and more than anything. You keep me locked safely away from the rest of the world, in a prison of my own design, one that you've made certain is inescapable. Dark and cold, wet with sweat and rank with the scent of so much decaying human flesh, I sit curled into a heap on the ground of my cell waiting for something or someone to save me from myself; and from you, you monster.

But you are my best friend. You will never let me go because you are the only one who would never think of abandoning me, no matter how disgraceful or disgusting I may become in my own eyes and in the eyes of the world. You will always be there, waiting for me to crawl back to you, frightened and wounded by the world and the creatures who dwell there.

Who are these people? Laughing, singing, holding hands and floating through life from one joyous moment to the next. How? They've never had you for a friend. They've never known the warmth of your sweet embrace, have never held you tightly in their arms as they sank into the darkness of blissful ignorance only to remain there as the years dragged slowly by. They have never known your pain and they have never experienced the taste of fulfillment that you dangle just beyond my reach.

I have tasted it. I have become fat on your pleasure, on your false hope. I have come to love it, cherish it, to need it with every fiber of my being, only to have it torn away from my trembling hands in my darkest hour. You left me with nothing but the emptiness of your presence and I hate you almost as much as I love you for it. Almost.

You were never really there at all. But oh to feel for a moment as though I was different from everyone else in a way that made me proud to be alive simply because I had you by my side. To walk into a room and know that I had something that they did not, what a splendid feeling. One that resonates deep inside of me as the malicious smirk of you spreads across my face. What do I have now, now that these feelings have been taken away, now that I'm only separated from everyone else by the black broken heart still beating in my chest although the light behind my eyes has most certainly burned out?

I have you. Always and forever, till death do us part. But you're not the one that you used to be. You've always been dangerous, always been the very thing that is going to kill me quickest; but you were going to do it softly, taking me gently out of this world and into the next on your feathered back. You were going to kill me with a smile on my face and confidence in my heart. Now you're going to sink your claws into me and tear me limb from limb as I cry out into the cold nothingness of the night.

You're unhappy. Unhappy that I've put myself in a position to have you torn away from me. Unhappy that I've tried to kill you and move on with my life. How could I try to kill my best friend? Funny, I could ask you the very same question. You struck first, I was only defending myself. Defending myself and perhaps standing up for a life free from torment for the very first time.

You're perched in my throat now, like a lump that refuses to let me swallow, just waiting for me to die without you by my side. But I'm here to tell you that you will starve to death before I give up this fight. You've always been there in the shadows, steering me closer to death with each passing moment, but I've begun to crawl back toward the light of

life and I will use everything that you've taught me to rid my existence of you forever more.

You taught me to endure. You taught me that I have the strength to endure the pain of you and to triumph against all odds, dragging you along with me. The odds are still stacked against me but for the first time I'm playing for the right team. For the first time I'm trying to leave you behind without running away myself. It's the most painful thing I've ever done, far more painful than you could ever be. But you taught me that I can endure.

I know that you're not going anywhere anytime soon. It's fine, stay glued to your perch. I've waited this long, and forever isn't so far away.

Some Girls (names have been changed)

by *Anonymous*

Rehab, psych ward, treatment center-- there are many polite terms for it. People in uniforms strap your arms and legs to a gurney and wheel you into an ambulance even if you're not actually dying, because some blood is invisible. People in uniforms give you a new room (no locks, no keys), new clothes, new rules. People in uniforms give you new prescriptions and new names for yourself. You start to hear adults talk about you only in whispers, until the whispering gets stuck in your head. In this case, a young girl is both the patient and the frightened person in the waiting room.

The adolescent girls' ward of an old psychiatric home near my parents' house was where I met Mandy Vargas, someone who stands out in my amnesia. A tomboy with a delicate face, long low ponytail, and glowing eyes like amber stars. Mandy was the same age as me-- sixteen-- and also had a broken reality. Unlike me, Mandy had to have her stomach pumped in the emergency room because she swallowed a bottle of rubbing alcohol until it blurred her vision and drew blood from her throat. The last thing she remembered, she told me, was flowers-- then blackness.

