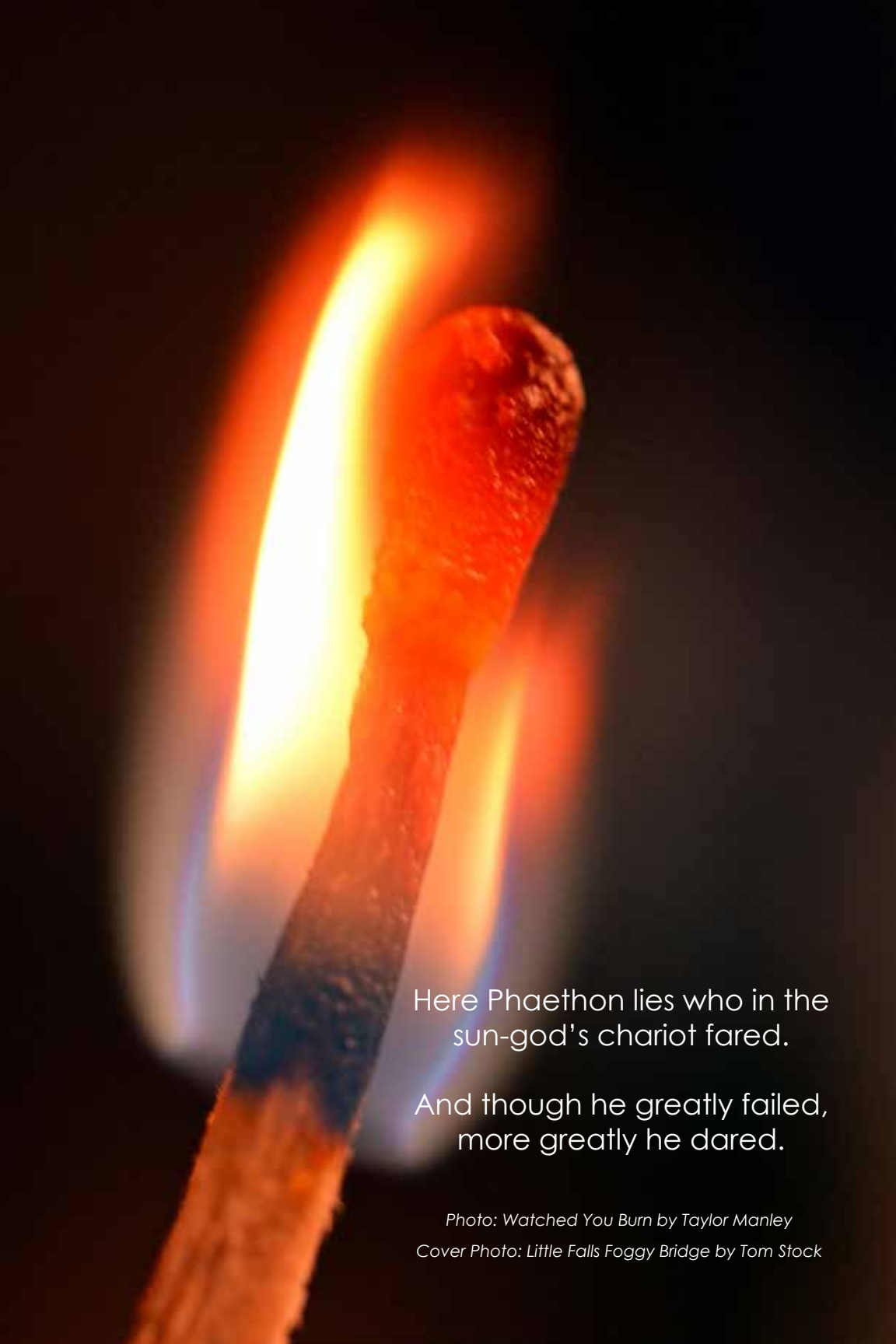


A long, empty road with a row of street lamps on the right side, receding into the distance under a hazy sky. The street lamps are black with ornate, curved tops and white globe lights. The road has white lane markings and a metal guardrail on the right. The sky is a uniform, pale, hazy color.

PHAETHON



Here Phaethon lies who in the
sun-god's chariot fared.

And though he greatly failed,
more greatly he dared.

Photo: Watched You Burn by Taylor Manley

Cover Photo: Little Falls Foggy Bridge by Tom Stock





The Fall of Phaeton by Rubens

About Phaethon

The myth of Phaethon is simple. He seeks to know his father. So he asks his mother Clymene, and she tells him his father is none other than Apollo, the god of the sun. Phaethon goes to Apollo and asks for some proof of their relationship, and Apollo says he will grant him one wish. Phaethon wishes to drive Apollo's chariot that pulls the sun across the sky. The only being that can do this successfully is Apollo himself. Not even Zeus can pull the sun across the sky. Knowing this, Apollo tries to dissuade Phaethon from this task. This does not work, and Phaethon is placed in charge of the chariot and its horses that breathe fire. Doomed from the start, Phaethon loses control of the chariot and nearly burns up the Earth. The Earth cries out to Zeus for help, and Zeus strikes Phaethon dead with a thunderbolt. Phaethon, now a falling star, plunged into the river Eridanos still ablaze. His epitaph reads:

*Here Phaethon lies who in the sun-god's chariot fared.
And though he greatly failed, more greatly he dared.*

In the spirit of this figure, we at the Phaethon value bold, confident, daring, courageous, and risky fiction, poetry, and art. Phaethon is not a tragic figure. His actions, that of a mere mortal, for a brief moment of time are equal to an immortal. He did something no other mortal, or immortal for that matter, could ever do. His confidence, courage, and daring are an inspiration to all of us. We too, if we risk our very lives, can be gods.

So we want pieces that challenge, inspire, stump, and move us. We crave new expression. New ideas. New connections. We do not value art that tests the boundaries of expression. We value art that obliterates them.

Faculty Advisors

Matthew Powers
Andrew Devitt
Blake Pitcher

All content within is the property of the
respective author.

VISUAL EDITORS

JONATHAN O'CONNELL

SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

ANTHONY MASI

DIGITAL FILMMAKING

JARED ROMAN

DIGITAL FILMMAKING

FICTION EDITOR

LORA ANDELA

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

CONTRIBUTORS

ROBINSON BAUTISTA, Science

BRANDON BEVINGTON, Radio-Television

VICKI BROWN, Dir. of Student Activities

DOM CASTELLANO, Humanities

NICHOLAS CICCARELLI, Business Admin.

THEODORE J. COOK, General Studies

ALEXA CRIPPS, Art Studies

WILLIAM DANIELS, General Studies

CHOE DECKER, Social Science

WENLIN DENG, General Studies

RANDI FARRIS, Fine Arts

GUIHUA GAN, General Studies

SALIH GARRET, General Studies

JADRIEN GORDON, General Studies

DUSTIN HUNTER, General Studies

JONATHAN JENSEN, Art Studies

JUNIOR JOHNSON, Fine Arts

TAYLOR LAWTON, Science

TAYLOR MANLEY, New Media

ELIZABETH MCDONALD, Non-matriculated

SHARON MCDONALD, Fashion Buying & Merch.

SHAUN MCGRAW, New Media

ABIGAIL MONICA, General Studies

DAVID MONTGOMERY, General Studies

BRYAN PRESTON, General Studies

XIAOXI QIN, Fine Arts

MELANIE QUILL, General Studies

JERRY ROSARIO, Accounting

CHRISTOPHER SALAMONE, Fine Arts

LEIW SAY, Fine Arts

ALYSSA SCHMIDT, Fine Arts

EMMA SMITH, EMT/Paramedic

TOM STOCK, Active Day Dreamer & Theorist

WALLY SZAREK, Social Science

JODI WHEELER, General Studies

fiction

8

Warren
Jodi Wheeler

20

Letters
Brandon Bevington

26

A Voice in the Dark
Wally Szarek

34

Best Day of My Life
Nicholas Ciccarelli

36

Unborn
Chloe Decker

41

A Note, Not Suicidal
Brandon Bevington

48

**The Reality of All
Happy Endings**
Elizabeth McDonald

72

The Baby
Emma Smith

76

Corruption
Dom Castellano

82

**Expert from a Literary
Work in Progress**
Jadrien Gordon

88

Until Valhalla
Bryan Preston

play

104

**The Other Side
of the Curtain**
Theodore J. Cook

poetry

18

Same Old Bird
Tom Stock

68

**Wilfred Owen Exploding
in His Head**
Tom Stock

101

**When a Tree Falls
in the Forest...**
David Montgomery

creative non-fiction

30

**A Product of my
Environment**
Robinson Bautista

70

**Completing College--
Behind the Wall**
Salih Garret

96

**Five Years of Prison and
Growing Up**
William Daniels

artwork

19

The Goat
Dustin Hunter

25

Tower Vase
Sharon McDonald

32

Symmetry
Vicki Brown

33

Victorian Tower
Alyssa Schmidt

35

**Sunrise on the Erie
Canal**
Tom Stock

46

Human Race
Shaun McGraw

46

Untitled Works
Randi Farris

53

Forest Goddess
Alyssa Schmidt

54

Photographs
Taylor Manley

60

Ceramic Heads
Various Contributors

68

Squid Brains
Abigail Monica

71

Untitled
GuiHua Gan

75

Lighthouse
Melanie Quill

87

Untitled Artwork
Alyssa Schmidt

100

Lost in the Lake
Vicki Brown

102

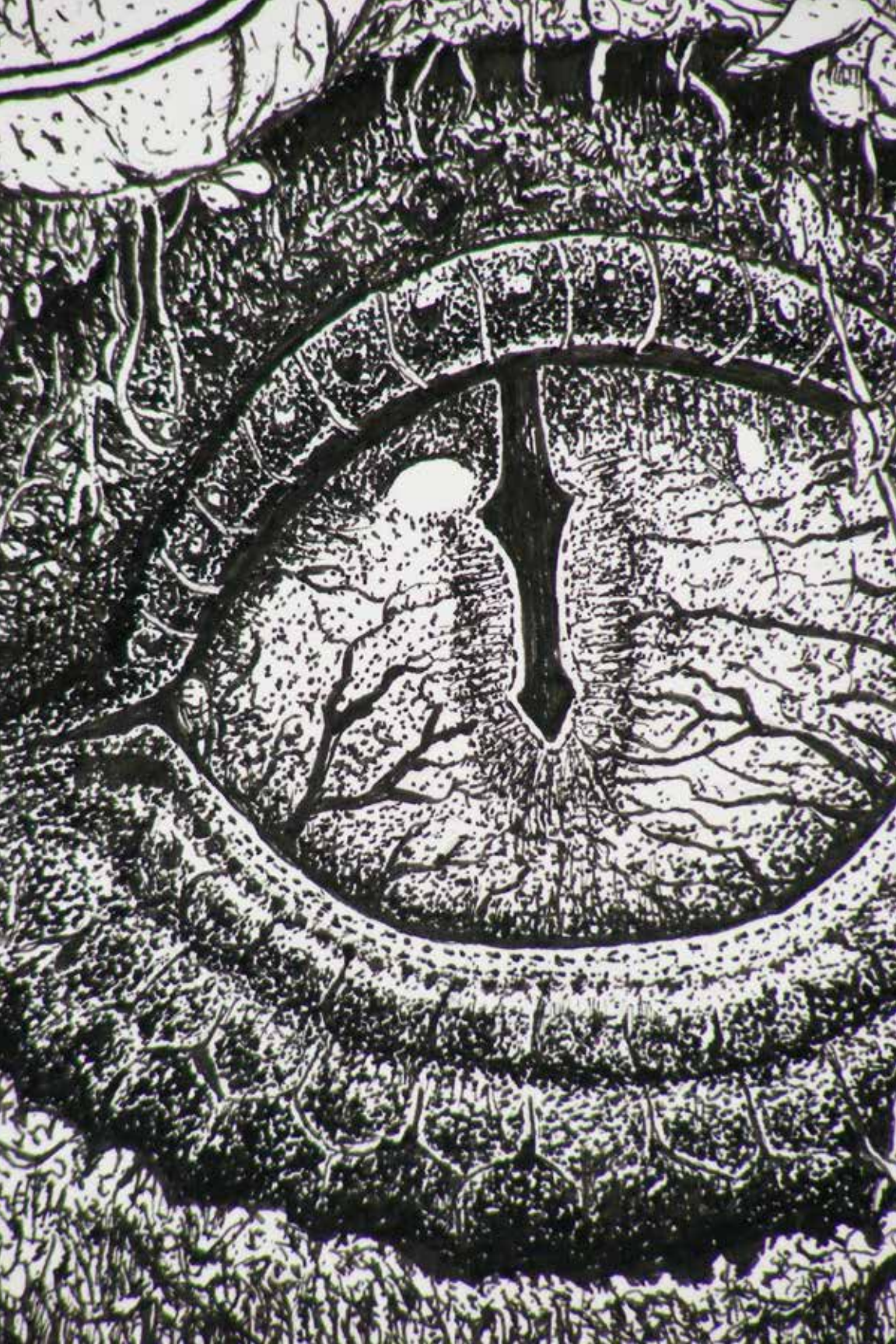
Sketchboard
Various Contributors

118

Untitled Artwork
GuiHua Gan

GuiHua Gan





Warren

Jodi Wheeler

A soft buzz, a fly, caught within a spider's snare, was the first thing that I heard that morning, not so long ago. It was also the first noise I heard this morning, which is funny, but not really at all. Images of times gone by flow quickly into my mind's eye and pierce me. You can take all your bad dreams, all the pain of the memories and tuck them into a little box, pack it away into the deepest part of your mind, and just forget. Not even that can help me now. I roll over in my too small bed and peek out through the folds of my well-loved blanket, between the faded curtains covering the window, outside. My eyes adjusting to the gray dawn of a new day. My stomach lurches, out of nowhere, a great heave sends me sprinting to the bathroom. I knew that I'd be giving up at least half my morning to last night's bottle. I flip the fluorescent light above the sink and look in the mirror as I take few quick breaths. I watch my pupils contract in the reflection. Faded brown hair, hanging damply around my pale face. Dark lashes, blue eyes.

"Good morning Ladies and gentlemen! It's going to be another chilly one today here in...." The too happy, too loud morning radio DJ blared from my alarm clock.

His voice snaps short with a static snap after I fly across the room and turn it off. Shit.

6:00 a.m. I should get ready for work.

Showered and dressed, jeans, a t-shirt with some long-faded tour logo splashed across the front. I toss my hair back in to a ponytail and check my mascara in the hall mirror as I leave.

Twenty minutes later I pull into the long, gravel driveway and park behind the old, square house. I take a breath before I open the door of my electric blue Geo and then my sneakers crunch on the pebble stone driveway as I get out. I should have grabbed my coat, damn, I always forget. The air was brisk, crisp leaves like shattered rainbows dance across my

path as I hurry to the back door.

I close my eyes for a moment and get stuck in a memory...

...there. At the house. It looms above me and casts its imposing shadow harshly, darkly, across my path. It's not like any other day in time, I can feel it as I walk to the door. A malevolent vibration seems to pulse from the house. I hid the frown on my face and swiftly stepped into the house.

"Finally!" She says as she rolls her eyes and opens the sliding glass doors in the kitchen. Beth darts out and quickly lights up a smoke, inhaling deeply.

"Good morning to you too Beth, long night?" I mumble under my breath, knowing already how her night had been. I can hear a muffled scream, that of a tortured soul, rising through the floors below. Beth must have heard it too, she flew back through the sliding doors and bolts from the room, red hair streaking out behind her.

Jack sits at the well-worn wooden table, he never even flinched. He looks calm today I think to myself as I slip my keys around my wrist. He just sat there, staring out the window, hands folded gently in front of him, three empty chairs surrounding him. I turn to stand at the short counter top, tucked into a corner, behind the massive kitchen door. Carefully, but with fingers long accustomed to the task, I begin to unlock the faded blue cabinet before me.

Peter Billian III. Typed neatly across the worn label of the first red plastic bin, on the first shelf, behind the coded and locked doors. Male, age 53, moderately mentally disabled, schizophrenic, prone to violent fits of anger, the list goes on. He was also a dwarf.

Pop! Pop! Pop! I push the pills through the foil backside of the bubble card that they come in. They rattle around in the little plastic cup as I count them. Check. Check. Check. I initial the little squares next to his name, under today's date, in a thick, plastic covered binder, seams splitting.

I knew, without looking, that he was already sitting in the little metal chair at the end of the counter. He always shuffled in right on time, Peter

couldn't read time though. Shoulders hunched, soft, gray hair receding. He never says much, he has no teeth. It had previously been allowed, removing one's teeth to expedite the feeding process, in the state hospitals that have long since closed.

I held my arms out to him, small pill filled cup in one, water cup in the other.

With crack-skinned hands he tossed back the pills, sipped the water.

"Open up Pete, you know the drill." I urged him. He opened his mouth, wide, dry lips stretching, and lifted his tongue.

"Okay, you're good." I said to him. He ambled off to place his cup in the sink.

Two more. I had been hoping for a quiet morning. I heard the screams again, issuing forth from the dark corners below.

Drew Stevenson. I pulled the second, red plastic bin, pill cards threatening to spill out, off the first shelf. Male, age 19, moderately mentally disabled, intermittent explosive disorder, paranoia and delusions, exhibits violence against others and himself. He's just one of the reasons why we had to double lock all the kitchen knives and scissors. And pens. And all the other silverware.

Drew walked in, dark hair disheveled, pants hanging too low. A smile played across his face that day, just before he took his place in the little chair. Drew was adopted as an infant. His parents must have been so disappointed. They rescinded their legal obligations and he was declared a ward of the state at just three years old. His adoptive mother found him, skull split open, playing in his own blood, not one tear shed.

