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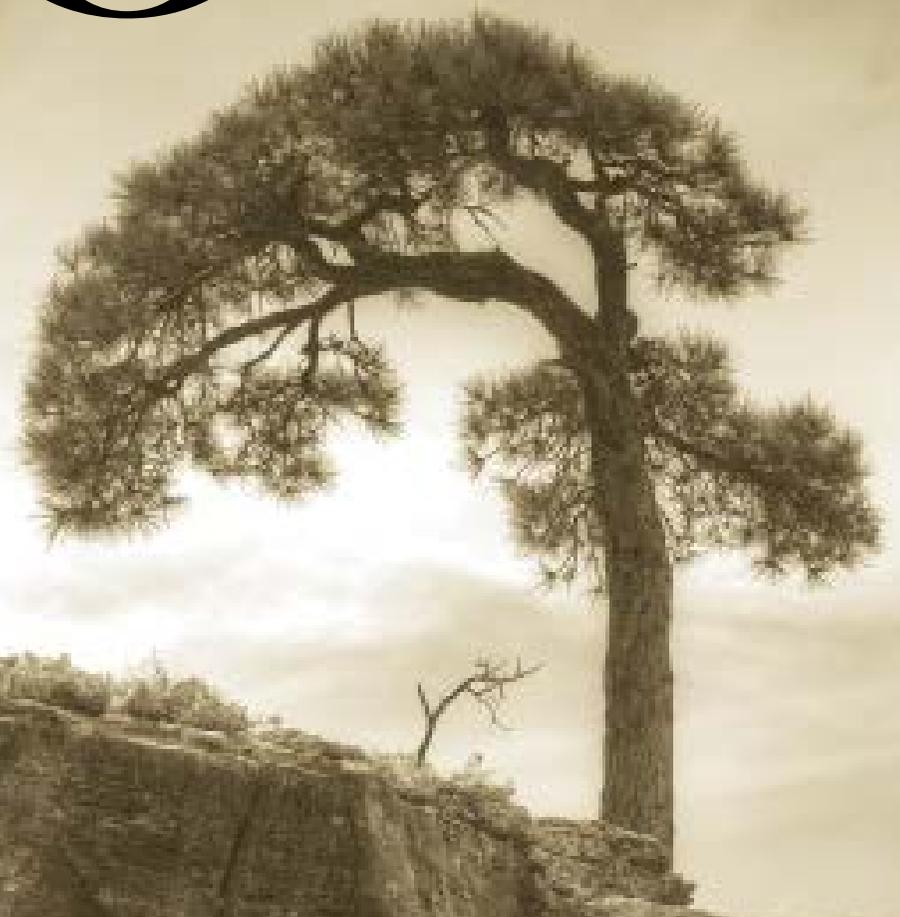
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OBSCURA



Sullen Tree by Luke Waguespack

Obscura

Literary & Art Magazine

11th edition

Red Rocks Community College
13300 West 6th Ave. Service Road
Lakewood, Colorado 80228



Ben Glasscock - Design

“The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense.”
- Tom Clancy

Briele Graham -Design

“Better to light a flamethrower than to curse the darkness.” - Terry Pratchett

J.P. Fischbach - Art Editor

“If it weren’t for the bad days, you wouldn’t be able to appreciate the good ones.”
- Anonymous

Kasey Mull - Communications

“The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return.”
- Eden Ahbez

Lauren A. Smith - Marketing

“Be always searching for new sensations.” - Oscar Wilde

Matt Passant - Nonfiction Editor & Communications

“The time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time.” - Bertrand Russell

Rikki Visser - Fiction Editor

“Never turn down tea if it’s offered. It’s rude, and that’s how wars start.” - Dr Who

Sabrina Hallberg - Poetry Editor

“Follow your inner moonlight; don’t hide the madness.” - Allen Ginsberg

Tony DeLena - Poetry Editor

“Writing is my way to cope, my own personal detox. All I do is open, I am
Pandora’s Box.” - Anonymous

Trey Tafoya - Fiction Editor

“Time spent with cats is never wasted.” - Sigmund Freud

Amy Braziller - Editor and Chief

“Don’t adventures ever have an end? I suppose not. Someone else always has to
carry on on the story.” - J.R.R. Tolkien