A blackness had been growing inside of me as long as I can remember until it finally took over. My proclamation that I was going to kill myself warranted a 51-50, involuntary 72-hour-hold. Doctors called it "major depression", then they called it "psychotic depression", at last they called it "bipolar disorder", and the pills flowed accordingly-- forcibly, if I angrily refused. Many people were fighting for my life. I just wanted to die.

In one of my old journals there's a long entry about Mandy, written after my first stay. Dated January 4th, 2007, it says:

"This afternoon Mandy has her head in her hands, crying across the smooth tan table, with her half-eaten cake and half-empty styrofoam cup of Hawaiian Punch in front of her.

"You hold it in a lot, huh?" I ask her, unsure of what else to say.

Mandy nods. I continue to sit and stare, distant. I sit and stare like I've sat and stared for the past four days. Mandy heaves a heavy breath, I know she is trying to stop crying.

'What's wrong with me?' she sobs, shaking to the core.

'What's wrong with me!' she sinks in her chair.

'Why am I like this?' she wraps her arms around her legs and rests her head on her knees, hopelessly.

I sat and stared, wanting to say more.

How I see myself in her."

Mandy and I left the mental hospital on the same day, and on that day we swore we would come back for each other. I came back twice but I never found her again.

There was Jane, who told me she was there because she got up in the middle of class and started banging her head against the wall over and over, and wouldn't stop. So her school district sent her over. She wasn't crazy, not exactly like me or Mandy. She was leaving soon. Her first stay was her last and some girls are lucky like that. I never saw Jane again, either, but I keep a picture she drew for me with elephants and bumblebees and my name on it. It's taped to my armoire mirror where my face would be reflected.

There are hundreds of other faces from that place and places like it, blurring together, lost in the vagueness. I remember Sara, the sleepy lush, detoxing, drooling onto her pillows for days. Nancy ate a big plate of french fries on Friday and nothing else for the rest of the week. A girl with bright red hair like a bird used to hear music that nobody else could hear. Most girls leave the hospital eventually. They leave and maybe they're okay. I hope they all make it out of themselves alive.

Some girls had insomnia though. Like ghosts, they'd wan-

der aimlessly up and down the hallway. I heard them while I rested in my assigned bed, trying to sort out the confused scratching of my own ears. They'd whimper in their rooms long past midnight. Wailing against the walls, mad in the wolfish dark. I can hear them still. They are weeping, everyone, keeping me awake. Even in my dreams they keep me awake.

White Butterfly

by Bané Obrenovich

Rick died this morning. No; he was found dead this morning; he probably died 4 or 5 days ago, that's what the cop said. Yes, I haven't seen him that long; I did not think anything of it. I did notice the smell coming from below my apartment, and now the realization of what that smell was is choking me. Tom, who lives in the apartment next to Rick's, did think something was wrong. It was him who jumped over the patio fence, went inside Rick's apartment, and found his body on the bathroom floor. The vent and the gap below the door were stuffed with towels; the incense had burned out days ago; the carbon monoxide that took Rick away probably still lingered.

I did not notice that he was missing. I did not see him for several days, and I did not think of him.

The cop stood outside Rick's door smoking a cigarette. Not for pleasure, it was obvious. "This is my fourth suicide this week," he said absentmindedly. I am not used to seeing cops like this. He was waiting for the coroner to show up and take over. But there was nothing mechanical or official about him. He was a human being. He was looking down, smoking his cigarette.

Rick sat in his bathroom with burning incense, with towels keeping the smoke inside, and waited for death. Alone. He was alone. And now I am suffocating too.

We became friends months ago. We were just neighbors first. Then my small home business picked up pace, and I asked him if he would like a part-time job helping me with

some administrative stuff. He said, absolutely. He was unemployed for too long. I did not think of it at the time, but it must have meant a lot to him. And I remember how in that first conversation he made a point to mention that he was gay, as if to test waters if I was OK with that. Why would I not be?

And he was very diligent in his work. It was simple stuff, working with templates for a newsletter. But he was very diligent, and he took it very seriously. We became friends. He would walk up the stairs from his apartment to bring me the memory stick with completed files, and then we would sit in my living room and chat about life. He told me of his growing up in Yakima and how in a small community like that gay kids had a sort of secret society. No one dared come out publicly, so they had secret gatherings or parties at someone's house. I asked if it was hard keeping a secret like that, and he said no, it was kind of exciting, like belonging to an exclusive club. He moved to Seattle to pursue theater, then to L.A. He showed me pictures of him on the stage, and most of the time he was in drag. A big, beautiful, chubby woman, with rosy cheeks and Doris Day hair. I wondered if his performances were at a real theater or just at a gay bar, but I did not want to offend him with the question.