He had done this to himself, repetitively pounding his head against his own bedpost.

Pop! Pop! Pop! Check, check, check.

"Can you hear my song?" He asked. Looking intently at my face as I handed him his pills. Eyes darting quickly from side to side.

“What song is that Drew? I don’t hear any music.” I remember replying. I can only hear the screams Drew, only the growls.

“No! You can hear it! You can hear my song!” He plead with me, voice breathless as the volume rose, rocking in his chair, pills forgotten in his hand.

O’ man. Not today.

“Yes, yes, Drew, I hear your song, is it the one about the mockingbird?” I asked him, having no idea what he was talking about. He stared back at me with dead eyes, unblinking, liquid pools of sickness, and said nothing.

He swallowed his pills, sipped his water, stood abruptly and walked to the sink.

He paused, only long enough to whisper at Jack, who was still sitting at the table.

“Do you hear her Jack? Eh, buddy? Dumb bitch wants to talk about fuck-ing mockingbirds.” He hissed quietly, vehemently. He strutted through the arched doorway leading to the rear of the house. Jacks hands started to chase each other around the ends of his wrists like tethered squirrels.

Jack Baker, third red bin from the left. Male, age 39, also moderately mentally disabled, autistic tendencies, multiple personality disorder, paranoia, violent outbursts.

Pop! Pop! Pop! The foil backing split as I deftly shot the colored discs of happiness and hope into the little cup. Check. Check. Check.

“Your turn Jack. Come on over.” I coaxed.

Heavy footfalls overhead, that had to be Drew. Glass splintered, I knew the sound. That was the fourth and fifth window this week I thought, shaking my head. I heard the racing footfalls that could only have been Beth and Dylan. Dylan hadn’t been with us long then, but he seemed like a good kid, strong.

Softer thumps from the carpeted floor above. Drew had no doubt been contained, restrained. Beth holding one arm out from his side while

Dylan held the other, both leaning in on Drews' lower body with the weight of their hips, as he lay flat on his back, probably staining the carpet with bloody hands.

Jack slid over to the end of the counter and sat in the chair. His fingers twisting crazily around one another. Eyelids fluttering rapidly like the new wings of a butterfly.

He took a deep breath and looked at me, no expression on his lined face, and said, "I'm sorry." He said nothing more, nothing less. Chills crept steadily up my spine.

A most disturbing noise came to us then. A lowly animal growl that seemed to be increasingly menacing. Ripping loudly from the chest of its owner.

Jack took the cup of pills when I handed it to him but he seemed to have gone off to another place. Who knew who he'd be when he came back to us.

Pills swallowed, water sipped, Jack lifted from the chair and ambled to the sink. On his way past me, as he left the kitchen, he was humming. The mumbled notes touched me, such sadness, what was the name of that song? It had come to me then, a long-lost memory of an old movie. Jack had been humming the old schoolyard rhyme,

"One..... two..... he's coming for you...three....four...better lock the door....." The notes faded into the recess of my mind.

It was time. Time.

The fourth bin, black, unlike the others. The name Warren Ewin scrawled across the front in red sharpie. Male, age 42. Severely mentally disabled, intermittent explosive disorder, bi-polar, paranoid schizophrenic, delusional, mute, a danger to himself and to others, more often to others. He was a biter. There was an entirely different protocol put in to place for Warren.

I grabbed his bin. Pop. Pop! Pop. Check. Check. Check. Pop. Pop. Check. Check. Over and again. Fourteen pills piled into the bottom of a lidded

plastic cup. I unlocked a small refrigerator under the counter. I removed three medicine bottles. Lorazepam,

Ativan, Benadryl. I filled the syringe, capped it, placed it in my pocket.

I took the pills and the syringe with me as I securely locked the medicine cabinet. I grabbed and filled a water bottle and left the kitchen. Through the dining room, through the sitting room, down a long hall and I was there. Standing in front of the splintered, yet repaired, door. I knocked once on the door and it was swung open, inward, its edges disappearing into the dim light. James held the door for me as I entered and descended several steps.

It was dark, the cavernous room was kept cold. The small amount of light filtered in through the barred windows and was cast from the lamp in the corner. There was a single bed in the room, a single chair. No adornments or decorations graced the top of the lonely dresser. No photos or papers, no T.V.

“How is he today James?” I asked, knowing full well the answer. Warren had been screaming and growling and moaning all night long.

“He’s pissed.” was James’ only reply. It was almost a game, or a joke, every day the same. I stepped further into the bleak room and looked for him. Warren was quiet, you wanted to see him first.

Ah, there he was, my heart skipped a beat as I saw him. Warren. Warren, standing there under the shadowed light passing through the windows. Standing there so straight and so still, tall, one could barely see his chest rise with breath. He was always dressed in black, top to bottom, not that he cared. It beat scouring blood stains. He had dark eyes, unreadable eyes with heavy dark brows. If the eyes really were the windows to the soul then Warrens insides were nothing more than death, and rot, and decay.

Evil emanated from him, I felt it every day, crackling though the air. He stood there now, outlined against the early morning sun, rays streaming in and glancing off his helmet. His Kevlar helmet with a plexiglas mouth guard. This wasn’t a bike helmet, more like a bear trap. This contraption was hinged at the top, coming down over his head like a

clam shell, straps locking on the backside. Even with the mouth guard he could squeeze, just barely, the longest of his fingers up and over the edge. He seemed to enjoy chewing his fingertips until they were nothing more than torn flesh. Blood dripped slowly from his right hand as he stood there that day, uncaring. Warren was missing the entire fourth finger of his left hand. Before his helmet wearing days he reportedly bit and gnawed and chewed and ground that finger down until there was nothing left, not even a stump. He was mute but would smile and laugh—almost, creepy, scary, the epitome of evil.

“Warren?” I called. He turned slowly toward me, slack lips, blood in his mouth.

Dylan had come in to the room and was slowly circling around behind me, to my left. James had left his post at the door and was on my right side, fading into the shadows. The chair was in front of me, between Warren and myself. I watched his body tense as I took a step toward him. “Warren? Could you come sit in the chair for me please?” I gestured toward the seat as I took another step toward him. Warren began to growl, deep in his chest, barely perceptible. I stopped when I was standing next to the chair, Dylan and James coming closer, treading softly.

Warren didn’t move, except he was trembling if you looked closely, a low tremor. We knew that every muscle in his body was coiled. As he stood there seemingly so still, staring at me.

He stepped toward the chair, every movement wrought with tension. With breaths held we waited for him to sit. Which he did. Stiffly, he sat in the chair in the darkened room while animal growls began to rip lowly from his throat.

James, the biggest of the three of us, moved behind the chair where Warren sat shuddering. He slowly crossed Warrens arms over his torso, left wrist to right hip, right wrist to left hip. James knelt behind the chair, shoulder braced against the back, and slowly encircled Warrens wrists with his hands. Dylan stood above James with his hands poised to release the snaps at the back of the helmet. Warren remained, barely breathing, as Dylan released the first clip and its heavy snap echoed in

the room. I moved to stand in front of Warren as Dylan continued to release clips. The moment Dylan released the last one Warren heaved a large sigh and his entire body relaxed, like a pressure valve relieved. Now he sat motionless, muscles relaxed as the helmet was removed. He smiled as I stepped closer, pills and water bottle in hand. Warren raised his head, leveled his black eyes on my face and snarled, lips curling. Pink spittle dripped from his chin. I took another step forward. Dylan deftly secured the belts around Warren's ankles.

"Warren? Could you open your mouth for me please? It's time for you to take your meds." I placed the water bottle on the carpet and snapped back the lid of the pill cup. Warren tilted his head back, jaw dropping. His dead eyes followed my every move. Extending my arm, I tapped pills from the cup into his stinking mouth. A few pills at a time, then a sip from the bottle. I recapped the pill cup and stepped away.

There were days that we completed this task without incident. Then there was November 12, 1992.

As I slowly backed away from Warren he growled and lunged from the chair.

James had been prepared and the legs of the chair didn't lift more than two inches off the carpet before Warren and the chair were slammed back down to the floor. I thought I heard the chair crack.

I dropped the pill bottle and water on a shelf by the door and picked up Warren's helmet. Warren pulled away from the back of the chair, trying to break the grip James had on his wrists. Grunting and straining, animal noises emanating. I opened the helmet and moved closer. James gave the nod. Dylan crouched near Warren's ankles and I leaned even closer, open helmet in hand. As I lowered the helmet Warren's right wrist broke free. I heard a strange gargle from James and before I blinked I felt Warren's sharp fingers scratch my skull as he fisted his hand into my hair. I began to scream as Warren shot up from the chair. Left hand now free he grabbed the back of Dylan's head and drove him face first into his right knee, over, and again, like lightning he smashed his skull. I heard his nose snap on contact and watched a fine spray of blood reflect the morning's light as it burst across the floor. I cried in horror as Dylan

slumped to the carpet, left eyeball resting on top of his mangled nose. James tried to lunge, reaching for the arm that held me but he gasped painfully and collapsed, blacked out at Warrens feet. I struggled and cried and fought as Warren drew my back to his chest. Beth charged into the room but it was already too late. She froze in shock as she saw James and Dylan on the floor and me struggling against the monster. I screamed and struggled but was no match for Warren. Warren's ankles were still tethered to the broken remnants of the chair but he knelt on the carpet, taking me with him as Beth stood by, watching in disbelief. My mind exploded in horror as I felt Warren's teeth sink deeply into my shoulder. I felt my flesh rip as he pulled his body away with my skin in his mouth. Both hands now fisted and tangled in my snarled hair he held me to the ground. Throwing his weight against me, he pinned me. He howled as he threw his head back and bit me again. Grinding his teeth through my flesh, I screamed. I squirmed beneath him but the brute strength of his sickness kept him there, knee in my back, teeth gnawing, licking the blood that poured from the bites. Pain seared across my body, the sounds of tearing flesh and maniacal laughter in the air. Warren leaned down, breath on my ear, I heard him chewing, I felt him swallow. The world around me faded to black.

I shuddered and twitched as a blast of icy air hit my face. I blinked, I tried to clear my head as I stood on the pebbled drive, about to enter the house. No longer day dreaming I strode toward the door, goose pimples spreading across my flesh.

I stepped inside and headed straight to the office. The atmosphere was different now. I sighed as I sat down behind the desk, placing my bag on the floor, shaking the mouse, monitor whirring to life. It had been nearly a year since that day.

James suffered a heart attack and died the day that Warren attacked us, that's why he had let go of his wrists. Dylan is no longer an employee. He lost his eye, he suffers from a brain injury. We used to visit him at the hospital but eventually stopped. There was nothing that we could do for him.

My wounds have healed. Stiff, white scar tissue covers my right shoul-

der and the side of my neck. Small white crescent scars run along my back. The pain and terror of that day still pound within my head. It was nearly four months before I was able to return to work. The psychologists and doctors thought it would be cathartic for me to come back here, part of the healing process. Initially I wasn't sure that I wanted to, that I would even be able to come back to the house. I can't work with the individuals anymore. I panic, become indecisive and afraid. I file paperwork now, I keep the files organized. Part time, a few hours a week where I'm forced to face my demons. I shake my head, as thought to clear it, and reach my hand to the bottom of my bag.

Warren was removed from the home. He was placed back into the facility where he had grown up. Several months passed before we heard anything more about him.

The institution eventually sent us his records, they appeared in the post box one day. Upon his arrival the doctors caring for Warren thought it best that he undergo a med detox. They stopped giving Warren his anti-psychotics. Maybe they were hopeful that a new med profile would help him. According to the records Warren was kept restrained and in isolation. After taking him off his meds it was noted that he began to lose a significant amount of weight. He wasn't eating. The doctors also determined that, because he was restrained, the helmet was no longer necessary. They found Warren, about six months after the incident, on the floor of his cell, lying in a pool of his own blood. Warren had dislocated his left shoulder. In doing so he slipped from his restraint coat and bit himself. It was reported that the cause of the death was suicide. Warren had eaten nearly half of his left hand before he began to chew on his wrist.

Same Old Bird

Tom Stock

New Jim Crow

Locked up in a bird cage
Can't speak about his outrage
Can't turn history's page.
New Jim Crow tryin' to escape
Imprisoned in the red tape,
Ghetto like a moonscape,
Strange fruit hung with hate.

New Jim Crow

Locked in revolving prison door
Outta jail but homeless poor
Right where he was before.

New Jim Crow

Can now use the restroom,
Passed by in the business boom,
Different song but the same old tune.

New Jim Crow

Blocked at the voting booth
Justice blind denies the truth
Election laws without a tooth.

New Jim Crow

Asked why he don't participate,
Still has to use the back gate,
They wonder why he hesitates calling him an ingrate.

New Jim Crow

Prisoner from the war on drugs,
Hiding like the street thug
Real truth swept under the rug.
New Jim Crow says the weather ain't gettin' better,
Rain is getting wetter,
Different set of feathers,
But the same old bird.



The Goat by Dustin Hunter

Letters

Brandon Bevington

What's it been? Two, five, maybe eight years? I don't fucking remember and I don't care too much to find out, only to wonder. The highball glass full of whiskey on the rocks help keep the days blurred. I could really care less what's going on in this world; all its murder and rape, its prostitution and disease, screw them all. I had something good once; a friend, an indispensable asset on this world who helped contain this beast that now runs rampant in my body. She never once contained these emotions I had by actions, but by just existing. Her presence afforded me to remain human, to see the good in this world for once. But now she's gone. Took her fate into her own hands and swallowed down the endless slumber, all four thousand milligrams of it. And the worst part about it all? I couldn't do a thing, a fucking thing to help her, to change her, to maybe save her! I helplessly sat at my house, trying to push off the thought, thinking, "Oh, maybe she got out of town for a while? Yeah, that seems right..." Right on point, you dumb bastard! Dreams of her eyes, her once beautiful blue eyes, so full of the potential to love, to laugh, to live. God dammit, I need another drink. Drown it away, get her off my mind. This hero complex will be the death of me. Down another drink.

When I catch my consciousness again, I'm standing before her house, her mausoleum. I haven't seen this place in so long... I'm ashamed of that. Instead of facing what had happened, I ran away, dodging the funeral, selling the house, traveling the world to just get away. This gravestone, it used to be breathtaking once. It was of Victorian design, windows adorning almost every face of the building. When facing the front, the spire sat on the right of this place; a giant cylinder with a small cone of top. This place was shingled with burgundy colored asphalt tiles, all overlapping and facing down towards the ground. The porch was long and rectangular, with four white columns holding up the high roof. Each pillar had unique hand carvings into the wood, depicting a story, unique and--fuck it. What the place looks like to me isn't important, it's what I came here to do that is. I won't lie, walking up to those steps up on the porch was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life. Look-

ing through that warped glass window in the door, I could see her again, lying there, blonde hair strewn about in the entrance way of the kitchen. Opening the door brings me back to reality, the house empty and dusty. Whatever furniture that couldn't be moved out at the time was wrapped in plastic to preserve it. It smelt of dry earth and mildew in here. It was dark, dirty and dry; a piss poor ending for such a nice house and a beautiful creature. I walk down this dilapidated hallway and find the kitchen. In an instant, I can see myself again, hunched over her, caught somewhere between disbelief and sadness and anger. I can see her again... fair peach skin, thick black eyelashes, full red lips...and a hint of jasmine perfume. Dull, empty blue eyes. The foam dripping from her mouth, still twitching slightly. I look at her hand. All those pills, big pills, about forty of them, swallowed down to stop her heart. I despise having to remember these details, haunted for not being there. But I take notice of her hand with the pills. Her...Celeste's finger was pointing towards something. A drawer, just to the right of the sink. The image fades and I'm back in this crypt. I walk towards the drawer and pull open the squeaky slot. Inside are a few letters, wrapped with a tight rubber band, addressed to me. My hand can't stop shaking, and my breath is trembling. Fucking hell, I need another drink. No, no, I need to be all here to read these things. I open the first letter, and this is what it says:

Dear Mateo,

It's the morning after Valentine's Day. I didn't get much sleep and the morning was really tough to get up from, but something tells me you had the same problem. I enjoyed our talks last night; about the beginnings of this holiday, the ridiculousness that companies take to make this a staple selling point and the jokes and humor of it all. You seem like a nice guy. Well maintained, clean haircut slicked back, five o'clock shadow and strong complexion. A real gentleman. I look forward to our next meeting.

Sincerely, Celeste

I can hear her speak the letter to me, even after all these years and all these sours, I can still hear her voice. I gently open another letter, dated February 24th.

Dear Mateo,

You are a very observant person, pointing out details in almost everything you see by using the littlest bits of info. No doubt then, you have noticed the paler skin around my finger. In truth Mateo, I was married once. Dean was his name. A handsome man; tall and muscular, a little on the paler side like me but not so much to be a ghost. Dark brown hair, brown eyes, right around six foot tall. He was a gentleman, always going out of his way to make sure my life went off without a hitch. He was a hard worker and always came home dirty from his construction job, but he always came home happy to see me. He and I would sometimes just hold each other for hours, enjoying nothing more than to be close to each other. And then one day, I get a call from the site manager. He said Dean had just fallen unconscious and wasn't breathing right. I dropped the phone and drove as fast as I could to the hospital. I waited in that terrible front room, waiting to hear something about him. Several hours later, I saw the doctor exit the room where the desk lady had said they taken him. He said to me, "Celeste...your husband has died of a blood clot in the brain. We...we don't know how this happened, but I am so sorry for your loss." Mateo, I never felt such pain in my life like I did on that day. Something inside of me had been torn out with a rusty knife and filled with salt. I walked past the doctor and into Dean's room and saw him there, hands folded on his chest, still in his work clothes. His eyes were closed and his body, so full of warmth, was now bitter cold. I caressed his face with my hand, gave him a kiss and held him close, for the last time in my life. His house, his money, everything he had ever bought, owned or inherited had now become mine. But I didn't want it, not like this. It felt so out of place, so wrong. I wanted him back, not his possessions. In more ways than one, I can see a lot of him in you Mateo. You're a gentleman, always treating me with respect and trying to make my life easier. You're funny, handsome. I find comfort in being around you. And I find relief in being able to tell you my story.