Paul Gallagher - Editor and Chief

“Wearing down 7 no. 2 pencils is a good day’s work.” - Ernest Hemingway



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In 2004, **OBSCURA** began as a small club, drawing students from the shadowy recesses of coffee-shop corners, and then flourished into an official class in 2008. Since then, students of Red Rocks Community College have both submitted to and designed this magazine with a collection of art and literature, guided by the shepherds of the English department, Amy Braziller and Paul Gallagher. *Obscura* has become RRCC's creative publication of students' works of art and writing by welcoming contributors' inspirations poetry, fictional or nonfictional stories, drawings, paintings, photography, and more. It stands as one of few literary and art magazines within the country that is completely designed, edited and published exclusively by students, and is produced by a community college.

Obscura is highly competitive. We receive over 100 submissions yearly that are carefully evaluated for acceptance. We take into consideration a range of criteria, from the technical to the emotional. We, the staff, have agreed on the pieces for inclusion in this year's issue, and believe it will inspire the student body to better themselves as both writers and artists. We hope that you enjoy the selections in our 2014 issue of *Obscura*, perhaps even enough to submit some of your own next year.

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THE WINTER PROMISE

Ceyi Ceyi Laflen

Sparkling gusts of silver wind
drive howling through the vale,
the skies are grey and somber
and the air grows foul and stale.
The barren trees stretch overhead,
guarding dark and light
against the winter nightmares,
and the dangers of the night.
The people huddle closely,
stoking fires to keep them warm,
as the snowflakes fall in silence
for a coming winter storm.
Their frozen hands, their tired eyes
remember ice and snow,
instead of grass and sunshine
when all things start to grow;
the laughing steps of children,
the hills that called and bade,
the dancing windy flowers
in a thousand different shades.
There in the long cold shadows,
a solemn vow is made-
that green grass will soon awaken,
and offer boughy shade.
For winter's time is ending,
the sounds of life, more than words;
when the piping call of feathers
in the branches high were heard.
Listen now, sad people;
all is not so dark-
the summer's breath's returning,
in the humble voice of larks.

WHISPERS

Cherie Cash

So do not fear the weeks ahead,
the long, capricious cold-
for we are made a promise,
from days long dead and old.
Ice will give way to water,
and water will give us Spring;
Soon, it will be naught but mem'ries
as we celebrate new things.
So, cheer your hearts, my sisters-
soon dark will become light-
Our hearts will ease, our peace be real,
we will be alright.

It is 11:30 at night and they've closed the 7-11. It wasn't unusual, I suppose, for a small town like Upheaval, North Carolina, to have things closed early – "a decent hour" they'd probably call it. I stepped out from behind the wheel of my black '71 Charger, giving her beaten up paint job an absent caress.

Letting out a heavy sigh I walked to the door of the gas station, looking at the hours listed there. Not open till 8am. It had been a long drive from Maryland and I was tired. I needed to find a place to sleep so I could be on my way and out of this town as fast as I could tomorrow.

I stomped back to my Charger and realized that something wasn't right with my precious Beast. The driver's side appeared to be tilted. Crouching a little, I noticed that the tire seemed to bend to the side. A wheel-bearing must have gone bad. That would explain why she'd been pulling so hard to the left. Poor Beast. It wasn't her fault she was old and broken down. Like me, she could use some work. We could both use a new start.

Leaning against the Beast, I checked my watch again. Bags and suitcases already overflowed the seats, wedged in tightly and denting the visor a bit. I had to hope it would smooth out once we found a new home; that we both would. Even the idea of sleeping in the front gave me a crick in the neck. Well, there was no hope for it. I'd have to find a place to stay and a mechanic in the morning. Sliding back onto the front-bench seat of the Charger, I started her up and cracked a small smile at her rumbling purr.

"I promise to take you to the doc in the morning," I crooned to my car and then rolled my eyes for talking to it. If I didn't get to civilization soon, the next thing I'd be doing was naming a volleyball Wilson. "If Dad were here, we'd fix you up ourselves."

We couldn't do that though. The cancer that had killed him, left me here and alone. No, not alone. Never alone. I had my curse. A curse that no one



believed and one that made me seem insane, as it had my mother. I suppressed my panic at the very thought of staying in an old southern town like this. I could already feel the creepy feelings surfacing, a muddy confusion of something old rising from the earth. Not a good start to my new life.