He was dead. Covered with a police sheet on a bathroom floor. He killed himself, like his brother did years ago. But he told me that suicide kills more than one person! He told me that his brother's death meant the death of a big part of his mother, and his father, and Rick. He told me himself that suicide wrecks everything around. And he still did it...

He would clip restaurant coupons from junk mail, and every week we would go to a different local restaurant that offered buy-one-get-one free deal. My brother would make silly comments about me hanging out with a gay guy, and am I heading the side way? When I was younger that sort of

comment would have made me uncomfortable, and I would have probably stopped hanging out with "a gay guy." But thank God I managed to grow up, and Rick was my friend, and I loved him as a friend, and silly comments from my brother did not change anything.

Several weeks ago my work changed and I told Rick that I would not need his help with that any more. I did not think. I was not thinking. He was OK with that, he said. He would look for a more permanent job. I said my former boss was a consultant, and that he worked with small businesses, and they frequently needed administrative assistants. Rick said he would love an admin job. I promised I would ask my old boss to find something for Rick.

I did not do it right away. Rick asked me a week ago if there were any news about the admin jobs, and I said I forgot to ask, and that I would, and I called my old boss and left him a voice mail. But I did not follow up. I was too busy with my own stuff. Too busy to think about Rick.

He gave no impression of being depressed. In fact, after a long drought he finally started seeing someone. He confided in me that he joined a dating site, and that when he received a first reply to his ad he got scared. The man who replied sent a picture, and Rick said the man was young, good looking and in shape. Rick was very self conscious about his weight. He said he immediately sent his own picture, and wrote that he is overweight, and pretty much described himself as some old, fat, forest monster. The other man liked that, and they met, and they started dating. I thought Rick was happy.

But he killed himself.

His suicide note did not say much. He wrote that he was "facing failing health and failing hopes." He purchased his

own cremation with some organization that does that sort of thing and takes ashes to the ocean. He did not want his death to be a burden on anyone. The cop read the note to me, and Tom, and the toothless Dolores from across the way. And the three of us then exchanged some words that I don't recall as the cop went to greet the coroner who just arrived. And then Tom, and the toothless Dolores, and I sat on the stairs looking at the driveway. Like three birds wet from the rain we sat there next to each other saying nothing.

The coroner took Rick away. The animal control people took Rick's dog. I excused myself and left Tom and Dolores on the stairs with each other and their thoughts.

I could have helped Rick. He was alone. I could have been a better friend; I should have seen the sadness, the desperation. If I could have helped him with that fucking job, maybe that would have been a ray of hope enough to pull him back from the brink. I could have continued giving him that stupid part time work, instead of being too fucking wrapped up in my own bullshit thinking about changing this and improving that. He was fucking dead now. He could have still been here. We could have gone to another cheap restaurant with his half off coupon and talked about life. But now there's only death. What is that expression about the straw that broke the camel's back? If I had helped him with that fucking job, maybe that would have been that all fucking important straw removed from the burden. I was not thinking. I was not seeing.

That night in bed I cried for the second time in my adult life. The first and only previous time was at my mother's funeral. I cried for Rick. For my fat gay friend who described himself as a fat forest monster. God, I was such a fucking asshole. He could have still been here. He was all alone in that bathroom. He was probably crying too. He was all alone. He died alone.

Tonight I dreamt of walking through a green forest, and I came upon a clearing. There was green grass, and flowers, and sun was shining from above. And the birds were chirping to each other, and gentle wind was rustling the leaves. Then a small group of butterflies came flying happily over the flowers. There were seven or eight of them, and they were all white. And there was a little fat butterfly with them who was slower and would fall behind. But the other butterflies waited for him until he caught up, and would then fly together for a little while. And then the little fat butterfly would fall behind again, and they waited for him again, and then they happily continued on together. He was one of them. He belonged. They would not leave him behind. They loved him. And he knew that he was loved.

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And to all the writers and artists
who submitted their work.