Sincerely, Celeste

It's one thing to have wondered as to why she took off that ring, but to now know the reason, not only to that but her general unhappiness. But I never knew you felt comfort in being around me. I, Christ, I wish I could have seen that. But I blinded myself. I open another letter, dated March 8th.

Dear Mateo,

I can't describe how I feel right now. I'm caught between these two glaciers that are splitting apart and I can't move away from the middle of them. My legs are frozen to each half and I can't move them. I can feel the pressure building up in my thighs and my stomach just drops at the thought of what will happen soon. We celebrated my birthday yesterday, but I had hoped you wouldn't show up. That cake you had brought me, it was the nicest thing anyone had done for me in a long time since...since Dean had passed away, but you, you are stirring up these old feelings inside me. When I look at you I can feel my heart race and my blood move, and my thoughts wander and my dreams soar. But when I look at you, I can also feel something eat away inside me, tearing and gnawing and plucking and my insides, causing this pain and confusion and discomfort. I'm so conflicted inside. But when you hold my hand and ask me if everything was alright, it all disappears and I can feel more clearly, and the pain goes away. I...it may be wrong to say this but, I love you Mateo. And I want to be with you.

Love, Celeste

Fucking hell. Why didn't you say anything Celeste? Why keep quiet? We could've had such a great thing here, today. I wouldn't be this permanently half-cocked smart-mouthed bastard that I hate seeing in the mirror every fucking day, hating myself for not trying harder, for not being better. Why? There's one more letter left to read. May 7th.

Dear Mateo,

My heart is breaking, just thinking of the words I have to put on this paper. I

look back to my life, from when I was a little girl just dreaming about making her mark on this world, to a teenager who antics got her in trouble more than once, to a woman who had loved and loss, and learned to love again. It just doesn't seem fair that my life has to stop here. That pain, the physical pain in my body Mateo, it's cancer. It's eating away at me, slowly progressing through my body until it shuts down my organs, one by one. This is something that no one recovers from, no matter how hard they try or pray. You just die. But I can't tell you this. If I do, I am so afraid that you'll want to drop everything in your life to try and save a lost cause. I may not be the most observant person ever, but I do know you have feelings towards me, the same ones I have been holding back from you. I don't want you to put yourself in this situation, the one that will lead you down a road of suffering and misery, one such that I have walked for a long time. That's why I'm pushing you away from me. I will not die knowing I have put you on this one-way path of self-destruction. Tomorrow, I will make sure that you'll never have to know about me or my secret. But one day, I hope you find these letters, understanding why I did what I did. And one more thing, Mateo. Thank you. Thank you for being my friend these last few months. Thank you for being a good listener. And thank you, for showing me that I could know the feeling of love and compassion again.

Farewell, Celeste

I put the letters down. The last letter had a corner ripped off of it. I look across the table and see the empty chair in front of me. This is where she and I would sit, having these long discussions about love and life, loss and pain, all that philosophical bullshit. This is where I could have told her how I felt. This is where it could have all changed; we wouldn't be here today if I had just said something. Here I am, sitting, in the room that she had died, listening, empty-headed, pulling the handgun out of my bag. I stared at that gun for a long time. And I left it there on that table.



Tower Vase by Sharon McDonald

A Voice in the Dark

Wally Szarek

Jason's head throbbed as he stared blankly at his computer screen, wondering how the hell he was supposed to stretch the measly two and a half pages he had already written into a full-length story. His eyes lazily rolled around his room desperately looking for a distraction to free him from the shackles of his academic responsibilities - however, the room was empty aside from a few bookshelves and another desk. He was cursing himself for procrastinating the paper until just before it's due date when he heard the familiar creaking of his front door being opened and then shut again. Jason considered the disturbance for a second then, realizing it was most likely his fiancé getting home from her shift at the pizzeria, he continued working without even bothering to look up from his computer. He heard her voice faintly call out from a few rooms over

"I'm home," she said in a tone brighter than usual.

"I'm in the study." Jason called back, meaning more to alert her to his position than to call her to him. "How was work?"

The soft tapping of Katie's footsteps grew louder until she entered the room, stopping just after the doorway.

Jason looked up to take in the aura of the woman he'd pledged his life to. Katie was small, clocking in at an adorable 5'3, making her look much younger than she actually was. Her short brown hair curled outward and brightened in color near the ends complementing her marvelous hazel eyes.

"Work was great, I made almost fifty bucks in tips and my boss let me off early!" she made her way over to Jason and set herself down on his lap.

"I'm gonna have to ask you for a favor though."

"Not to be rude, but could you do whatever it is yourself?" Jason replied, "I kinda have an essay due tomorrow."

"You're still working on that?"

"I finished writing it almost an hour ago, but it's not long enough." Katie's attention shifted off of him and towards the computer as she began correcting the multitude of spelling and grammar mistakes that commonly plagued Jason's writing.

"Couldn't you at least wait until I'm finished writing to do that?"

"I may as well do it now, you're not really getting anything done just sitting here," Katie replied in a sassy and condescending but also heartfelt tone like only she could. "So how about you take a short break to clear your head? Then you can come back home to an essay that doesn't look like a twelve-year-old wrote it."

"Fine..." Jason reluctantly agreed, "what was it you needed?"

"I need you to drive down to the store and pick up a few things for dinner."

"You're joking?" Jason asked, to be certain he had heard her correctly.

"Oh no, not at all" Katie smugly replied "You'll have to hurry too. I won't be able to make dinner without it."

"The closest store is a thirty minute drive from here."

"And for some reason," Katie snapped, "I can still hear you complaining about it."

"Well that was harsh."

Katie laughed for a second then leaned her face in and kissed him then whispered, "get out of here loser, I've got stuff to do." And with that, she hopped up off of his lap and disappeared into the next room. Jason stood up from his desk, followed her down the hallway through the living room and out to the mudroom. He pulled a hoodie off the coat rack and laced up his shoes. On his way out the door he called back to Katie.

"I love you."

"Ew gross," Katie joked. "I love you too."

Jason stepped out the door and began walking down the cobblestone

pathway to where their cars were parked. He made his way around to the driver's side of his \$500 2001 Subaru Outback, opened the door and slid behind the wheel. There was rust on both back doors, the windshield wipers hadn't been changed in over a year and the passenger side rear view mirror was cracked down the middle. He inserted the key into the ignition and after sputtering a few times the old boxer engine groaned to life. His hand reached over the shifter as he pressed on the break, but it wouldn't budge on his first attempt. Only after several seconds of wiggling it back and forth accompanied by various curse words did the car finally shift into reverse.

The only way into town that didn't involve tracking through a maze of dirt roads was to take Grant Road, a long, mostly straight road with a few twists, turns, and hills littered randomly along the route that eventually leads into a ravine at the very bottom. Jason only enjoyed one thing about Grant, there were never any police. He'd been abusing the scarcely populated and under patrolled area since high school, when he and his friends would go to great lengths to find out which one of their second-hand 4 cylinder cars was the fastest.

Jason turned on Grant and floored it, squeezing out every ounce of power his Outback could muster to climb the first hill. Flying down the straights with practiced ease, he cut through corners with the precision of a 19-year-old who thought he was better at driving than he actually was. Within minutes he was nearing the end of the road speeding down the gradual decline that led into a three-way intersection. He slid his foot off the gas and pressed down gradually on the breaks expecting the slow but steady decline in speed he'd become accustomed to from his junky car. The car was slowing down until an abrupt pop came from what he could only assume to be his front brakes. Jason panicked as smoke erupted from under the tires and the car sped uncontrollably towards the guard-rail on the opposite end of the intersection. He tore at the emergency brake only to realize that it had rusted away long before the car was his. Jason could only watch as his car obliterated the only thing in between him and a forty foot vertical drop. Faster than he could blink the airbag struck his face, causing him to lose consciousness as his car barreled into the ravine.

He awoke to unimaginable agony followed by the realization that the sun was starting to set, meaning it had been several hours since the collision. There were car parts scattered everywhere. Had it not been for the airbags and his seatbelt he'd be little more than a grease spot right now. Any attempt to move was greeted by stabbing pain shooting through his body from several different directions. Both of his legs were shattered. He was having trouble breathing. There were shards of glass embedded in several places throughout his body and his left eye was swollen shut. Jason stretched his right arm for the glove box where he kept his phone only to see a bloody mangled stump where his hand once was. Jason screamed in horror as he hopelessly searched for the other half of his arm to no avail. With his only remaining hand, he removed his seatbelt and dragged his limp body over the center console to the glove box in agony. With all the strength he had left he torn the box open, grabbed his phone and began to dial 911. The call went through immediately.

"911 what's your emergency?" the operator said in an off-putting bubbly voice.

She started to say something else but it was abruptly cut off as Jason ended the call, that wasn't the last voice he wanted to hear. He typed 1 into the phone, counting on the speed dial to connect him to a pre-programmed contact - one of few numbers he had bothered to commit to memory. The line rang for what seemed like an eternity, the sharp pain from each breath increasing in both regularity and intensity. Finally, the line picked up.

"Katie?" Jason choked out

"Yeah what's up?" she replied.

"Katie I've been in an acci..." Jason never got to finish the sentence as he was cut off when Katie started laughing uncontrollably.

"Ha! Got you, leave a message."

As the light started to fade from Jason's eyes he thought, at least I got to hear her voice one last time.

A Product of My Environment

Robinson Bautista

When we think about racism, we tend to think about the mid 1900's and the African American Civil Rights Movement. We immediately relate racism to the mistreatment of our ancestors and fail to see how racism is present in the everyday lives of the many minorities throughout the many "ghettos" in the country, nevertheless the world. Racism is experienced differently for everyone, some may even be unaware of it, but for me, racism is the generalization of where I come from. This generalization is often tied to the color of my skin. For years, I have dealt with this universality, but what enrages me to this day is the inevitability of being stereotyped because of where I come from. I never chose my surroundings; in fact, neither did many people of color. Minorities were shoved into crowded cities, living in ill maintained buildings, while white America was being supported by banks to live in suburban, more secluded areas of the city. This institutionalized form of racism is at fault for the bountiful number of urban areas we refer to as ghettos due to their inhabitants: most coming from low income backgrounds. Racism isn't only the discrimination of a certain race, but the minimization of their opportunities at education, life, and health.

As a kid growing up in the Bronx, I was acclimated to the destitution of color in my neighborhood. It never came to my attention that there were no whites in my community. It wasn't something a kid should worry about. I was oblivious of the racial divide until my freshman year of high school when I moved to a more suburban area in Frederick, Maryland. The scene was very different to me. The land people owned stretched for acres, and people didn't live as close to each other as they did back home. I could tell from the moment I stepped out of my sister's car that the air was different; it was pure, I took a deep breath. Filling my lungs with all the oxygen it was deprived of from all the company trucks and buses that polluted my cities air. In fact, the air in the city is so polluted that it is uncommon to not have asthma as a child. Another difference I noticed as I walked on the crisp, green grass that crunched underneath my feet was how quiet the suburbs are. Nothing can be heard except the

birds in the distance and the cars that passed on the smooth road every few minutes. That night, I had the most troubling sleep. I had been accustomed to the loud, city noises caused by the unapologetic neighbors who yelled at 3 in the morning, and the sirens that screamed urgency without fail on an hourly basis.

Gentrification is a huge problem in New York City. Renter's monthly bills continue to increase, as the state makes more and more areas commercial. Even local businesses are forced to sell their stores due to their inability to keep up with high rent. An example in my neighborhood would be Fordham Road. Fordham used to be just another part of the Bronx, a poverty-stricken neighborhood until they began to place banks, and stores like Starbucks, and Chipotle, within a 2 mile radius of Fordham University, their student body being made up of a white majority. The commercialization of the neighborhood increased the living expenses for tenants who resided there. This resulted in many people having to leave their homes and move into even lower income neighborhoods. Although gentrification makes a neighborhood look more cordial, it forces low income families out of the neighborhood and brings more middle-class families in. Statistically, these low-income families are people of color, so the gentrification of urban areas limit the choices of living for low income, ethnic families. It may not seem that severe, but try to imagine how people may feel about gentrification in their neighborhoods. Imagine being forced out of your own neighborhood. You have a job, but you were barely making ends meet before, and now because of the new market that was built across the street your rent increased 10%.

Growing up in Kingsbridge Heights, a community that serves a vast majority of minorities, I was cradled with the idea that my life was full of opportunities to grow as a young man. Seeing my next-door neighbors on the corner on my nightly visits to the corner bodegas was something I normalized, until I realized that the illusion of normalcy hid a great number of underlying issues. The "grind" was not the one advertised to me through Disney Channel. The textbooks of my people weren't made of paper, but of pure sacrifice. The sacrificing of our dignity, of our God-given morals were things we were taught we had to do someday in order to create at least the illusion of stability. Drug dealing, prostitution, and addiction were not things our families had in mind for us. These things

were what my people had to resort to when education was looked at as a far-fetched idea. As not only an inhabitant in my community but as a student, I have seen the loss of hope. I have felt it.

I never really saw leaving the “ghetto” as a choice but more as a necessity. My family didn’t have the privilege of choosing where to live when they immigrated here. Thankfully, because of the realization of these issues, I have more opportunities than they did. Although these opportunities are economically limited, I can still make something of myself. I never thought of the economic troubles my community faced as a kid, and many people never see it. Although the Bronx consists of many poor families, they are rich in love, acceptance, and unity. The Bronx would not be the Bronx without our ethnic cultures merging as one through co-habitant. It would not be the Bronx without the Dominican family owned corner stores, who’s cook effortlessly initiates conversation while making your bacon, egg and cheese at three in the morning.



Symmetry by Vicki Brown



Victorian Tower by Alyssa Schmidt

Best Day of My Life

Nicholas Ciccarelli

The sand is fine and fluffy, each step takes me a few centimeters deeper and my boot gets engulfed with each tread. Building up on the surface and making the next step that much heavier. Mountainous terrain, filled with valleys, cliffs, ridges, saddles, depressions, but at the crest you can take it in for what it's worth. Severely obscure looking rocks, placed evenly apart and well-rounded with little craters as if they weren't supposed to be there, guarding the path of "least resistance," made that phrase almost unimaginable.

We have been walking for hours, sweat soaks our plate carriers. Our machine gunners have been handing off the 240's every click or so just to share the love. Nothing spectacular, nothing important that we are accomplishing, a simple white space patrol and surveying the area while taking in the sights.

We always travel far from natural lines of drift to avoid ambush, taking on the steepest hills, biggest gullies, all avoiding areas of premise.

The wind is pelting me with sand as I approach the top of the next mountain. I see blue, so much blue as it runs from as high as I look up to the bottom of the ridge. There's almost no difference from the crystal sky to the waves.

Not a religious man at all, but I had something powerful, whether it was a part of me I have never tapped into, or an existential force making itself very known. Could have easily been the 130-degree heat, in full kit with an 80% humidity reading, or something much more. Being partially color blind, I felt I saw deeper colors, smelled the salty air, and felt the cool mist as it brushed my face. All of my senses were heightened to a point that I couldn't have imagined.

In my years, I have never seen a group of 18 grown men, sprint down a mountain after absorbing the scene to such entirety, ripping off clothes, armor, not dressing it right. Leaving 3 people to guard all the gear as we

jump in the ocean, swapping in and out for guards, giving everyone the same rush of that 80-degree water submersing them, rapidly cooling off all the dried sweat.

Something so simple that people would call a hike then a swim is easily marked down as top five best days of my life.



Sunrise on the Erie Canal by Tom Stock

Unborn

Chloe Decker

I stumbled around the party with almost no control of my body, I panted heavily but giggled loudly as I felt the Vodka shots take effect.

My body felt warm and relaxed, it was as if under my skin I could feel my blood circulating slowly.

My limbs were weak but my legs could still wander around but only in circles as if they had a mind of their own.

I wanted to walk home but I couldn't, I would be arrested if anyone knew I was drunk

To be drinking at all was illegal, just imagine how much trouble I would be in if the cops saw me this drunk.

I tried to find the man who told me where this underground pub was, but he was nowhere to be seen.

So I just allowed this random man to hold me as he dragged my body into a different room, soon the whole room was filled with the muffled sound of loud party music and all I saw was the blood red ceiling tiles floating above me.

I saw this mysterious man take a handful of pills and the next thing I knew, suddenly something or SOMEONE was tugging at my dress.

I could hear him panting heavily and I could tell he was becoming more and more excited as his face grew closer to mine.

I squirmed as much as I could, trying desperately to escape, but his un-tightening grip made this close to impossible.

This man was much stronger than I was, this was obvious just by looking at his muscle mass.

I tried to see his face, commit it to memory, but I couldn't see through the tears and the mixture of blurry vision from being so drunk.

It was at that point, that I realized there was no escape, I laid there paralyzed in fear.

I gasped heavily and threw my head back screaming, because that's all I could physically do, "STOP! STOP LEAVE ME ALONE! HELP!"

I jolted awake and let out a heavy sigh. I whimpered as I smacked at my arms with a violent force and when I realized that pig was no longer there, I calmed down and wiped the sweat off my brow.

I wish I could tell you that falling asleep brought me some peace in the three months after my brutal attack but I would be lying, the nightmares always started the same way, I relived every single moment of that night with perfect recollection each time I cried myself to sleep, but those dreams would soon come to an end.