It took me another thirty minutes of searching on the internet on my smartphone to find a place to stay. My battery kept dying. Another great perk to my curse. Anytime I was around something electronic, I drained the life out of it. I kept my cell phone on the car charger whenever possible.

The only place within an hour of me was called the Pickering House Inn. I hesitated. I didn't want to stay at an old plantation home but I also didn't want to sleep in my car. The Beast wasn't in any condition to try and find a more modern hotel.

The bumpy and pock-marked path was definitely not a fun ride. The moonlit night did little to appease my darkening mood as weeping willows cast long, finger-like shadows on the road before me. The headlights of my car barely lit up the surrounding area but I could see that the road was between heavily wooded areas and very narrow. I wanted to go back but there was no way to. The size of the Charger would never allow me to back up and turn around and I wasn't a good enough driver to back all the way to the main road.

Finally, a giant expanse of cleared land appeared and the road evened out. I crested a small rise, I could see the plantation mansion with its prototypical white pillars and peaked roof. A small graveled parking area had been set aside from the home and that's where I parked my Beast. *Good enough for me*, I thought. I sat in the car, gazing at what must have once been the pride of the South. Two beautiful, sweeping staircases climbed up the sides toward its grand, double-door entrance. Giant pillars guarded the egress on either side, silent sentinels reminding visitors of days past. Swallowing hard, I let go of the steering wheel. "Breathe, Anna," I commanded myself out loud. "It's just one night. *One* night."

I reached in my overnight bag at my side, and pulled out my leather gloves, putting them on before getting out of the car. If I could just avoid touching anything unnecessary, this might not be so bad. I wiggled my fingers in the gloves, looking around. A gentle breeze lifted the tree branches lining the long, circular

driveway and where I stood, a whiff of something caught my attention. A touch of peppermint and...something else. I flexed my fingers in my protective gloves, debating my next move.

Getting out of the car but I stopped as I reached the end of the Beast's hood, my right hand resting on the warm metal. Biting my lip, I looked back to the safety of the front seat. Panic, pure and sure welled inside me. I could feel my heartbeat pound in my ears as the blood rushed through me.

Closing my eyes, and breathing slowly, I tried to suppress the oncoming panic attack as it reared its ugly head. My hands started to feel cold and clammy. My chest felt tight, gasping for breath I tried to keep the thoughts at bay.

Why am I just like *her*? My hands shook as I fumbled in my jeans pocket for the keys.

Go back to the car! You're safe in the car! GET IN THE CAR!

My face flushed red hot as panic exploded in my head.

The world was spinning. The air around me was thick with fear and death.

I could feel the weight of all of those ghosts sitting on my chest, squeezing the air from my lungs. I gasped and panted and shoved more air in and out of my lungs but there was no oxygen in it.

I would die here. Become one of the ghosts that haunted me. Her ghost would mock me, having warned me more than once. Her whispers of death hung around me like a noose, slowly constricting.

The world around me had slowed down, leaving me half a step out of phase, drowning in my panic. *Get back in car!* My mind screamed at me, begged me. Desperate, I closed my eyes tight against the world.

"Ya comm'n in?" The door opened suddenly. I squeaked, my heart in my toes, and stopped in my tracks. A large, buxom woman filled the doorway, framed momentarily by the light behind her that flickered a moment and then settled. Her



light brown eyes appraised me as if I were something she was considering buying. Her black and silver hair was pulled up in a loose bun atop her head, and her hands were planted firmly on her wide hips. “It’s a might chill outside. I wood’na want ya to catch cold.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said automatically. “May I have a room?”

“Yes’em.” She opened the door wider and beckoned me forward. I walked quickly up the wooden stairs, and into the foyer of the old mansion, keeping my eyes down. “Where you be from?”

“Maryland,” I said and instantly I regretted it. As I made eye contact with the Southern lady, I knew that she was “true-south” and I was now the enemy. Quickly, I changed tactics, “But born in Georgia, ma’am.”

“You goin home I ‘spec?”

I nodded my head hurriedly and she smiled, pleased by my answer. I’d say whatever she wanted as long as she’d give me a room and leave me be. “May I please have a room? Your most modern room.” I added the last with a small shudder.