Associate in Arts Degree

English Literature

Courses in this area of emphasis encompass traditional literary history and interpretation as well as cross-cultural inquiry and current theoretical debates. Literature majors are trained in critical reading, writing and thinking, as well as in literary interpretation. Literature is the study of representation, ideas, language, and culture. As such, it is a source of knowledge and pleasure, as well as a field of study. Literary texts are social documents in artistic form that speak to us as much about historical issues as about aesthetic matters. Literature students learn to think critically and to understand the role that texts play in a given society, past or present.

Requirements

- Students must complete a minimum of sixty (60) units. These units must meet PCC's General Education Requirements and must include eighteen units in the area of emphasis.
- **To complete the eighteen units in the area of emphasis, students must complete English 1C or English 26 and fifteen (15) units consisting of courses from at least three of the five categories listed below and including a minimum of two Literary Survey courses. Each course must be completed with a grade of "C" or better.**
- The courses that universities and colleges require for transfer vary. In selecting literature courses, students should consult with Counseling Services to determine the particular transfer requirements of specific transfer institutions.

English Literature courses offered at Pasadena City College

Literary Survey:

Engl 30A	American Literature	3
Engl 30B	American Literature	3
Engl 30C	American Literature	3
Engl 44B	World Literature	3
Engl 44C	World Literature	3
Engl 46A	English Literature	3
Engl 46B	English Literature	3

Gender and Ethnic Literature:

Engl 24	Lit in Translation	3
Engl 25C	Women in Literature	3
Engl 47	Mexican/Chicano Lit	3
Engl 48	Asian Literature	3
Engl 50	Afro-American Lit	3
Engl 51	Native American Lit	3
Engl 52	Asian-American Lit	3

Literary Origins:

Engl 44A	World Literature	3
Engl 45A	Literature of the Bible	3
Engl 45B	Literature of the Bible	3
Engl 78A	Intro to Shakespeare	3
Engl 78B	Intro to Shakespeare	3
Engl 82A	Intro to Mythology	3
Engl 82B	Intro to Mythology	3
Engl 82C	Intro to Mythology	3

Genre and Modes in Literature:

Engl 25A	Modern Literature	3
Engl 25D	Science Fiction/Fantasy	3
Engl 25E	Literature of Horror	3
Engl 25F	Comedy and Literature	3
Engl 25G	Mystery/Crime Fiction	3
Engl 49A	Film as Dramatic Lit	3
Engl 49B	Film as Dramatic Lit	3
Engl 53	Interpreting Poetry	3
Engl 57	Modern Drama	3
Engl 60	Masterpieces of Drama	3
Engl 61	Intro to the Novel	3

Special Topics in Literature:

Engl 25H	American Journeys	3
Engl 25I	Post-Colonial Lit	3
Engl 25J	Utopian/Dystopian Lit	3
Engl 26	Intro to Lit. Theory	3
Engl 54	California Literature	3
Engl 59	Children's Literature	3
Engl 34	Major Novelist	1
Engl 35	Major Dramatist	1
Engl 36	Major Poet	1
Engl 37	Major Critic	1

Creative Writing

at Pasadena City College

English 5A (Creative Writing)

Prerequisite: Eligibility for English 1B. Creative literary expression; short story, poetry and essay. Individual experimentation with various forms; students evaluate their work and work of classmates in light of contemporary writings. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC. *CAN: ENGL 6.*

English 5B (Creative Writing)

Prerequisite: English 5A, 6, 7 or 8. Creative literary expression such as: short story, poetry, dramatic form and essay. The focus is on in-depth criticism of student work and professional writers. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

English 6 (Short Story Writing)

Prerequisite: Eligibility for English 1B. Theory and practice in writing the short story. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

English 7 (Inscape Magazine Publication)

Prerequisite: Engl 1A. Critical review and selection of creative material; design and layout of a literary magazine. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

English 8 (Writing Poetry)

Prerequisite: Eligibility for English 1A. Writing of poetry in all forms. Reading of traditional and current work. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

English 9 (Creative Nonfiction)

Prerequisite: Engl 1A. Writing and analysis of creative nonfiction such as memoirs, reviews, profiles, and nature writing. *Transfer Credit: CSU; UC*

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