I gulped; feeling dehydrated, but my body was shaking so much that I couldn't get up, I began to breathe so raggedly that I sounded like an asthmatic.

I closed my eyes and listened to the rain outside hit the roof and I touched my chest gently as I felt my once palpitating heartbeat decrease in speed.

I felt the sweat that had formed on my skin dry up and when I opened my eyes I felt calmer than I ever had been in a long time, I gulped again and went to my window.

Below me I saw, after shifting the lace curtains back, New York City just as busy at night as it would be during the day.

I saw all different types of cars drive by. There were drunk people jay-walking across the street, and although it was funny to watch the Model T Ford stop quickly and to have its commander scream out, 'Hey I'm driving here,' I was thoroughly unamused.

I could hear the giggling and all it did was bring back bad memories, STOP! HELP ME! I heard it loudly in my head and I whimpered uncontrollably as I quickly shut the curtains closed.

I began panting as the rain outside went from a small drizzle to full

blown heavy rain, my room was completely dark, which made me feel safe, the door was locked, which made me feel even safer.

I groaned while feeling my stomach, I didn't tell anyone when the doctor confirmed the child, so no one would have to know.

That's when I began to undress slowly and carefully.

I took off my pants, and threw them onto my bed, and I began rolling up my shirt and tucked the bottom edge into the chest opening of the shirt near the neck, that way it would stay up.

I walked to the closet and when I opened it I saw the glass rod that I had soaking in the alcohol.

I could hear thunder clapping aggressively behind me as I sat down on the floor, I opened my legs wide open and made sure it was the sterile part of the rod going inside of me.

I began to sweat as I felt the cool glass scrape across the walls of my area, with that happening my whole area opened up and expanded as it accepted the rod.

I wanted to scream but I knew if I did I would wake up the household.

So I groaned heavily, stopped the rod from moving any further and I put a piece of thick wood in my mouth, I bit down hard onto the piece of wood and I sobbed as I kept sliding the rod into me.

I screamed gently from my nose instead of my mouth and my whole body was drenched in sweat as my body shivered from shock, in the palm of my hands I could feel the blood slip out of me and the once see through glass rod was now stained with red.

I moved the rod in a circular motion, the tip of the rod, which was gently sharpened, would hit the walls and I pulled the rod away from each spot when it hit the walls inside of me.

I was trying my best to find the small opening of the cervix so I moved the rod up more with an angle.

I didn't know I hit the cervix opening until I finally felt a pressure going deeper into me, I felt like I was being torn into two and I began panting, when I closed my eyes I felt my whole body become slippery from the excessive amount of sweat.

I began to scream in a muffled tone as I threw my head back and kept digging in deeper inside of me, I felt a soft poke at my uterine wall and I immediately stiffened as I controlled my muscles to not move one bit.

I was breathing heavily but very controlled as I slowly and somewhat skillfully pulled the rod outwards, about 1 centimeter.

The thunder boomed loudly outside and the rain drove down from the sky with a mighty force and I could hear in the background the wind whistling as it moved roughly through the air.

I could feel the blood seep out of me and my hands very quickly became wet and sticky.

The blood began to stain the blue carpet in a foot of unevenness, then I moved the rod in a circular motion and that's when I felt it, the sharp part of the rod had stabbed the uterine wall.

I felt my body go cold and in a swift motion I pulled out the rod, and that's when half of it snapped inside of me.

I screamed loudly and threw the free half of glass down onto the floor, I used the wall to climb up and stand.

As I stood I could feel a rush of blood quickly fall out of me, and inside of me I could hear the other part of the glass rod crush up and break into tiny shards.

My whole inner leg was soon drenched in blood and when I looked down I saw that a whole puddle of blood had been created.

I could feel the glass shards move in my body and I began wheezing in a hysterical way as my body entered a shock state.

I wanted to walk but I couldn't, I was still and paralyzed from the pain.

I could feel the cold sweat that had been created drip down my body, my

mouth opened up and the piece of wood that was in my mouth dropped to the floor and began absorbing the blood.

I breathed very shakily as I tried to say, "Help...." But the words were strained and covered by the boom of thunder.

My breathing became rapid as I held my stomach, I could feel the shards rip and tear my most precious insides and soon I was weak in the legs.

That's when I dropped down onto the floor and fluttered my eyelashes as my eyelids became heavy.

Soon I saw the lights come on and I heard a scream ringing in my ears that I could only identify as my mother's voice.

"Catherine...Catherine!" I heard as my mother lifted me up and made me face her.

I whimpered as I looked at her and I coughed gently, I could only see my mother's mouth, my eyes were closing very slowly and I whispered very weakly, in a total of five separate times, "The baby should be gone now."

I felt a sudden relief from being able to admit that finally to my mother, I laid my head back and my body slowly began to relax.

"Catherine!" My mother screamed out.

That's when I shut my eyes and fell asleep, by then my body was completely numb and limp and the pain; and the product of my rape that some would call the baby, were finally gone.

A Note, Not Suicidal

Brandon Bevington

January 28th

Finally completed the move into the new house. The air is crisp, the drapes hung and the evening sunlight now saturates the living room. The living room is large in size; a 30'x42' rectangle, in all its sharp edges. The floors are hardwood planks, cherry in color and warm to the touch. The living room has the usual commodities; a large, brown leather couch, with a Lazyboy recliner right next to it, black and also made of leather. Placed in front of the couch is an ornate coffee table, made by Amish farmers. The wood looks like Pine or a dark Oak, but has been stained and finished with a nice glaze of sorts. It grabs at your fingers like cobwebs when you rub your hand on the finish but it matches the rustic feel of the house. Beyond the couch is a large sliding glass door, providing a view of the mountain side. Walls that encase the room are made with long logs of wood, stacked onto each other and held together by some kind of cement or bonding agent. These logs have also been finished out with a nice dark glaze, almost as if someone had allowed molasses to freeze and harden on them. The room had a tangy lemon smell to it along with a sweet earthy smell that you get from cutting plywood. Above, on the ceiling of the living room, is a large fan, spinning tirelessly to circulate the air. The sun has now dropped from its lovely pink hues to now a crimson red and then soon it will be blue and then black. Off to bed for now.

February 3rd

It has been a few days since anything was written down, but now something can be read. The town, about fifteen miles from the house, is ultimately dull and uninteresting. A permanent gray cloud seems to loom over the heads of everyone living here, forcing them to repeat the same processes every day, in and out of the week. There are no vibrant colors here; everything has been dulled from the weather, erosion, or had

been spray painted by the local belligerents. The only sense of anything other than dread is suffocation. It's quite difficult to breathe in a place like this, although there is no smog, no pollution, and no overcrowding. The grayness of this place just seems to steal your life away if you are not careful. This town is very much devoid of life, even though people populate it. Much different than the first night at the vivid house. For now, ignore the feelings and pick up the groceries.

February 14th

Happy Valentine's Day. The reason as to why this holiday got this name is controversial at best. There was a church minister whose name was Valentine. He lived in Germany in a time where members of the same religion could only marry each other. Very convoluted compared to the world you live in today but that is how things were in those times. This minister did not care much for the rules of the church and married people of many different faiths away from their prying eyes. Or he at least tried to. Valentine was discovered and as punishment for his heresy, he was executed. Thus, he was immortalized as a Saint among the people until officially recognized by the church as such. Decorations expressing love and commitment are hung on this day to honor his supposed, "sacrifice." The same decorations are put up on the now broken in house. Heading into town for the day required some work on your part, to remain vigilant about not letting the feelings get the best of you. You meet a woman at the diner.

February 15th

Waking up in the morning was a little harder than the other nights. Of course, staying up until two a.m. talking to a woman wouldn't help that. The girl is a beautiful blonde woman with dark blue eyes. Her lips were scarlet and curvy and her skin fair, like that of a maiden in a fairytale.

She wore no earrings, bore no piercings and as far as one could tell, donned no tattoos.

However, there is the reminiscence of a ring on her left hand, a small portion of her skin paler than the rest from where it had once sat proudly. Her clothes contradicted the bright nature of her hair. Where her hair said life, her charcoal black coat said whither. Where her bright blue eyes said human, her wrinkled old gloves said less than so. Her lips spoke of happiness and love, but her body muttered ending it all. All these morbid details could be seen in her, but what can one do after seeing this much in a person, without making it too awkward? Is it that, or would it have just been easier to ignore it? One can only wonder.

March 7th

It's her birthday today. She's never had a proper birthday party, she mentioned one night.

Bringing a cake should change that for her or at least one could hope. The birthday occasion was dismal at best. Very few guests were invited and even fewer showed up. No one seemed to care for this woman, although she was one of the only few (her and yourself) that showed color in this bland town. She shows appreciation for the cake that was brought but something about her wishes you had stayed home as well. Concern for her well being begins to pool up and coagulate inside, feeling like cinder blocks on your back. You head home, hoping that the feeling will dissipate.

April 19th

Spring time has come to this dreadful town. The flowers shoot up from the ground and color begins to return to this decrepit place. Tulips, Lilacs, Lilies, Daffodils....Bleeding Hearts. Those were her favorites, she mentioned one time. She said she liked the way the heart would open up on the bottom and let the insides of the flower pour out of it. Something she wished she could do with her emotions. Having known her this long, it's safe to say that you have become her friend and cannot help but feel empathy for this fractured creature. Many times before you've tried to convince this beautiful looking woman that saying such things will only

dampen her mood more, but it rolls off of her, like water on the raincoat.

May 1st

You haven't seen the woman in some time now. In fact, no one around town has seen her in some time. It's easy to make yourself think that she has gotten out of town for a while and the thought comforts you.

May 8th

Local police issue a missing person report. Large search parties are formed of people who now show some color. The flowers have wilted.

May 11th, 9 am

Police have found nothing in their three day search. They ask you questions as to where you last saw her and for the address at which she lives. They ask for your assistance.

9:21 am

Both the police and yourself arrive at the house. No lights are shining through the windows.

The police ask you to approach the door and knock. There is a terrible feeling in your stomach and it begins to turn over. It feels as if your feet are weighed down with what feels like wet concrete, each step sealing tighter and tighter. The door is within reach.

9:23 am

Knocking on the door bore no response. Your back is pressed forward by the hand of anxiety and the unknown. You try to look beyond the glass windows on the door, but the warped glass distorts the imaging in-

side, making it difficult to spot almost anything. Almost anything. When looking with your peripheral vision, you could see the blonde woman's hair, just sticking out of the doorway in the kitchen, just at the end of the hall. You don't think, just react and kick open the door yourself. You run inside and find her, lying on the floor. She was clutching a pill bottle in her hand, foaming at the mouth; still. What once was in her eyes, what had shown such fragile life, was gone. A blank stare into space.

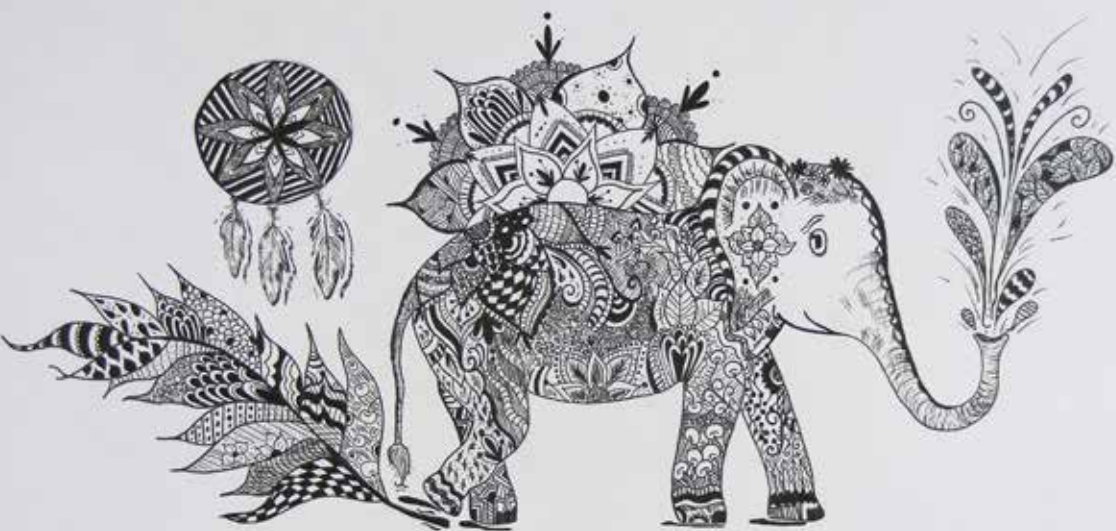
Last Entry

There was something else in her hand that day. A note, not suicidal. She wrote your name on it and the police gave it to you, several days after. Sitting alone in this living room, now so bland, so colorless, you screw up the courage to pick up the note and walk towards the large window. Everything seems duller now. The wood has become an ashen gray, the finish worn. The ceiling fan has stopped working, still, like she was that day. The sun doesn't set near this house anymore, knowing well you aren't ready to see it yet. In this large, empty living room, all you can think about is her and if you could have done more to stop her, to save her. There is a single light that hangs above the sliding glass door frame, dim and depressing. You loosen your grip and reveal the note in your hand, rolled like a tube and tied with a thin and crumpling black string. You pull the string slowly from the note until it pops off and unrolls this will of hers, to show you her last words. Her last human thing she could ever do, to you, just two simple words;

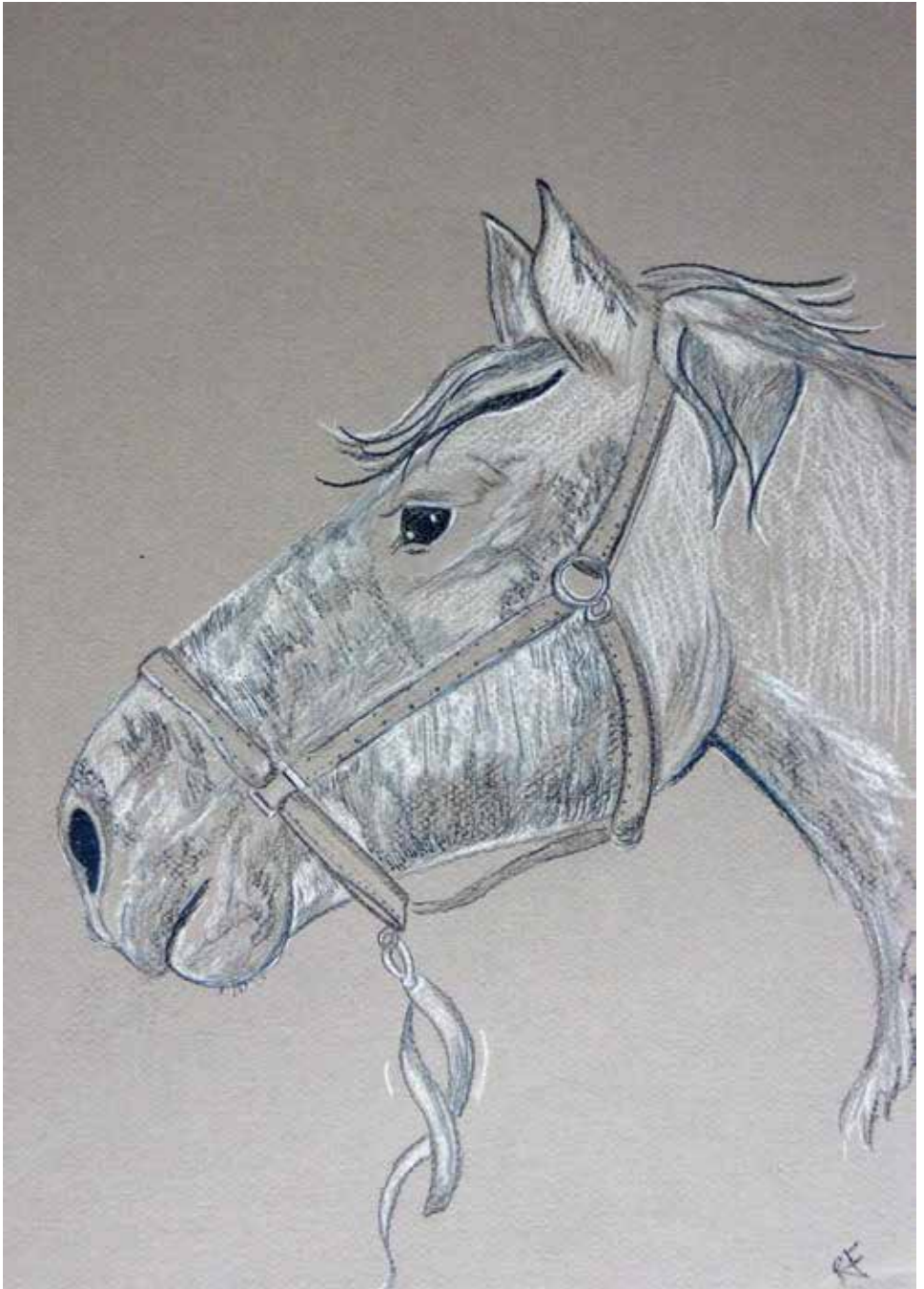
"Thank you."



Human Race by Shaun McGraw



Randi Farris



Randi Farris

The Reality of All Happy Endings

Elizabeth McDonald

The alarm went off next to Tom's ear. He rolled on his side, reaching over Sarah to shut it off, careful not to wake her or the baby. She mumbled something under her breath and pulled Caleb closer to her chest. Tom laid there, watching them sleep, committing this scene to memory. Caleb clung to Sarah's loose grey shirt with his thumb in his mouth. Sarah's blonde hair swept over her eyes, catching the light just so. Her pink lips parted with every slow, even breath. It was rare to see them so still and not turned up in a smile or talking away about something. That's why he loved Sarah though: always smiling even when he couldn't.