“That’s big city stuff. This heh house was built before the war of *Northun* Aggression. Not a lot of ‘tricity. You undustand my meaning, chile?”

“Yes, ma’am. Just a room.”

She nodded, her bun bobbing in place. “You’n call me Miss Sally. I am the Innkeeper of Pickering House Inn.”

I stumbled and then realized she was waiting for me to introduce myself. I cleared my throat nervously and stuck out my gloved hand, “Annabeth Sinclair.”

“Whaz ya doin in Upheaval?”

“Passing through, on my way to visit family and then to school in California.”

Miss Sally made a sort of cough and snort at the same time. “No decent Southun lady go to California, chile. You stay here in the South. Get a proper up-bringin.”

My own mother was a proper “Southun lady” and I knew better then to argue with one of those so I stayed silent as we made our way past the grand entrance.

I followed her further into the home, glancing around me as I walked, careful not to touch anything. It didn’t matter though. I *felt* the pull of something old take hold of my mind and the tugging of my gut told me to look in what must have been a parlor. As we passed a large, furnished room, I saw them. Three young gentlemen, dressed in the uniform of Southern Calvary. They stood, smoking cigars and laughing soundlessly. One of them turned to regard me as I passed and I saw that half his face was bloody and torn to shreds. He said something, but I couldn’t hear him or the others, his working eye showing surprise that I *could* see him. I felt my body shiver as I stopped and stared back as all three now turned to face me. Each soldier sporting a horrific wound and each equally as surprised as the first to see me noticing them. My body yearned to go to them, to speak with them, to be them. Maybe if I got closer. I stepped towards them, but a hand held me back.

“You ain’t goin in there,” Miss Sally instructed, her voice calm and quiet. “That’s fer menfolk.” The men vanished as I stepped away from the threshold. Miss Sally removed her hand and I looked at her, my eyes wide. Miss Sally quirked an eyebrow and tilted her head, like a Cocker Spaniel. She made a little sound in her throat and then gestured with her head to follow her again.

I was used to the looks that my weirdness often attracted. Once it was noticed anyway. People who didn’t immediately run away from me gave me those looks as they stayed around to see “The Freak Known as Anna” touch something that made her crazy. It probably threw people off that I didn’t wear long, silky skirts and have my head wrapped in a gypsy scarf or beg to tell their fortune. I was a psychometrist but that didn’t mean I had to like it. I wish I could just say that I simply didn’t like it, but truthfully? I feared it.

Miss Sally had moved down the hall, no longer watching me with her



knowing eyes. I followed her, trying to suppress the feelings of “look at me” and “touch me” that oozed from every nook and cranny.

“Here you go, Miz,” Miss Sally said, coming to a door. “This heh is the most mod’un room we haz.”

I nodded, anxious to get her away from me and into the safety of my own room. The smell of peppermint and, what I now recognized as vanilla, assailed me again and I very nearly leaned into the smell, enjoying the spicy scent. “I love the incense you have here, Miss Sally.”

“We has no incense, chile,” Miss Sally scoffed, pushing open the door to the room with her hand as she did so. “It’s \$100 a night and that includes food.”

“I just want sleep,” I said, feeling the energy just drain me. “I also need the number to a mechanic. My car needs a little work.”

“You gonna need to talk to Orvill. He’s mechanic ‘roun heh. I’ll get yous the numbuh and some wa’m milk. Wa’m you up and sets you to rights so yous can sleep good. Stay right here, chile.”

I watched Miss Sally go, her peppered bun bobbing in time with each step, her large frame stomping as she disappeared down the narrow hall, talking softly to herself. Resigned, I entered the room. An antique, four-poster bed, complete with canopy, sat in the middle of the room. Wisps of sheer curtains hung from the carved posts and pooled onto the floor. The open windows allowed a cool breeze to shift the curtains ever so slightly.