"What's wrong?" Sarah said opening her eyes, not really awake yet.

"Nothing. Just thinking about how much I love you," he said kissing her.

She scrunched her face, smiling. "I love you too." She stretched and curled up closer to Tom. "Caleb finally slept through the night."

"Thank God!" he said flopping back down on the bed.

"This parenting thing isn't so bad," Sarah stroked Caleb's blonde hair away from his eyes. He had inherited his mother's hair and crystal blue eyes.

"I like being called Dad."

"You're a good dad," Sarah murmured before falling asleep again.

Tom stared up at ceiling letting Sarah's comment run through his mind. He was going to be a good dad. Be everything his dad wasn't. He would go to every baseball game, teach him how to fish, how treat a girl on his first date, everything. Caleb would always know he was loved.

Tom twisted his wedding ring around his finger. He couldn't remember ever feeling loved by his father and he never knew his mother. Sarah was the probably the first person to say "I love you" to him and mean it. He looked back at her sleeping next to him. If it hadn't been for her, he

would have ended up just like his father, a dead-beat junkie hiding from the State. Tom closed his eyes and concentrated on Sarah's soft breathing and warmth. This was his family now, a new life.

"Here you go!"

I jerked my head up from my laptop to see the pretty blonde waitress with a beer in one hand a coffee pot in the other.

"Your order," she said setting down beer and pouring some coffee in a cheap, white mug.

"Thanks, Danielle," I said, quickly looking at her name tag. She flashed a sweet smile before collecting the empty beer bottles from the table. It had been a rough night.

Looking around the dimly lit diner there wasn't much to see. Everything was old and out of date. The faded green wallpaper was peeling, the red booths were cracked and coming apart at the seams, and the floor tiles looked like they might have been black and white at one point. The only thing with real color was the "Open" sign blinking in the window next to me. I stared out the window, my reflection looked back me, a middle-aged man in a wrinkled blue button down who's dark hair was just starting to grey. He looked unhappy and I couldn't blame him. I blinked, refocusing my eyes. It was dark outside now and the snow hadn't let up any. I checked my phone for the time, 8:34pm. It was quiet, even for a Wednesday. There was only an old man sitting alone at the bar and a young couple making out in the back booth.

I tried to go back to work on my story, but the flow was gone. I typed a couple paragraphs, but they seemed awkward and off tune in a way. I leaned back, taking a sip of the coffee. It was burned and probably made from the same grounds from this morning. I opted for the Coors instead.

I found myself watching Danielle clear off the neighboring tables and chat with the bus boy who reeked of weed. Even in the tacky blue uniform she was eye-catching with bright, hazel eyes and a curvy figure. For a nightshift waitress at a struggling diner, she walked around with an air. What caught my attention the most was the expensive shoes and perfume she wore, hinting she had money. Why would a girl like her be

working in a dump like this? I noticed the small bump to her belly when she reached across the last table. Poor kid. She couldn't have been much older than 17.

She looked up at me, noticing my staring and blushed. I quickly stared down at my hands, tracing the tan line on my ring finger. Sarah had always wanted a kid. I would have been a good dad.

"Danelle hurry up! I want to get out of here at a decent hour for once," the overweight, tattoo-covered cook yelled from the back. He was just coming around the counter when he caught sight of me.

"Oh my God! It's you! You wrote that book. What was it again? Beautiful Minds!"

"Yup, it's me." I said forcing myself to look away from Danielle.

The attention was great the first couple years. I performed for the camera and said all the right words. I needed the attention then. Now all I wanted was to be left alone. I spent most nights in shit-holes like this one now. People here didn't care who you were or what you did; they just wanted a quiet place to drink and feel sorry for themselves. I don't blame my current situation on my sudden rise and fall from fame. I didn't need any help screwing things up.

"I don't have your book, but could you sign this? For my wife. She loves your book," the cook said holding out a notepad.

"Sure."

"Thank you so much."

I flashed the cook an Academy Award winning smile and quickly scribbled my name on the grease covered paper. At least I made somebody happy tonight.

I finished off the Coors and signaled for another one. I rolled the glass bottle over in my hands as I tried rereading my story. It didn't feel right, and I couldn't figure out why. It needed to be perfect. As stupid as it was, I almost believed if I wrote it just right, it'd somehow come true. That this would be my life.

I had that chance, for this to be real, and I throw it all away. If I had just spent more time with Sarah, loved her the way she deserved. Instead I broke her heart over and over again with all the other women and coming home drunk every night. I could be home with my wife right now instead of sitting alone in this hell-hole getting drunk. I slammed my laptop shut as if that'd help. It made a cracking noise. I'd add that to the long list of things I'd regret later.

I pulled my laptop back over and carefully opened it, inspecting the small cracks running through the plastic frame and screen. Back to the only thing I was good at: building useless pretend worlds for the enjoyment of others.

"You're a writer?"

I looked up to see Danielle set down another beer and pulling a chair out from the table. She needed to talk so I shut my laptop gently this time and took a drink. I knew I'd need it.

"Yeah. Are you aspiring to be one?"

"I wanted to go to school for an English major, but I got into some trouble, and it didn't work out." She stared down at her stomach for a moment before continuing. "I know you must hear this a lot, but where do you get your inspiration. Like how do you come up with all your ideas?"

I liked Danielle, so I resisted the urge to groan at the question. After years of being asked this question, I still hadn't come up with a good answer. I would make some flowery comments to hide the fact I didn't know what the hell I was doing. She deserved a better answer.

"I like to write about the people I know and meet. I write a new life story for them, maybe give them a better ending."

"Would you write about me? I'm not asking to be in your next novel or anything. I just want a different ending."

"Danielle! Get off your ass and get back here. Some of us have lives to go home to," the cook shouted from the kitchen.

"Yeah, of course." I said quickly. I didn't want to get her in anymore

trouble.

“Give me a happy ending.”

“Danielle!”

She stood and headed for the back, but hesitated looking back at me, searching my face.

“I will.”

She had a hopeful smile, Sarah’s smile, on her face before disappearing behind the counter. I was alone again, and it bothered me. Maybe she’d come back after her shift was over. I could give her the story then. My mind was racing with different scenarios and ideas. This couldn’t fix her life, but it would give her some hope to keep going. Maybe pursue that English major. I smiled to myself as I opened my laptop and waited impatiently for it to wake up. I noticed the small crack in the screen had gotten bigger. I ran my finger down it and as if on cue, the crack spread like lighting across the screen and everything went blank.



Forest Goddess by Alyssa Schmidt

TAYLOR M



Drowning by Taylor Manley

photographs

MANLEY



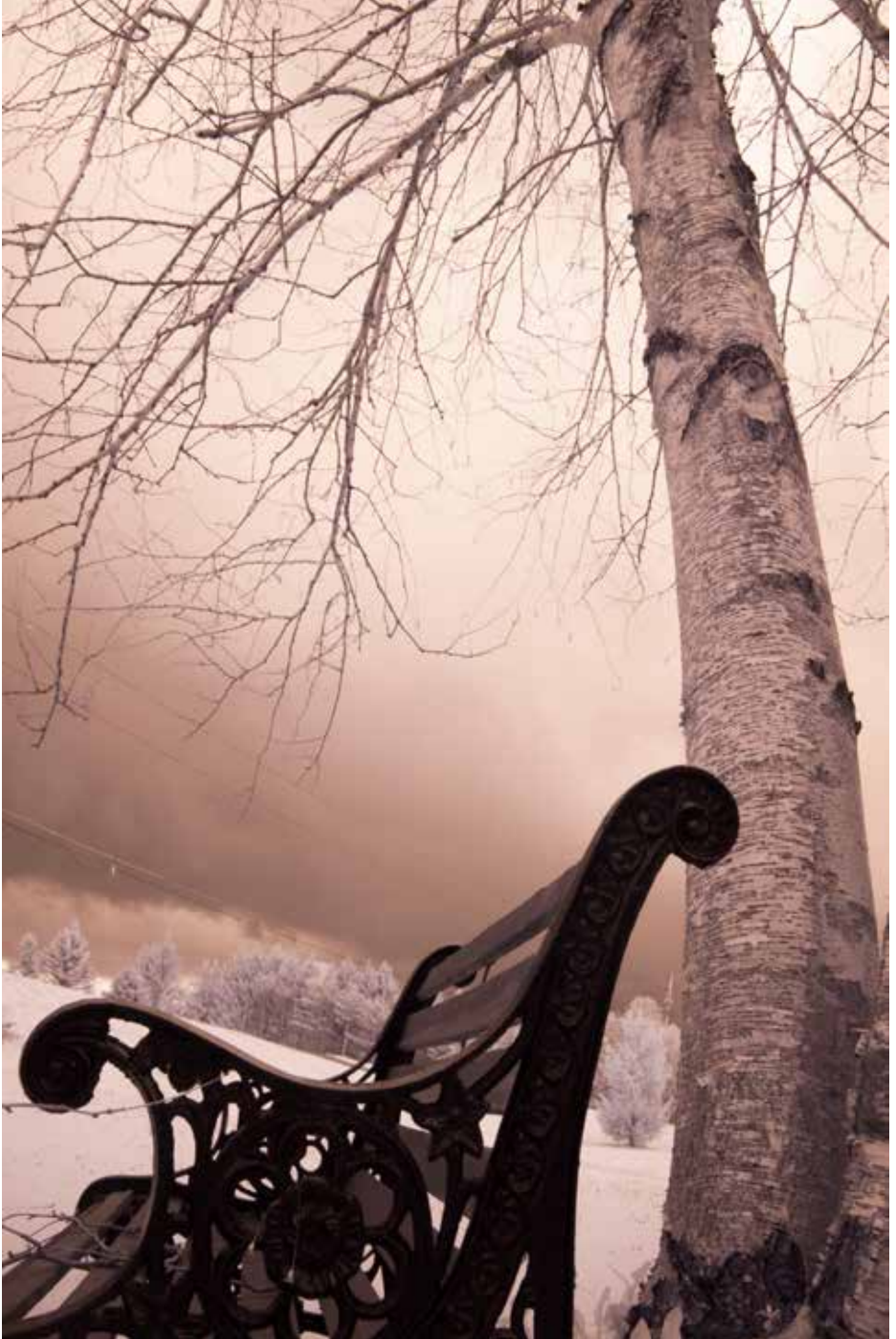
Dark Side of the Moon by Taylor Manley



Burden on Society by Taylor Manley



Window Light by Taylor Manley



Vacant by Taylor Manley





Grease by Taylor Manley

a collection of
ceramic
heads



Longping by GuiHua Gan



Succubus by Alexa Cripps



Friend by Leiw Say



Bad Baby by Xiaoxi Qin



The Artist by Christopher Salamone



Untitled by Jonathan Jensen



Gunther Von Hagens by Junior Johnson

Wilfred Owen Exploding in His Head

Tom Stock



Long left alone
In static attic air,
Hidden between silent shadows,
Not quite buried,
He asked
IT
Be brought down to the
Living
Room.
In the foot locker
(Such a cruel pun),
Shredded and askew,
Tattered revenants,
Lay the Jungle Boots.
Fell by noise never meant to be heard,
Having last walked long ago,
Desiccated sanguine mud still clinging
In tenacious defiance to the march of years,
He does a Recon of them.
From the olive drab sarcophagus,
(Government issue)
The empty foot openings
Stare out at him
Two dead eyes,
Inviting him to insert his misplaced feet
So once more they swallow whole
His legs.
Musty mocking battled battered boots,
Surreal
Empty containers of collateral damage,
Capable of summoning phantoms

Who shoot real pain
 Across so much time and space
 Into this free fire zone.
 Ghosts,
 Relegated, to not only the dark hours,
 Roll with him
 Daily,
 Always by his side
 In his heroes chair.

Some days
 "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot,
 Do you copy????!!!"
 We need Medivac dust-off ASAP!!!"
 While
 The recorded voice at the VA call center
 Once more orders him
 To hurry up and wait for the next available customer service facilitator.
 He listens to recorded music over and over again telling him
 "You are the sunshine of my life"
 Until he falls asleep in his uneasy chair.
 Sleep without rest, fatigue without relief,
 Backlit with a purple haze from the mute, picture less TV set,
 Somewhere between the woke and somnambulist worlds,
 Between the walking and the crippled world,
 From somewhere near dawn's early light,
 Not far from Taps and lights out,
 Deep in the valley of disturbed dreams,
 Somewhere inside a new 'in country',
 He thinks he hears sabers rattling
 To the tune of
 "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again"
 (Hurrah! Hurrah!)
 Until BREAKING NEWS invades the DMZ of dreams,
 Commanding him to finally sweep clean his mine field of Claymore memory,
 To run whole once more,
 Floating free, foot loose on crimson VFW poppies
 Above Flanders's Field,
 With Wilfred Owen exploding in his head.

Completing College-- Behind the Wall

Salih Garret

After going through the trauma of facing court proceedings, sentencing, and the reality of having loved ones turn their back on you, a new sort of reality hits you in the face when you are placed inside of a cell. With nothing but time, you begin to search within yourself. If you're fortunate enough, you begin to understand that you must make a change in your life. That's what happened to me. That 'light bulb moment' happened as I searched for ways to survive, and I accepted that that education would be THE key to my success in life.

I transitioned into a college student while living in circumstances under which many would have crumbled. I am proud to say that the process of completing my degree while living in prison is not only challenging, but transformational. In the process, I have developed critical thinking skills, learned how to communicate effectively, and disciplined myself to follow new organizational strategies.

Looking back, I realize that attending college behind prison walls requires the same soft skills as it would if you were a man or woman on the other side of the bars. You must know what you want and be serious about it. What makes it different for us is facing these additional requirements: besides a high school diploma or GED, you must have no record of disciplinary infractions for at least a year prior to enrollment, and a minimum of six months left on your sentence. Facility program requirements determine the latter. In New York State, there are approximately 23 colleges that currently offer degree programs for incarcerated people. The options consist of 14 Associate Degree Programs, eight Bachelor Degree Programs, and one Master's Degree Program. Some of the participating colleges are Bard College, John Jay College, Cayuga Community College, and Hudson Valley Community College. Each semester starts with 15-20 eager students who successfully passed the placement exam.

Having enrolled has helped me secure a future. Once I complete my sentence requirements, my mission will become to finish my education at Syracuse University and obtain an Administrative position in the Human Service field. Then, I will interview and secure the role of Director at a non-profit whose mission is to make an impact on the community

My advice to young men and women who are incarcerated is simple, but important: NEVER give up on yourself. Make the decision to continue your education, regardless of the circumstances. You can't be passive about this. You have to CHASE DOWN YOUR PASSION! And hold on to hope. I believe that, as they say, "Hope is ALIVE." Hope has eyes that sees opportunity when it's over the horizon. Hope has feet to carry us into our destiny when mistakes, tragedy and self-doubt have blocked our path. Hope is LOVE that fills your heart up so much that you have no choice but to share it. It overflows. Yes, my friends. I can attest that hope is ALIVE!



GuiHua Gan

The Baby

Emma Smith

Michael woke up that morning to a racket. His mother was wailing and his father was offering words of comfort that didn't really seem to be working. Michael slept with the door open, so that if the boogie-man did exist he could make a quick escape. Now his strategy backfired, it was too noisy to sleep. He knew what was going on. His mother had explained to him about the baby she had in her belly and it was coming out very soon.

Michael rolled out of bed and threw his Captain America blankets into a heap. He glared at the crib across the room. He didn't want to share it, and he didn't want a baby brother or sister. It was just him and he liked it that way.

He hopped down the stairs two feet at a time, planning the karate moves he'd use on his encounter with the boogie man. He was probably green and had horns and looked like a booger and-

"Michael honey put your coat on...ohhhhh Lord Jesus!" His mother stopped and bent over with her hands on he kitchen table. "Chris, it hurts so bad."

Michael's father handed him his coat and helped his mother stand and make her way to the door. "I know babe, hang in there."

Michael plodded along behind them, forgetting his shoes because his sleeper feet seemed to do the trick.

He was mad at the baby for hurting his mom so much. Why was Grandma so excited? And Aunt Louise and Uncle Tom and everyone? Michael didn't understand. This baby was worse than the boogie man.

He hopped into the seat behind his dad and buckled himself in the booster at his mom's request. She was still moaning. His dad kept talking to her softly as he pulled the car out of the driveway.

It wasn't far to the hospital. Michael stared at the purple sky, it was

hardly light out. Since he always said his prayers at dark, he figured he still had time to get one in. He closed his eyes tight. God please make this baby go away pleeease. Amen.

When they arrived at St. Vivian's, an agonizing 10 minutes later, Michael was sitting with his cheeks on his fists. The trio shuffled into the emergency waiting room and Michael couldn't help but stare at the variety of people present. One lady was really really fat. "Daddy why is that lady so fat?"

"Michael! You can't say that man. I'm so sorry ma'am."

His father grabbed Michael's coat sleeve and pulled him towards the front desk.

"Chris I can't wait much longer I really can't."

Michael watched his mother closely. She was red as a tomato and she even was crying a little.

"I know sweetie." A lady came to the desk. "She's in labor can we see Dr. Williams?"

"Of course Hun, follow me."

Michael plodded along after the receptionist and his parents, into the elevator. At the top they got off and Michael's mom and dad went into a room and the desk lady told him to sit tight.

He sat tight for a billion years. He couldn't see what was going on but he hoped the baby was going away and his mom was going to be better. His little legs dangled off the cushioned chair and he kicked them vigorously. He was on the rapids, trying to escape the crocodiles, they were really close so he kicked harder and harder.

*"He was mad at the baby
for hurting his mom so much."*

Suddenly he heard a wail from his mother and sobbing. Someone opened the door to the room and rushed out. Someone from inside said, "She's not breathing."

Michael's mother was crying loudly. Something was very wrong. He got up quickly and peeked around the doorway. The people in white coats were running around, back and forth, swarming around his mother like hornets. He felt tears bubble up in his eyes but he didn't understand why or what was happening. He was scared.

His father came around the doorway with a face Michael had never seen. His dad was scared too. He knelt down, placing his hands on Michael's shoulders. "Hey buddy.. I need you to be a big boy for me ok?" Michael knew he only had to be a big boy when something was wrong. "Mommy's baby is really sick. The doctors are doing their best but...she's in bad shape."

His father suddenly grabbed him and hugged him fiercely. Michael felt his father's tears on his neck, and he cried too.

"Daddy...is the baby gonna die?" He couldn't help but sob. He was heartbroken. This was his fault. He never wanted the baby, what if God had listened and was really taking the baby away?

"I don't know Michael, I don't know."

His father stayed with him in the waiting room. After another billion years, a doctor approached them with a clipboard and a serious look.

"Well, I can say definitely that your baby is healthy. She's on oxygen right now and we're monitoring her heart rate, among other things. We don't know what caused her to go into respiratory arrest yet, but she is stable. We're going to keep your wife overnight and see if we can't get her to breastfeed in the morning."

Michael's father seemed to melt into a state of relief. "Thank you so much, really."

"You're welcome, you can see your wife now if you like."

The doctor left and Michael stared at nothing.

“Hey buddy, your mama’s ok and guess what? You’ve got a baby sister, what do you think?”

Michael snapped out of his trance. Maybe God had saved his little sister instead. He was happy, excited even, but he put on his big-boy face.

His dad smiled, “Well?”

Michael sighed. “Do I have to share my room with a girl?”

His dad laughed and ruffled up his hair. “I’m sure we’ll figure something out. Come on, let’s go see your mom.”



Lighthouse by Melanie Quill

Corruption

Dom Castellano

I sit in my dim one-bedroom apartment, and collect my thoughts. A glass of whiskey sits on the desk slightly north east of my closed laptop. I reach for the glass, the rocks sway within the liquid. The taste is rich and oaky, my throat gets a harsh burn but I can take it. I set the glass down in its original position and the rock's motion comes close to a halt. The liquid calms and then my eyes focus on an imported Cuban cigar and its smoke that circulates around me. A slight involuntary smirk comes to my face, I couldn't help but enjoy the smell. My smile retreats as the phone rings. I grab the old gray phone from the dock and press the green button. The ring comes to an end but the coarse voice of my partner begins to speak.

"What did you find on that murder John?"

"Not much as of right now but I am still looking into it Tim." Then there is a pause, I zone out of the conversation. One side of my brain keeps me calm and collected, the other side begins to rage with the thoughts of the victimized family. The site of the man, woman and child lying face down in their own blood haunts me. No one was supposed to get hurt. The more I think about it the more I see that I am becoming what I vowed to bring to justice. Things used to be so much simpler, I used to go to work and then come home at a decent hour. My wife would be in the kitchen cooking up a delicious meal. My two kids would be playing in the back yard, running around and enjoying their youth. I had a great family life, I felt true happiness; nothing could shatter my reality. Then the roller coaster called life went off the rails, I suppose I lost my way when I beat that gang banging thug to death. The pain he brought me... I can only hope that crushing his skull with my fists brought him the same amount, I made sure he suffered. I kneeled to hold my wife and kids one last time as blood ran from their bodies. This was my breaking point and now I sit here alone still doing the same job, it's all I have left. No house, no pets and little to no money. I would have more but addiction is a hell of curse. I fade back into the conversation as my partner calls my name repeatedly.

"John... John... hello John... are you okay man?"

"Yeah Tim sorry I zoned out what did you say?"

"I said there is something not right about all this, based on the crime scene, the four men were meeting someone. They had multiple packages of drugs. So, who were they meeting? They were obviously receiving payment for the drugs; I am not sure if it was money or guns though. When you showed up at the crime scene we went in together, did you see anything interesting or out of place?"

"Hold on Tim I have to review my notes."

I am locked in, I feel my heart race a bit as I debate. Do I give my partner some information so I can pretend I am trying to solve this thing? Or do I just play stupid? This whole thing is a mess. I really fucked up. It feels as if time is endless so I am patient with my dilemma. After a few moments, I find myself lifting my fingers from the keys. I glance at my mahogany grandfather clock, the sight of it is marvelous. I get a warm and peaceful feeling within my mind as I watch the clock. The pendulum swings as the weights hang. One hand inevitably laps the other, I find it fascinating that no matter what clock, watch or time piece you look at the same hand always laps the other. It is quite beautiful in its infinite form. My eyes break away from the grandfather clock and I realize that time is limited in this situation. There is no escape from the choice I must make. Then I return to the conversation.

"Like I said Tim, I didn't find much at all but I would like to go back and search for any hidden evidence that we may have missed. What do you think?" I wait impatiently for a response. My hands shake with fear, I think deeply about killing one of the only friends I've ever known. I don't like these thoughts flowing inside my head, I am lost. My eyes fixed on that damn grandfather clock again, then Tim spoke.

"The pain he brought me... I can only hope that crushing his skull with my fists brought him the same amount..."

“Yeah. Let’s go back tomorrow morning and investigate, I am sure we are missing something.”

I respond with haste, “Do you want to go now?”

Again, I waited for his response, but I didn’t have to wait long. “You don’t want to wait until morning?”

I respond one last time, “Not really, no.”

His response came quick again, “I’ll see you in a couple of minutes.”

Without responding I end the call. I stand up and walk to my bed. My gun holster, a leather coat and a bottle of whiskey sit above the comforter. I grab the holster and slip it on effortlessly. Very easily I slide my gun into its place within the holster, I put my leather coat on over that and sit on the bed. I wait for my partner, while waiting I grab the bottle and tip it back, the liquid pours down my throat and the harsh burn returns. I ignore it and continue to drink until the bottle is empty. I drop the dry bottle onto the bed and tip my head back to rest my eyes. I wait for a knock at the door, the thought of pulling the trigger on my partner circulates through my mind. Will it put an end to this madness? Nothing I do will bring the family back from the grave. I can only imagine what my wife and kids think of me now. Maybe I should just turn myself in... I lay with my eyes closed simply thinking then a loud knock wakes me from my thoughts. I get out of bed slowly and walk to the door. The three locks come undone easily and there in my line of sight is my young well-dressed, freshly shaved partner. I notice he is fashioned in a nice navy-blue suit and black dress shoes, it is odd that he is dressed this way at three in the morning. He breaks the silence and speaks,

“Are you ready John?” I look at Tim and nod, we walk down the old rickety stairs and out the door.

Dull street lights shine in the darkness, light rain falls from the pitch black, starless sky. My partners old beat up sixty-nine Dodge Charger sits close to the curb still running with a loud rumbling coming from its engine. We pop open the doors simultaneously and get in. “Let’s go see what we can find, my friend.” I said with a straight face. My partner nods and starts the car. He drives us through the neighborhood, we pass by

forsaken apartment complexes. The buildings appear rundown and forgotten. Homeless men and women settle in alleys nearby without a care. People who seem to be up to no good walk through the streets. My heart isn't racing as much but that might be from the alcohol. Nothing is said from either of us but I get the feeling that something isn't right, maybe I'm just paranoid. Tim isn't as talkative as usual though, I notice his standard issue Glock pistol slightly poking out of his coat. His thoughts seem unclear but I wonder if he knows... I wonder if he suspects that I was part of that deal.

We arrive at the apartment complex, the car doors slam shut simultaneously as we get out. Walking up the steps I stop and look at the sky again for a moment. A full moon hangs high. I draw my attention back to the scene and lift the police tape so Tim can go by. He leads the way, as I follow. We make our way up the stairs to the second floor. The hallway outside of room seven is covered in bullet shells and a thin layer of cocaine. We slowly open the creaky door and walk in. The bodies are gone but the chalk outline remains, a thin layer of cocaine coats this wooden floor also. We start to look around for anything that we may have missed, "Go check the kitchen, I will stay here in the living room". Tim nods slightly and walks slowly through the crime scene.

I begin looking for the money that was left here. My mind is cloudy because of the whiskey but I try to remember everything that happened. My mind recreates the meeting, I see myself handing the money to four dealers. The dealers were white males who wore black long sleeve shirts and baggy jeans. As they hand me the drugs, sirens can be heard immediately outside, I tear open the cocaine and throw it in the air. The dealers become too distracted to stop me from running, I make it out the door then the shooting starts. I run out the back entrance and down the street. Then I realize I left prints on that suitcase. I turn around and meet up with the cops out front for briefing on the situation. Little did they know, I was part of it all. My partner shows up at that point, he had a confused look on his face as he was surprised to see me. He brushed off his confusion as we charged into the apartment complex. My flashbacks stop as my memory gets fuzzy. Then I remember waking up to my partner, he helped me to my feet. I had a small cut on the back of my head and a whopping headache. I remember seeing the victimized family lying in

their own blood. What am I missing?

“Hey John, did you find anything?”

“No Tim, I’m still looking.” I close my eyes for a second and think once more, I remember seeing a man hovering over the bodies while I was in and out of consciousness. My mind produces flashes of the case sliding across the floor somewhere in the apartment. “Where did it slide to though?”

“Did you say something John?”

“No Tim.” I looked through the living room close to the bottom of the walls, no luck. Leaving the living room, I enter the small bedroom on the right and look close, the dark is working against me. As hard as I look, there is nothing to be found. Then I walk back out into the living room and observe everything, I close the door a little bit and oddly enough the case is laying there.

I pick the suitcase up and call Tim. “Tim I found something!” He doesn’t answer, then I look around and find him standing by the sink with his gun out.

“Great job John, I knew you could do it. Now give me the case.”

I was lost for a moment as I dropped the case by my feet and looked at him. “What did you do? How were you part of this?”

He let out a chuckle, “John I wasn’t part of this, I am not stupid though I knew you were hiding something. You were on that scene quicker than me. I was called to the crime scene! You showed up out of nowhere on your day off, wearing casual clothes. Everybody else thought it was luck, except me. Then you and I raided the apartment, we killed the dealers. They weren’t going to go quietly. That family told me that they saw you enter with a case. It’s amazing what you learn about people right before they die. That family was completely poor, from what I saw they were innocents living day to day but I couldn’t have them turn you into the police... Luckily, they told me. Then I knocked you out and shot each of them in the head. I fired off a few more shots to make it seem like I was just killing dealers then I woke you up. I saved you from conviction, this

all started with you wanting the drugs you junkie. Well call me greedy but I want the money.”

“You son of a bitch!”

He chuckled once more, “You are a bad man John, I’m just looking for a pay raise. Unlike you I am actually going to get what I want.”

His gun pointed to my heart, I slid the case across the floor to him, his eyes followed the case and then I charge. I spear him into the sink and knock the wind out of him, as his gun falls to the floor. He recovers quickly and head-butts me, blood pours from my nose. Instinctively I grab onto his clothes to hold myself up. I start to punch him in the ribs repeatedly. With every punch he weakens but in my drunken state I am slower. He uses this to his advantage as he pushes his knee into my gut and throws me into the sink, I hit my head off the faucet. He then grabs me by the back of my coat and throws me onto the floor. I lift myself up from the floor slowly to readjust to a sitting position.

“This could have all been avoided old man, I was just going to let you walk but now, you die.”

I slowly pull out my gun as he picks his up from the floor and faces me. Our guns now fixed on one another, it’s all a matter of who pulls the trigger first. I know I am not making this out alive, and that’s okay.

“Any final words John?”

I readjusted once more to sit up against the wall, my gun remains pointed at Tim. Then my final words come out... “Fuck you!”

Two loud gun shots echo through the hall of the apartment complex. Tim falls onto the apartment floor, blood pouring from his head. John starts to bleed out from a chest wound with a slight smile on his face, his breathing is heavy.

One final thought courses through his mind before his heart stops. “Louise... Bentley... Aarik... I love... you... forgive me...”

Excerpt from a Literary Work in Progress

Jadrien Gordon

An alarm goes off at seven rousing Nathan from a blessedly dreamless sleep. He slaps at the nightstand next to his bed trying to find and destroy the device. After several attempts that has is palm stinging Nathan cracks open one eye. The alarm isn't on the nightstand. It's perched defiantly on his dresser taunting him from the far side of his bedroom. Mom set this up. Nathan still groggy brain deduces as he glares at the alarm. I have to get up to shut this stupid thing off. Lame.

Nathan drags himself out of bed pulling his sheets and pillow to the floor. He staggers to his dresser raises his fist high over his head then slams it down the alarm clock silencing the vile device and putting several more cracks in its plastic face. The blow isn't enough to terminate the thing but at least it felt very satisfying. Nathan is about to go to the bathroom when he notices his clothes. They're ironed and neatly lined out on his dresser. He stares at them with deep thought. The clothes, smelling of detergent, silently reminding him that he has to go to school. In order to wear these Nathan has to become someone else. He gazes into the mirror and sees the face of a child that he was. Nathan sighs. For a while he didn't know that part of him still existed. He thought the old Nathan died on Halloween night five years ago. In a way, he's kind of glad he'd been wrong. Still that child has to recede. He would not last that day.

Nathan shuts his eyes and draws in a deep breath, filling his lungs with the brisk morning air. He searches the deep trenches of his being, underneath memory to a place that burns. There he finds pain and loneliness. He finds anger and loathing. He could go deeper but then he would submit completely to the berserker. He's sunk enough to allow red tendrils to snake out of his heart and penetrate his mind. Beads of sweat dot Nathan's forehead as his body temperature rises enough to expel the morning chill of his bedroom. Go back to sleep. Nathan hisses to the child. Die just for a little while. He opens his eyes. The boy is gone. In the

mirror is the shade of a creature born of that horrific night. Nathan wants to smash that mirror. But the monster has become so necessary. So very convenient.

Katherin blinks at the expressionless face staring at her from the inside of her locker. Geisha, she muses. It is the face of the traditional courtesans of Japanese culture – A mask that reveals no inner thoughts. An observer can project whatever emotions that may please their own vanity. I don't need you anymore, do I. Katherin asks her own reflection. I'm where I belong now. There is no reason to go on pretending... She takes out the books she'll need for her next class and closes her locker, leaving in darkness the mask that has served her too well for the past five years. Katherin tells herself again the next time she opens the locker it will be a familiar face that she'll see.

Katherin turns and allow her senses to be bombarded with the activity around her. It's midafternoon at her high school. Students make their way to their next classes in no big hurry; there's plenty of time till the bell rings. Lockers squeak open and bang shut and Katherin's nose is filled with the smells of oxy pads, deodorant, hair gel, and sweat.

Katherin bites her lip seeing the high school "theological club" known as The Pride further down the hall. They are making their rounds picking out students to extort. They've managed to convince the faculty that they are collecting donations for a charity. So the Dean advises staff to turn a blind eye the Prides aggressive tactics. A Pride of scavengers. A coalition of brutes lorded over by an overstuffed alpha male... Katherin leans against her locker and focuses on her attention away from the gigantic Anthony Henry to a tall, feral looking boy, and kept in check by a mad dog. Nathan her best friend from childhood.

The Pride has surrounded a victim. He's some kid Katherin's seen around but does not know him by name. He's a freshman. Small and

“But the monster has become so necessary.
So very convenient.”

timid and like most other freshman in a new school he's braving a new world, trying to find his place. He's a face in the crowd, innocent, unassuming, caught aware and in the wrong place at the wrong time. Katherin doesn't know his name so she gives him one, Tetsuo. Towering over Tetsuo – over everyone – is the alpha scavenger, Anthony Henry. The titan's expression is casual, pleasant as he pitches the goals of the faux charity and the importance of donations. Tetsuo isn't buying any of it but he's trapped. He looks for a way out, some sort of a distraction, a friend to help him or a teacher to save him. The hallway only has observers and students pretending to chat and not pay any mind to his humiliation. The usual.

Katherin watches Tetsuo's head drop. She surmises that this is the very moment when he realizes that no one is going to help him; not the jocks whom are the most capable of standing up to Anthony, nor the cheerleading squad whom can easily gain the attention of the Prides gluttonous leader. The chess club could detour Anthony by challenging his pride, however they maintain a strategic distance from the Prides activities at all times.

Tetsuo's eyes turn glassy. He holds his head up not as a show of strength but to keep his tears from spilling. He's caving to the pressure. The bullies thirst for tears above anything else. They always want more. The Pride are masters at opening the flood gates of a wounded soul. They savor every drop and are never satisfied. They bare at their teeth at Tetsuo's silent plea for mercy.

Anthony was waiting for this. He puts his heavy head on the boy's shoulder and pushes him back. The kid, grimacing in pain, slams into something solid, something that hurts his back, neck and shoulders. It's not a wall and it's not a locker. He slowly turns his head and looks too deep into the blazing gaze of Nathan Nightshade.

Tetsuo turns white; his dismay shifts into naked terror. Nathan, Almost as tall as Anthony leers down at him with uncanny loathing. Katherin hugs her books to her chest as she watches the scene unfold. She remembers a boy who could easily be moved to tears, his unguarded face an open window to his soul. That wuss. I held him as he cried during

Snoopy Come Home. Those doe eyes of his would run endlessly at the site of a sad looking teddy bear. Now those same eyes can reduce everything to ash.

What really startles her is how terrified Tetsuo looks. Nathan has built a reputation for himself. What he's done leaves no room for exaggeration, no space for rumor. Katherin is the only one in school who hasn't seen what her childhood best friend is truly capable of. Yet Nathan's hateful expressions threaten to destroy her memories of the boy who not so long ago was a favorite target of Anthony Henry.