Putting my suitcase down on the carpeted floor, I turned in a slow circle, taking in the old room. The room was overly dressed. Rich red tapestries adorned the large windows on the far side of the room, while heavily variegated carpets lay under every piece of furniture. Of that, there was a lot. Gorgeous red wood was the preferred medium in the large, opulent bedroom. My gloved hands flexed, as if they were anxious for what I knew was going to happen. Psychometrics was something I was learning to deal with in pieces. One of those pieces was the *need* to touch a beckoning artifact and I could barely contain it now. I could feel my heart beginning to pound, and my skin began to tingle all over. My fingers *ached* to touch everything, to let my sixth sense explore the world around me. I could

feel a fine sweat form on my forehead and my teeth worried at my upper-lip. Like a meth addict, I obeyed the call, pulling off a leather glove. I couldn’t help it. I reached out, extended my fingers, and touched first the linens, grazing my fingers along the fine cloth. A few more steps and I stood in front of an old dressing table. I hesitated but finally sat down on the upholstered stool. A golden cup and pitcher sat on the table in front of me. I picked up the cup and the night vanished. I found myself in a huge ballroom, brightly lit with candel chandeliers. Feasting and dancing surrounded me. Women in full ball gowns twirled around the floor with Southern uniformed soldiers partnering them. The woman who was me and who was not me lifted a golden cup to her lips, throwing her head back and laughing as a young man whispered in her ear.

I closed my eyes and tried to concentrate, tried to break the hold of the golden cup in front of me. “*Don’t let it control you, Anna,*” I chanted to myself over and over again, keeping my eyes squeezed tightly shut. When I opened them, I stared into the mirror but instead of myself, I saw a woman with golden hair piled ornately atop her head. She stared back at me, head tilted slightly as she caressed her skin along the bare collarbone, quite aware of my presence. I jumped away from the table, upending the stool as I scrambled away.

“Don’t be messin my furniture, Miz. It’s as old as this heh Inn,” Miss Sally said, coming back into the room. She held a tray in her hands. “Cou’s e it wazn’t always an Inn. It was a home. Once.” Miss Sally busied herself putting the tray on small table next to me. The clatter of the glass on the tray made me jump. “Yous alright, Miz?”

I glanced back at the mirror and saw my own, pale reflection there. Eyes wide with fright peered out at me, framed by tangled, blonde hair, all disheveled as if I hadn’t slept in days. I hadn’t, but Miss Sally didn’t need to see that. “Yes, sorry. I saw a bug. A big bug.”

“It’s the South, chile.” Miss Sally put the tray on the dressing table and left me alone, shutting the door quietly behind her. I saw the cup of milk and the note with a name and number on it, but decided I couldn’t deal with any more tonight. Quickly, I undressed and wrapped myself in Dad’s sweatshirt, eventually drifting off to dream-filled sleep.



*

“Orville,” I rubbed the space between my eyebrows. “I need my car fixed as soon as possible. Sooner than next week. Can’t you order from a parts store in Raleigh?”

“Yep.” Orville smiled a nearly toothless grin. “Part be-in-here next week.” All his words were thrown together and, unlike Miss Sally’s “plantation south” accent, I was still deciphering.

“I will pay extra if you can get the part here tomorrow. I’ll pay the shipping,” I said the last part slowly, in hopes he would understand.

“I’s do that Miz, but the parts still take afewen dayz ta getz hur. We haz no post office, in Upheavel, haz to travel to next town over to get’em.” Orville spit out a wad of chewing tobacco. “Donz worry. I’ll get’er fixed. Sh’ll be good az-new.”

Unconsciously, I stroked the keys I held, running my thumb over the Dodge logo of one of the key rings. A sense of calm rolled over me and I pegged Orville with my best no-nonsense look, I handed Orville a piece of paper with my contact information on it. “You can reach me there.”

I patted the Beast and started for the opened garage door when Orville stopped me, a greasy hand on my arm. His touch was as light as a feather and was gone as quick as lightning. I turned to him, he was tugging on his Ole’ Miss Baseball cap. “Doan you worryz miz, I take good care of her. They’z spek to me. She’ll tell me waz wrong alright.”

I swallowed and then gave Orville a little bow of my head, acknowledging his words. “She’s the only thing I have left that my father gave to me.” *I have no-where else that is safe.*

Orville tipped his hat to me and dismissed me. I watched for a moment more, even managing a small smile as Orville started talking to the old ’71 in the same way my father had only a few months ago.