Tetsuo, reluctant only a second ago to donate to the Pride's charity, eagerly forfeits all of his money, hand over giant fist to Anthony Henry. Anthony, very pleased, pulls the boy into a hug and thanks him for his generosity.

While Anthony makes a show of thanking the terrified kid, Nathan notices Katherin. His left eye twitches violently as he tries to hold his angry mask. He has become so adept at burying that weak child deep beneath pain and anger. Deep, but not deep enough that Katherin, his best friend, cannot find and recover him. She offers Nathan a gentle smile warm enough to melt the hardness of his face. The ferocity of his expression turns to weariness. Nathan's sudden change does not go unnoticed by Anthony. He releases Tetsuo, who quickly departs without looking back. Anthony follows Nathan's gaze to Katherin. His "Always- a- Pleasure" smile fades into flat line.

Katherin glares back to Anthony, wondering if he remembers her, the only Japanese girl in their third grade class. That and she had been a loner. It was for those reasons that he had targeted her. She was noticeably different from other kids and alone. You remember me don't you? It wasn't that long ago...

If Anthony does recognize Katherin he has yet to reveal it. However he has taken notice of her interest in Nathan. His attention mechanically moves from Nathan to Katherin. The gears in his head turn with greasy efficiency. Suddenly he turns and walks away taking huge strides. Student leap from his path as his entourage follows in his wake.

Only Nathan stays behind. His face turns softer now that the others are gone. Katherin drinks this moment. She's aware that others are watching them with open curiosity. She doesn't care. Right now she doesn't care about her anonymity and she knows Nathan could care less about his own vicious reputation. In this golden moment the two of them are children once again. In this fleeting moment they are the envy of the old elementary school; they are the ones with the platinum bond. In this dying moment they are the ones who come together with one another to stand up to Anthony Henry, make a fool out of him, and pay for it dearly. In this passing moment, they are The All-Stars once more.

The piercing ring of the bell snaps them both out of that dream. Nathan winks at Katherin, shoves his hands down his pockets and stalks away. Students trip over themselves trying to get out of his way.

Katherin laughs bitterly. There is a part of you that enjoys his attention. It may be a small part. So small you would deny it even exists. But it's there. The power you feel from the fear that you create will recede again. You hate what you have become. I'll just keep reminding you who you were... who WE are.



Alyssa Schmidt



Alyssa Schmidt

Until Valhalla

Bryan Preston

My morning started the same as every other morning had for the past month. I was finally starting to adjust to being forward deployed and all its mundane routine without getting the chance to go out on a patrol. For most of my platoon this was our first deployment, and we had no clue what to expect, but I can tell you that we were all itching to actually get to do something other than sitting around bored out of our minds and cracking jokes about each other. Sooner than I realized I would be thankful for all of the preparation that went into getting ready for this.

Deville, Rodriguez, Smith and I had gone to breakfast the same as the past few weeks. Deville is your picture perfect Marine from Texas. He had a square jaw, broad shoulders, and that typical southern draw that one would expect a Texas boy to have. Rodriguez on the other hand was from Southern California and had a full sleeve tattoo on his right arm. Smith was the senior guy to all four of us and was from Arizona. He was cocky and sure of himself because this was his second deployment and from the stories that we had heard about him he could handle his own in any fight. His skin looked like leather from growing up in the desert. Before we finished breakfast that morning Staff Sergeant Ramirez came up to us and told us that we needed to be in the ready room in fifteen minutes.

As we walked into the ready room I noticed that this ready room did not look like the one back on Camp Pendleton. The room was about twenty feet by thirty feet and had a large projector screen at the front of the room. They also had maps of our operating area on the wall with what looked to be a highlighted route marked through Fallujah. Standing at the front of the room was Gunnery Sergeant Braddam. He was a man of rough stature, standing about 6'1" and built like a brick shit house. His face looked rugged and had a slight tan to it. Every man listened closely to what he said because they knew that his sixteen years of experience just might be the thing that separated going home in one piece or in a flag draped coffin. This was the moment everyone in the platoon and I had

been looking forward to. We were finally going on our first patrol.

"We will be departing tomorrow morning at zero seven hundred and proceeding west towards Fallujah. We are not expected to encounter any hostiles along the way and we will be conducting radio checks every two hours." said Ramirez. "If there are no questions go get your gear ready."

"Oorah," replied the entire platoon in unison.

We made our way to the gear locker where we stored all of the ammunition, grenades, and extra first aid gear. Everyone had solemn looks on their faces while we prepared to pop our deployment cherries. I figured it would have been the opposite. I couldn't take the silence any longer.

"Do you guys think that we'll get the chance to kill any of those fuckers?" I asked Deville, Smith and Rodriguez.

"I fucking hope so. I'm itching to get into some shit," replied Deville.

"Deville you're always looking to pick a fight. Shit I'm just hoping to make it back in one piece," said Rodriguez.

"You all just need to chill the fuck out and stop worrying about what tomorrow holds and get your fucking heads in the game," said Smith. "Just because they are telling us that we won't encounter any hostiles doesn't mean that it is true. You all know that there is no such thing as military intelligence."

We each grabbed extra magazines, rounds, and grenades. We also made sure to load all seven of our magazines to the full thirty round capacity, grabbed our flak jackets, kevlar helmets, and a couple of extra MRE's and threw them into our day packs. We conducted gear checks to make sure everyone had what they needed for the next day.

"Everyone load up and let's go fuck some shit up," said Ramirez without missing a beat.

We loaded up into our Humvees and started on a journey that would forever change everyone's lives. The first few hours passed slowly as there was nothing to occupy us except dry barren earth. When we got to the city of Fallujah we had plenty to keep us occupied. There were locals

walking around all staring at us and ushering their children inside quickly almost as if they knew something was about to happen. The buildings were all huddled together and looked like old rundown buildings in the slums of San Diego. Most of the buildings were two to three stories tall and they were all different shades of brown that were full of bullet holes from constant skirmishes being fought amongst them. The city block looked like someone was trying to pack everyone in the city in just a few hundred feet of each other. Then, just before we reached the outskirts of Fallujah, it happened.

Two deafening explosions went off simultaneously. One in front of the lead Humvee and one behind the rear. I slowly got out of my Humvee, disoriented from the two blasts. Slowly my hearing started to return. The first thing I heard was something no one would ever want to hear. It was the sound of a bullet whizzing past and slamming into the Humvee only mere inches from my head.

"Burk! Get the fuck down and start shooting back at those motherfuckers," yelled Ramirez.

"Roger that SSgt." I replied.

Without missing a beat I crouched down behind the rear of the truck and looked through my sights. I was surveying the top of the building about fifty meters in front of me when I saw the assailant crouching down aiming in on Deville and Rodriguez with a rocket propelled grenade. I took a deep breath and took the man in my sights. I slowly pulled the trigger back on my M4 until the recoil of the round took me by surprise. I watched as the man fell from the top of the building and followed him down until his lifeless body slammed into the ground. Then, just like all of the typical war movies, shots started to rain in from every direction.

“We loaded up into our humvees and started on a journey that would forever change everyone’s lives.”

Smith was to my left and in the open, not taking cover. Instead he was just standing there shooting at every single Taliban he saw. Then there was that same unmistakable whizzing of a bullet slicing through the air again. The next thing I knew there was a guttural scream coming from him. I looked over at him and saw blood pumping from a wound in his stomach. It hit him just below his flak jacket and he was already starting to become pale.

"They shot me--call the corpsman," yelled Smith.

"Corpsman, we have a man down," I yelled.

The Corpsman ran over and started working on Smith. The corpsman tried his best to stop the bleeding but in the end he could not and Smith fell victim to being overly cocky and not taking cover when he had the chance. I knew that the only way to prevent more Marines from suffering the same fate I had to keep looking for those bastards that were shooting at us. I went back to sweeping the area through my sights. Every time I got one in my sights, I put two rounds into their chest dropping them each time.

"Fall back to the building to our six o'clock. We have an air strike coming in on our location in three mikes." said Ramirez.

As soon as I got into position I could hear the undeniable sound of the whizzing of the missiles flying through the air at their target. They rocked the buildings across from our position. They fell like paper being blown over by the wind. When the dust finally settled there was no sound to be heard. It seemed almost too good to be true.

As I lay there recounting the events that had just transpired I hear my name called out. Unsure of where it came from I did not move from my position. I was quite comfortable as this was the first time since morning that I had a chance to just relax. This time my name was called out in a more demanding manor, so reluctantly I start to move.

"Burk, get over here," SSgt Ramirez said.

"Coming SSgt," I replied a bit groggily.

"I need you to take Deville and Rodriguez and go check the building to

our two o'clock," said Ramirez.

"Copy that," I replied as headed to retrieve Deville and Rodriguez.

In the short time that it took me to reach their location my mind was racing. Why could SSgt Ramirez want us to go double check the house? It has been quiet for about an hour. We haven't received any shots fired, seen any movement, or heard anyone but ourselves during that time. Did he know something we didn't? The more I thought about it the more I started getting a feeling in the pit of my stomach I had only felt one other time in my life before this. That sinking feeling I had just earlier that day when I had my first fire fight.

"Hey shitheads, SSgt Ramirez wants us to go and double check that house," I said to Deville and Rodriguez.

"What the fuck for?" they replied in unison.

"Fuck if I know, but that's what he wants so grab your gear and let's get this shit over with," I replied.

As we slowly worked our way to the building we didn't say a word to each other. We weren't sure what to expect when we got to the building but we were ready for anything. The building was two stories tall and was riddled with bullet holes. Parts of the building on the second floor and up by the roof had been blown away by the airstrike that had happened just a short while ago. The door was nothing special just a bunch of wood boards that had been attached together in what looked like a very crude and hastily made barn door. Deville lined up to take point, followed by Rodriguez, and I was bringing up the rear. I could feel that anticipation build as we got ready to breach the door. It felt different than it had during all of our training exercises back in Camp Pendleton. It reminded me of that feeling you get when you are about to embark on an unexpected journey unsure of where you would end up. Just before breaching the door, Deville turned to Rodriguez and me.

"Whatever happens, we've got each other's backs in there. Keep your heads on a swivel and your eyes open for anything," said Deville.

"Don't worry about it, we got this," smirked Rodriguez.

“Yeah, we’re not gonna find shit, he’s just making us do this to pass time. We will be fine,” I said trying to maintain my confidence in front of them.

“Well then let’s go and hopefully get the chance to fuck some shit up,” Deville replied.

With that he slowly opened the door and proceeded to enter the building followed by Rodriguez and me. We methodically worked our way through the downstairs of the building. Deville would sweep to the right, Rodriguez sweeping to the left, while I was slowly sweeping our rear to make sure none of those cowardly bastards took us by surprise. It went this way for the first three rooms we cleared. The rooms were empty except one. In what we thought would have been the dining room sprawled out on the table were maps and pictures of our unit. They knew that we were coming. I thought this was very unusual and what little hope I had of not encountering anyone was slowly starting to slip away. Deville came out of the fourth room and gave us the all clear.

With that he pointed to the stairs and we silently moved in unison to proceed up to the second floor. Again we encountered nothing as we moved up the stairs. Deville rounded the last corner and reached the second floor. That’s when all hell broke loose. We heard the one sound none of us wanted to hear. It was undeniable. That metal clinking sound bouncing off the ground and then rolling to a stop.

“Grenade! Get the fuck down,” Deville shouted as he dove to his right.

The sound was deafening inside the house. It seemed to bounce off the walls endlessly and just repeat. Time slowed down as my hearing slowly started to return to me I heard screaming. I looked up to see five insurgents all covered in what appeared to be dust from the building as a result of the bombing approaching us. This was what I had been hoping wouldn’t happen. There was three of us and five of them.

“Find cover,” I shouted.

I dove to a stand that was still standing by the top of the stairs and kicked it over crouching behind it. Deville managed to get in an alcove that was by a window directly across from me. Rodriguez got up and started to head to the room that was positioned directly behind me. As he got up to

move, Deville and I laid down cover fire so he could make it to the room.

The insurgents look shocked that we had all recovered so quickly and didn't get hurt from the grenade. They didn't realize that they had thrown it too hard so it rolled past us and went down the stairs to the landing before exploding. We were lucky, but weren't gonna let them know that.

"Hey, fuckers, don't you know it takes more than one fucking grenade to kill Marines," shouted Rodriguez.

With us shooting back at them from behind our cover they started to retreat back to the room that they came from. Just before making it back to the room one of the insurgents dropped. Deville had caught him right between the eyes, spraying blood on two of his buddies. They were returning fire at us.

"I'm moving!" yelled Deville to me over the bursts of gunfire.

"Go! I got your six!" I yelled back.

He pulled up and ran across the narrow hall and into a room about ten feet in front of me. Just as he was about to make it through the door he fell in agony.

"Fuck! They shot me in the leg." Deville yelled.

"You good to keep fighting?" I questioned.

"Yeah," responded Deville.

"Rodriguez, move on my signal to Deville's previous position," I said.

"Gotcha," Rodriguez acknowledged.

"Now!" I yelled.

With that he ducked out of the room and made it to the window alcove. Deville was standing back up and without saying a word started to charge the room yelling and firing like a deranged asshole.

"Let's get 'em," Deville said.

He hit one of them as they stuck their head out to look and see what was going on. Then suddenly, one of them came out of the room Deville had just been in and another from the room across the hall from that. I managed to drop the one that came out of from the room Deville had been in. Then multiple shots rang out through the building. The other insurgent was dropped by Rodriguez. But he wasn't quick enough. Deville was hit again. This time in the other leg. It was a lucky shot too. It hit him right in the back of the knee. Deville dropped unable to get back up. Without hesitating I jumped up and ran for Deville. I had to get to him before they did. I was about five from him when I heard another shot and looked up to see another insurgent falling to the floor dead. I sped up, running faster than I had ever before and grabbed Deville by the strap on flak jacket, starting to head back towards Rodriguez.

"I've got you buddy, we're gonna make it don't worry," I said to Deville.

Suddenly I felt the same burning sensation as I had earlier in the day and knew I had been hit. But I also heard something unfamiliar to me. It sounded like someone was gasping for air mixed with a gurgling sound. I looked down and saw that the bullet hadn't just hit me but had gone straight through Deville's neck first before hitting my calf.

"Deville's hit," I yelled to Rodriguez

"Shit. Get down," yelled Rodriguez.

That was the last thing that I heard and then everything went black.

Five Years of Prison and Growing Up

William Daniels

My name is William Daniels and I'm 51 years old. I'm about to write about the changes in my life over the last five or so years. I will be comparing myself from that time to the contrast of who I am today. It will be difficult to write about just me without including a host of people, events and situations that have brought to where I am in my life today. That is to say spiritually, physically, mentally, and overall attitude towards the future. I will be writing about the months prior to April 24, 2011 and the tragic event of that day, which brought me to prison. This is also the date of the unfortunate tragedy that cost a man his life, the suffering, pain and grief cannot be measured. It will be about my coming to grip with acceptance, owning responsibility, self-forgiveness, moving forward while dealing with feelings, setting goals, and hoping for a better tomorrow. I will do my best to keep some type of chronological order to the events, but no promises. So let's start with events prior to April 24, 2011.

I am a recovering alcoholic that has been in or around recovery since 1998. I've had some relapses since that time, with two periods of sobriety over five years. Three days prior to me coming to jail, I had not drank in 5 1/2 years (synthetic marijuana). K-2 was fairly new and the curiosity of a high similar to weed peaked my interest. With an unconscious craving to self-medicate my feelings, I tried it. At that point in my life all rational thinking was gone. I had been self-employed from 2001-2011, sole proprietor of a small home improvement business. It is not my wish to make excuses for my poor decision making, which was detrimental. I was under financial stress to the recession, my relationship with my wife wasn't the best, and my pride and ego would not allow me to ask for help. With an inability to face life on life's terms, I put myself in a precarious position. I was doomed to use with an attitude of hopelessness and despair that I had worked myself into. Thinking I knew best and could handle things on my own, how wrong I was. So let's go back to the

beginning of the month of April 2011.

It was the early part of this month that I traveled to New York, to subcontract in the city of Utica. I was going to be there for three weeks, finish the job and go home. I had been in the area several times before over the last couple of years. In the past, I was with members of my recovery network. This time I came by myself, bad idea on my part. Already using, I began to isolate myself from others, hiding my use. I was staying with the owner of the company that I was subcontracting from and working with members of his crew. They had fears that I was reporting everything they did to their boss, which was not the case. The owner was very inquisitive of the progress of the job. The tension I felt from staying with him and getting along with his men was unbearable. I just didn't have the social skills to deal with it at the time, I felt trapped in the middle. April 24 was Easter Sunday that year. I was homesick and truly wanted to be back home with my wife and 3 1/2 year old daughter. I was totally a miserable person, getting worse by the day. Three days prior to Easter, I drank. I couldn't communicate my desire to leave Utica and go home. One of the myths of man, "Men should be the sole providers for the family, real men don't ask or need help." Looking back I regret not going home, being honest with someone about how I felt, or asking for help. Taking care of my family was impossible, I wasn't even taking care of myself. I had been drinking heavily that Easter Sunday, driving with no regard to anyone's life or safety. I remember thinking if I wasn't careful, I might get a D.W.I... The thought I could pass out at the wheel, crash, and take someone's life; well that never crossed my mind. After all, that type stuff only happens to the other guy! How much more irresponsible and selfish could I have acted? Who were my victims? The answer would be, many!