I could see the Pickering Inn from where I was standing on the side of the

road. I glanced first at the long winding road and then at the field that separated me from the Inn and pursed my lips. It would take a good hour to get to the Inn following the road but if I took the field I could be there in thirty minutes flat. Pulling up my pants and resituating my messenger bag across my shoulders, I headed into the field.

Vanilla and peppermint surrounded me, the sweet and spicy smell drawing a smile from my lips. But then an underlying metallic scent surfaced, first mingling with the pleasant fragrances then overpowering them and pushing them away. I stopped trudging through the long grass, pulled out my water bottle, and took a long swig, trying to wash away the copper scent filling my mouth. Something tickled my nose, an aroma I recognized as the stench of death. The smell of putrid flesh laying forgotten in the hot sun. Actually hoping for some creature to be dead around me, I closed my eyes knowing the truth.

The sounds came next; sharp cracking sounds like pop-rockets filled the air around me. Smatterings of rifle-fire assailed my ears and cannon-fire boomed shaking the ground beneath my feet. I covered my ears and started running for the thicket in front of me. Cries from the soldiers, begging for their mothers and mercy coalesced with the whistling and explosive cannon sounds. Suddenly, I couldn’t hear the firing of the guns, but only the crying of the fallen. Tendrils of touch, like stray hairs on the skin, tickled me under my jeans. Something grabbed my ankle and I screamed, letting go of my ears and tried to brush off the offending touch.

“Let me go! Leave me alone! I don’t want this!” I tried to tell them but there was nothing around me. No bodies to plead to. No ghost to beg mercy from.

Running, I made my way to the overgrown and wooded grove of trees. Slowing, I gasped for breath, chest rising and falling almost in time with the staccato firing of the bullets. The branches seemed to reach out to me, welcoming me into their darkness. I slipped into them easily, dodging twigs and thorny undergrowth the best I could, letting my feet find their way through the twisted bramble. The towering trees drowned out the sunlight and I tripped, tumbling head over heels until, finally, I stopped, cracking my head. Shifting, I reached out and grabbed hold of whatever it was that I had cracked my head on, trying to sit up.

The smoothness of stone startled me and I moved so that I was kneeling.

Surrounding me, several headstones stood out from the forest floor. Many were covered in moss and I knew without having to look that the soldiers buried were of the South, but the soldiers who had begged for mercy just moments before came from the North. The soldiers here were at peace. I don't know what made me do it, but with my thumb, I tried to scrub off one of the headstones to see the name but it had been worn clean by years of weathering. A young man lay beneath the headstone. His eyes popped open and stared at me. His mouth opened in surprise, as if I had woken him from a deep sleep. Jumping back, I yelped but the soldier didn't move, simply watched me.

Rising, I walked slowly around each headstone, stepping over unearthed tree roots and found myself in a slightly kept part of the little cemetery. A statue of a sleeping angel, her wings relaxed in peaceful slumber marked a coffin that was entombed in cold white marble. The statue called out to me, pleading with me to touch it. I licked my lips nervously, a feeling growing in the pit of my stomach, like butterflies after a sharp drop. Anticipation and adrenaline pumping through my veins and before I could talk myself out of it, I touched the sculpture. The statue's wings began to move and next I saw her eyes open. The stone pupils followed me, her wings fluttered a moment more, disturbing the dead leaves underfoot. A sleepy kind of smile crossed her lips before she returned to her slumber.

"My mama tol me stories of your kind," Miss Sally's voice shook me out of the cemetery's reality. I turned to her and found her sitting atop a rock at the end of the cemetery. I could see run down shacks behind her. The thicket had started to claim them for its own, the vines winding around them. These must have been slave shacks. Though they were falling apart, I could see wisps of light wrapping themselves around her, pulling her to them and linking her forever to their antiquity. "I haz some power too, see ghosts all the time but they never notices me likes they notices you." Miss Sally continued.

"How do you have the power?" I asked, already knowing the answer.

"It handed down, chile'. My great great grammy was a slave here once, befo'. She taught all her chillens about the power of the spirit. Yous have so much of it. Mebbe a little to much." Miss Sally held out what looked like a doll made

out of some kind of rough material, "Thisin be Grammy's and before that it was my Grammy Ife's. Tell me what you see."

"I don't understand. How did you know?"

Miss Sally grinned at me, her smile reassuring, "You mentioned the incense, chile." My grammy often remarked about it. Back in *those* days, when all those boyz fighten the war of Nothun Aggression, there be so much anger and fear. Sometimes the battles be fought and the dead lay in the sun. Oh, the smell! So'en the people would burn incense and dip their 'kerchiefs in vanilla and peppamin oil to keep the stench away."

"Then why don't you smell it?" I asked, even more confused.

"I don' have the gift *that* much. My great Grammy did. You does." She nodded her head sagely at me.

My throat tightened and images of my mother assailed me.

"I don't want to touch anything." I said the words aloud for the first time. "I'm so tired of being scared."

Miss Sally jumped off her perch with surprising agility. Dusting off her flower print dress, she gave me the once over. She was maybe five feet and barely reached my shoulder, but I felt small under her gaze. "You have a decision to make then Annabeth Sinclair. Yous needs to decide to stay afraid or embrace your gift. That's a decision only you make." She traced some worn letters on a tombstone. "Sometimes, you doin embrace it, and the gift takes you instead. Makes you crazy."

I gulped, images of my mother flashing before me. She hadn't accepted anything. Hadn't told me anything about the curse. I found out later, and through her journals, that she had the same curse. She had been hoping I had been skipped. She hung herself more than ten years ago. My first ghostly visitor was her, in my bedroom, the noose still around her neck.

My dad had tried to help me but his time was already up, even then. At first he didn't believe me, hadn't wanted to believe me; but as time went on and as



the panic attacks grew worse, I convinced him.

Miss Sally held out the doll and I stared at it. The doll had no face, her marking had faded away and little bits of what may have been yarn sprouting from her head. There was only half of a body and that was made from some kind of cloth, perhaps burlap. The dress on the doll was made from the same material. Discolored patches adorned the dark doll. Without having to touch it, I knew that this doll held whispers of something dark and sinister. It held secrets of lives long gone from this world.

Miss Sally wiggled the doll a little bit, impatient for me to do as she commanded. With shaking fingers, I took the doll from her. Images washed over me, each person who had touched the doll, revealing itself to me one at a time. Sounds reached my ears and they, like the slave huts behind her, were linked to her. Children's laughter and singing. A feeling of deep sadness, of desperation and hope enveloped me. All these emotions slammed into me, nearly bringing me to my knees. After the last image disappeared, I raise my eyes to Miss Sally.

"I do not want the same fate as my mother. I don't want to be afraid anymore. Teach me."

She raised her chin, brown eyes assessing me like they did when I had first met her. She was weighing me. Deciding if I was worth the trouble. I raised my chin, ready to fight for the first time since my mother's death.

"Tell me what ya see."

WORDS

Sabrina Hallberg

Her writing desk holds pieces of her past.
Tequila bottles and beer bottles,
Cigarette ash and lost homes.

She sits at her writing desk every night,
Watching the glass and memories reflect light.
It wasn't the drugs or drinking or smoking that got her here.
It was the inexperience and boundary lines of it all.

She's worked hard to get where she is.
Living through two rounds of bankruptcy,
An abuser with unkind hands and a venomous mouth,
A relationship on unsteady ground,
And the traditional form of self-doubt.

The writing desk is chipped from years of repetitious use.
It knows where she begins to curve into another image.
An image that is sickly and small, hiding behind strings of hair.
Dark eyes casting out over everything, scrutinizing *every* piece.

There is no sound that comes from this image.
Until the image is beside her ear,
Whispering wet and sickly phrases.

She sits back in her chair now, letting the image fade like smoke.
This is the image of a girl that sat through the negative pulses,
And never made it to the other side.



She picks up a tarnished pen and sets it to aged paper.
The ink begins to pool, reminding her of staining.
But the black consumes the paper, leaving no
White in its wake.

The pen drops onto the desk, carving in another scar.

The desk is sagging with weight from the letters resting there.
She props her knee underneath, wondering if she alone can bear the weight.
It hardly moves.

She removes her knee and lets the weight sink back down.

There is no ink in the bottle and the quill has dulled.
The girl, the desk and the image sit in a makeshift circle,
Watching one another without moving.
Two carry the past and one is supporting the burden.