I won't mention his name, nor will I ever forget it. His wife also seriously

"This time I came by myself, bad idea on my part. Already using, I began to isolate myself from others, hiding my use."

injured. He was the father of two young ladies, one was 22 the other 17. He had one grandchild at the time, she was two. His oldest daughter was pregnant with her second child. There is no way I could ever replace their loss. The regret and remorse I live with on a daily basis. The guilt, shame, and responsibility for a debt I can never repay. So, I live with this burden, knowing I am responsible. I would never wish this on anyone, on either side of the spectrum. There is also my wife who struggles daily, raising our daughter basically alone. They are also victims. My wife has stood by me in her life on a daily basis. The consequences of my behavior have been a far reaching ripple effect. I was sentenced to seven to twenty-one years in New York State Department of Corrections. The first six months of my incarceration, I was in a deep state of denial. I went to sleep praying I would wake up in the morning to discover this was all a very bad dream. I assure you though, it is real.

While in county jail, before coming to state prison I started attending some A.A meetings, where I met a man named Jack. Jack brought meetings in from the outside. He planted the seeds of two words that I would later put to use; they are, "Preparation and Opportunity." I started attending church and was connected to a preacher with a prison ministry. For so long in my life I had tried to fill a God size whole with everything, but God I also met a young man in county with the same changes as myself. He was someone I could empathize with. I will refer to him as Matt in the writing. Although that is not his name. Over the last four years we have become good friends. After county I was sent to Elmira state prison.

Elmira was a major culture shock. The reality of my loss of freedom. The bricks, bars, lack of mobility to come and go as I please was gone. Actual choices of what I would eat, when I could shower, what I could wear; all being decided by someone else. One of my friends back home named Butch, suggested I stick with the winners. Butch had done 16 years in Virginia state prisons and currently has 29 years of sobriety. He told me the winners were people that were trying to improve themselves and help others, in spite of their circumstances. He said, "They are there!" It was up to me to find them. I was in the max a little over ten months. He also stressed for me to practice awareness. It took some time to truly figure that one out. What I came up with was things like where I was at, who I was with, what I said, and keeping focused on future goals at the time.

While at Elmira I did complete a vocational program. It was at Elmira I discovered I enjoyed reading, which I have done much of, over the last five years. It has become a healthy form of escape for me. It is relaxing, as well as educational. After about ten months my classification dropped and I was sent to Cayuga, my first medium prison. I was only there for thirty days, before being transferred to Gowanda. It was at Gowanda that I really began to grow and change.

I arrived at Gowanda in the latter part of November 2012. I was sent there to participate in Gowanda's D.W.I program. I was placed on a waiting list for it. I ran into Matt again, in the yard. He shared with me how he was working as an I.P.A. (Inmate Program Associate). Matt expressed how much he was enjoying it and thought I would be interested in the opportunity. So I decided to write and was approved for the program. I finished the course and was placed as an A.R.T. (Aggression Replacement Training) facilitator. My role was to present prosocial skills such as: using self-control, thinking ahead of consequences, and understanding the feelings of others. I also had the opportunity to work as a T.A. (teacher's assistant) for Pre-G.E.D... I started feeling better about myself, by helping others. I was walking daily, on a softball team, playing handball, and eating healthier. I started setting goals and accomplishing them. I received a certificate for legal research, and the H.I.V. aids facilitator course and involved with the prison book club. I'm not sure how many people I helped along the way, hopefully a few. All I'm sure of, it was very rewarding for myself. It has not been easy making an effort to be positive in such a negative environment as prison. I had the chance to take a good at myself while in the D.W.I. program. I'm grateful for the civilian staff that has helped along the way. I don't think it would be appropriate to name them, so I won't. God knows who they are. I have had one ticket in the last five years, for missing a medical call-out. It reminded me, I am by no means perfect. My whole attitude and outlook has changed. After completing D.W.I... I was offered a preference transfer. So I chose the Oneida hub. I arrived here at Mohawk Correctional Facility in the early part of November 2015. I am working in facility maintenance as a carpenter. It feels good to be working with wood again. I go to A.A. once a week and am still attending church services. There is a college program here at Mohawk, funded by the Sunshine Ladies Foundation. Acquiring an associ-

ate's degree is now one of my goals, while I'm here in prison.

I'm not the person I was five years ago. Today it is easier for me to ask for help. Prompt to say I don't know something, if I don't. Thanks to A.R.T. I am a better communicator, decision maker, and more perceptive of other people's views and feelings. Self-forgiveness has played a big part in my ability to move forward. I am not saying I'm not accountable or responsible for my actions of April 24, 2011. My victim's family may never forgive me and that's understandable. I'm not full of the doom and gloom of five years ago. Today I have hope, and am capable of contributing to society. I can be a better me, husband, father, and friend. I have to practice some principles though; awareness, remaining open-minded, willingness, and not forgetting the feelings of others. I still have a ways to go, room for growth. The last five years have been about me growing up.



Lost in the Lake by Vicki Brown

When a Tree Falls in the Forest...

David Montgomery

A Solid Oak shed its leaves
And fell slowly to the ground
Overtaken by disease
It never made a sound

Although silent in its death
The forest took a heavy blow
When the tree took its last breath
The Oak left a gaping hole

It was home to some
An escape for many
Everyone was welcome
For it provided plenty

Shade from the burning sun
Shelter from the storm
With nowhere else to run
In the winter kept one warm

Even in this tragedy
This Oak does still survive
Immortal is the memory
Of when she was still alive

Sketchboard



Wenlin Deng



Taylor Lawton



Jerry Rosario

The Other Side of the Curtain

A play by Theodore J. Cook

Introduction

In the *Other Side of the Window* I had the idea to take a prison classroom, to show the human side of prisoners, while also trying to show the transformers prisoners undergo, either through external forces or internal ones. I thought long about how to demonstrate these struggles, and I decided to try replicating Anton Chekhov's unique style to voice my creation. I admire the way Anton Chekhov uses symbolism and interwoven conversations, to convey his statement in his play *Three Sisters*, so I tried to employ these same devices to showcase my message; that even you feel if it is needed or not, there is also an equal chance that if you look deep inside yourself you might be surprised at what you discover.

For starters my play became shorter than I originally had envisioned, so to aid my creation I placed emphasis on the cast's personality traits, also I drew out the stage setting and character movement in the acts, except for the role of security, which was also a convenience. By using these devices I was hoping to focus attention on the two main characters, James the rebel/reformed rebel and Dan the changer, and to convey the transformation that they are experiencing via their movement. My symbolic imagery also started with the sketch of the stage set up, then further by the stage direction, and finally by the conversations, either with the Professor or the ensuing conversations where the Professor fades from the act.

The first symbolic imagery I placed on the stage was four paintings; an eagle flying through a rainbow, Peter Pan and the lost boys, a Harley rider and Liberachi. I picked these images, for the paintings to convey a sense of freedom, whether that is to have a right for personal choice, I believe that each of these paintings I chose shows both. Next on the stage I placed a huge outside and inside window to aid the external and internal changes that I am striving to show, also I used stage direction in each act to help with this; the outside window goes from no sight of the razor wire outside, to its being in view, and then finally it is pressed to the window, showing the tightening of the external forces the characters undergo, while at the same time the inside window goes from a dim light, to a little brighter, to brightest showing the awakening of the inner beauty or evolution of the characters. Then I placed the characters on the stage to try to show the strongest coping characters to be at the front, and the characters that haven't found their own self or coping tactic towards the back.

I believe that in doing this it demonstrates the wearing down the spirit of the rebel in the James character, and spotlights the transformation in Dan.

With the dialog, I placed inside the play I tried incorporating the last of my symbolism, in hopefully some unique ways. I split each act with the Professor character speaking in it, the classroom teaching, and the Professor fading out going to multiple two, or in one instance one, person conversations. When the Professor is in the act he is teaching the class about plays; first act *Three Sisters*, second act *The Dictator*, and the third act *Ghosts*, with each act I tried to employ these devices or meanings from the play that was mentioned in that act. Then when the Professor fades and the split occurs in the act I use the ensuing conversations to spotlight the main character of the act by giving them the last word, and in the case of act three, first and last words. In the first two acts during the split I have James arguing with security, which I used as a symbolic outside force, yet in act three James converses with Tom showing his new placement or outlook in the play. At the same time Dan in the first two acts is speaking with Tom, about the paintings at the back of the room, but in act three Dan has the only single person conversation, where he discovers who he is. Throughout all of the dialog I place some clues to some of the deeper meanings I wish to relate.

I have spent a lot of words showing the importance of, who I view as, the two main characters but each of the characters in the cast and their personalities they have, help propel the play in a real and beautiful way. The more I have reread my own play, the more I have questioned the Tom character with his comic personality, yet he converses with both the characters who underwent the biggest changes. What does this say about this character? Tim seems to be one of the simplest character at first glance, yet he says some of the most poignant cliché or not, words of the play, in my opinion. Ken the Star Wars fan grows on you like a fungus. Where West, soft spoken historian, adds an insightful flavor to the whole work. I gain the sense in each reading I have garnered so much more than I originally had intended, and each of these fantastic characters were needed for this accomplishment.

In closing I am not a huge fan of the play *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, but I can't argue the genius of the symbology or interwoven conversations he used to convey his statement. For that very reason I am unable to find any better to try and emulate, to get my own messages across. As with each reading I found something new to admire about a character, I have found also with a hint of a message I would like to send to the audience. I will let each person take what they want from the play, as long as their laughter and joy joins along with my own, forming a chorus of merriment that I can be proud of. Please, pardon me for the shortness of my first play, but I know you will not find the experience you receive from it lacking in any regards, enjoy.

Cast

Other Side of the Window

<u>Cast</u>		<u>Personality</u>		<u>Costume</u>
Security Officer	-	Gruff	-	Blue shirt + Pants, black boots
Tom	-	Comic	-	Green pants, shirt, black boots
Ricardo	-	Factual	-	
Lancing	-	Religious	-	
Mike	-	Movie buff	-	
Ken	-	Star Wars fan	-	
Ram	-	Philosophical	-	
Tim	-	Well intentioned	-	
West	-	Soft spoken historian	-	
Dro	-	World exposed	-	
Dan	-	Changer	-	
James	-	Rebel/Reformed	-	brown boots (Act 1), black (Act 2+3)
Professor	-	Charismatic, Smooth	-	Suit that changes each act, black shoes (Act 1+2)/brown (Act 3)

Act One

*Stage direction Act 1: Outside window (whiteout condition)
Hall window (Dim light/security paces up + down hall)*

- Professor: Let's start off tonight with a simple question, how did you enjoy the play *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov?
- Ken: I really didn't like it, it was mainly about snobby Russians.
- Tim: I didn't get a full grasp on the context.
- Tom: I thought it was a huge pile of horse...
- Professor: Tom!
- Tom: Sorry Professor.
- West: What influence did this have on the social upheaval that Russia was undergoing at the period?
- Professor: Excellent question West...
- (Security enters through hall door)
- Security: Why are you wearing a different color?
- Dan: The colors are so amazing to behold, a choice is a must.
- James: As long as I am wearing them, what matters the color?
- Mike: It's like when Jason gets his mask, it just fits right with the theme.
- Tom: A choice is a must? Why just choose one? I like black,
- Security: There will only be one color, are you special?
- Dan: I prefer another color, but can't say what.
- Ram: The necessities are what they are. Who are we, that hand onto trivial tokens, who I say are we?
- Tim: I just don't understand the difference sometimes. Why is one, one way, and other, another way?
- Dro: When you have been here or there, you will know why one is that way.
- Mike: Or like when the "mighty ducks" win, it's just meant to be.
- Ricardo: Ah, the number that began it all. I see where you are going with this.
- James: I don't see why the color really matters, one is just as good as another.
- Ken: The force is strong in this one.
- Tim: Yeah, I get it, but why is that?

- Ricardo: It could only be as you say, I can't see any other way. Unless if you consider dual ones?
- Security: Do as I say!
- Lancing: An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
- Dro: That's just the way it is!
- Ram: We are but the trials that we accomplish.
- Ken: There will be no duel in this; you must be one, one be must you!
- Lancing: And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulaion worketh patience.
- James: I just don't understand the big deal.
- Tom: Come on, yes you can.
- Ram: The suffering that we endure is nothing, but a moment of pain.
- West: So, you're saying it's like when the Roman Empire finally fell.
- Dan: It's just so streamlines and majestic.
- Tom: So are some busses I've seen.
- Lancing: And patience, experience; and experience, hope.
- Security: Do as I say!
- Tim: Alright! I get it already.
- Dan: But it just busts right on through, oh isn't it marvelous.
- Mike: Yeah! Now you're really getting it, just like "Remember the Titans".
- Tom: Huh, I guess if that's your fancy.
- James: Fine!

Act Two

*Stage direction Act 2: Outside window (Spring budding on
distant Tree/Razor wire mid distance)*

Hall window (light brighter/security stays outside window)

Professor: Good evening class.

Everyone: Good evening professor.

Professor: I hope everyone finished Issam Mahfouz's play *The Dictator*?

Everyone: Yes, professor.

Professor: And, what did you think?

Tim: I was slightly confused with the whole thing.

Ken: I think Saadoun was a hospice worker taking care of a crazy old man.

Professor: Let's not get too far ahead. I just want to know if you enjoyed the play.

Ram: It was a great play, I couldn't stop laughing.

Mike: I enjoyed it, but I liked Eugene Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* better for the theatre of Absurd.

Professor: We are each entitled to our opinions, Mike, but I am glad you mentioned theatre of the Absurd, I want to make sure we are all clear on what it is.

Ricardo: Ridiculous or unreasonable.

Professor: Yes, Ricardo, that would be the Webster dictionary definition, but what bearing does that have on the theatre?

West: To shed light on the unjust, unreasonable, or ridiculous; laws, rules, language, religion, social or political bent or just about anything else the playwright would like to challenge.

(Security enters through the door, then proceeds to do a head count of the students)

Security: Where is he?

Ken: I feel a disturbance in the force. The death star has been breached.

Mike: WHAT ABOUT "Prison Break"?

Time: So, you say flight is easy?

James: Where is who?

Ram: Wisdom dictates caution.

Mike: No, "Escape from Alcatraz"?

Security: There is supposed to be twelve of you!

- Dan: I don't exactly know how many of them there is, but it looks to be a lot, and they are all dressed, just so, right.
- Lancing: Professor themselves to be wise, they become fools.
- James: Well, there is only eleven!
- Tom: I see what you're saying there. It appears to be about eleven of the tight dressed ones.
- Dro: It's as easy as breathing the air around us.
- Dan: All in green and looking fantastic!
- Security: Where is the twelfth?
- Ricardo: I get that way sometimes when I've study too hard, it will pass. I am sure there is no breach.
- West: How about Harriet Tubman and her escape for freedom?
- Tim: I just don't understand why?
- Ram: We are only striving to do what is right?
- Lancing: Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers.
- James: There is only eleven as there always been!
- Tom: Wow, you are getting awful excited about the whole thing.
- Ram: So he fled?
- Dro: Think of flight as a freeing of the soul and body.
- Ken: Breach there is! Is there breach?
- James: What?
- Lancing: Who will render to every man according to his deeds,
- Security: Fled, you know left, exited ...fled!
- Ricardo: Breach - An interruption of opening made by or as if by breaking through.
- Mike: Wow! It's like Sean Connery in "The Rock".

- James: But, but, but... there is only eleven, as there always been. No one has fled.
- Dan: Very excited! I just can't believe all of them.
- West: If you insist.
- Tom: I can't believe all of them, either.
- Security: Tell me where he is, or you will wished you fled with him!
- Ram: Yes, punished by the law, only the law.
- Dan: It would just be so great to soar.
- Lancing: For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.
- Ken: Mighty is this!
- Tom: Soar or sore?
- James: Sir...Sir... I don't know what you are speaking about no one has fled, sir, please believe me...sir.

Act Three

*Stage direction: Outside window (leaves fall/Razor wire close to window)
Hall window (Bright light/ no security to be seen)*

Professor: I have a great class planned for us. Good evening class!

Everyone: Good evening professor.

Professor: I hope that everyone enjoyed Henery Ibsem's play Ghost.

Everyone: It was good professor.

Professor: Well let's hear some takes on it.

James: I think at the end, the son was resigned to his death.

Lancing: I think this play exposed sin in such a venue that it would shock the audience into deep contemplation.

Ram: I think that it shows a sense of freedom through the revealing the secrets, or the ghosts, that people routinely bury.

(A pause happened on the scene)

Dan: I don't know why, but I must say he is very handsome.

Ken: Went rogue he did.

Ram: We all need understanding and love to nurture us, so we grow and flourish.

Tom: When did you get here? Can I get you a donut?

Lancing: Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cling to that which is good.

Dan: Such a powerful machine between his legs.

Tim: Where is the biggest machine makers?

Mike: How about "Philidelphic"?

Ricardo: The percentage grows by the years.

Ram: We, humans, are complicated machines.

Dan: Oh, and look at that, so gallant and commanding. How could I miss this before?

Dro: Germany, China, U.S, all command respect in this.

James: I guess always, but I just realized it.

Tom: Welcome! To the World, we exist in, we welcome you.

- Tim: How are the views there?
- West: How about the Ancient Greeks or Romans?
- Dan: My eyes are so clear now. I truly understand what was so clearly there for all to see.
- Lancing: Bless them which persecutes you: bless and curse not.
- James: I never knew it would be...so...fulfilling.
- Dro: Beautiful, each in their own ways.
- Ken: Wrong side of the force, he is.
- Mike: Well how about it!
- Tom: That's just the start of it. Wait until winter, we do it all over.
- Ricardo: Every day someone will understand the numbers that align the axis of the world.
- West: I thought you would see it that way.
- Tim: Oh, I got it, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, cliché, but so true.
- Dan: I finally see... It's so...so...Complete.

(Curtain Falls)



GuiHua Gan