But imagine a desk clear of time.
Crisp paper placed neatly in the middle,
And a fresh ink and quill to the side.
Imagine it without the seeped in stains.

Imagine the girl, the desk, the image.
I am all of them.
Stain free amongst the decayed.

PERFECT MISTRANSLATION

Emily Johnson

안녕하세요: Hello (an-nyeong-ha-se-yo)

The easiest place to start is hello. Acknowledging the existence of another living, breathing, thinking being. Hello. Hola. Bonjour. Ni hao. A simple smile or wave. Or, in this case, *annyeonghaseyo*.

시작: Beginning (shi-jak)

About eight years ago, I sat at the laziest coffee shop in Nashville with my MacBook, a notebook, and a pen. The sunlight streaming through the windows felt warm, but it was a lie. It was February and I was drinking a hot, honey latte, which meant it was really, really cold outside. I knew a few words and phrases already, but this was it. This was the day I was going to start learning Korean. Actually learning Korean. This was the day that would turn my life completely upside down, but I didn't realize that quite yet.

한글: Korean Writing (han-geul)

King Sejong the Great created Hangul in the 1400s. Before that, Korean was written with Chinese characters. Hangul is more phonetic than English, and absolutely genius in the way it stacks to create syllables that mimic the shape of the tongue inside your mouth when you make them.

전화기: Telephone (jeon-hwa-gi)

I've never really lived in Korea, but I've spent a lot of time there. No matter how much I study or how well I can talk to anyone in person, I cannot understand Korean on the phone. This is a problem if you want to order black bean sauce noodles and have them delivered to your apartment. The last time I tried was a complete failure, and I swear I'd never do it again. That night, my friend and I came up with a joke. How many white girls does it take to order food in Korea?

Apparently, more than two.



존댓말: Formal Language (jon-dae-tsal)

Korean has a lot of formality levels. The proper way to speak is mostly determined by age, so people will usually ask how old you are before they ask your name. I am terrified of making a formality mistake and horribly offending someone, so I only speak informally with people who have directly told me it's ok to do so. It is awkward to speak formally to someone younger than me. Even as a non-native speaker I can sense it, but it is better to err on the side of formality.

사투리: Dialect, Accent (sa-tu-ri)

I started studying Japanese a few years ago. Grammatically, it is almost identical to Korean. My teacher says I sound Korean when I speak Japanese.

교통사고: Car Accident (gyu-tong-sa-go)

Korean pop music is a trap. It seems as an ironic appreciation (because, of course, you have better taste in actual music than that), but ever so slowly you'll start singing that row song you know, and then you'll start paying attention to that other group too, and before you know it, you'll find yourself translating for an international fix club with a mostly teenage following even though you're 29. If you're really not careful, you might even find yourself in Seoul, waiting outside of a recording studio in the snow for five hours just to catch a glimpse of the boys walking from the car to the building. Just watch out for stiff vehicles while you're waiting. They will hit you, on purpose, and it does hurt.

꿈: Dream (kum)

They say you've mastered a language once you've dreamt in the language, but I've dreamt in languages I don't even speak. Sometimes I dream in Korean, but most of the time I don't remember what language I dream in. I just dream, and I remember the words in whatever language makes the most sense for the context. Sometimes I don't remember the words at all, but I understand the deeper meaning beneath all these different words in different languages we assign to try to convey them.

한국 연세: Korean Age (han-guk yeon-se)

In Korea, all babies are a year old when they are born. Also, in Korean age, everyone turns one year older on New Year's Day, not on individual birthdays. Confucian group centered mentality at its finest. That means a baby that is born on December 31st is two years old on January 1st, when it is biologically two days old. If you ask how old someone is, they will probably tell you the year they were born instead. Saying I was born in 1984 is no much less complicated than oh, you're 29? Korean age or natural age? So you're actually 30 in Korean age? Right. Right. You learn quickly after having this conversation too many times.

하늘: Sky (ha-neul)

In English we say sky, in Korean we say hanneul, but the sky still exists whether we call it anything or not. Sometimes I don't know what to call it, so I let the blue expanse speak for itself.

외국인: Foreigner (wae-guk-in)

Last Christmas Eve in Seoul was absolutely frigid, but that didn't stop my friends and me from spending all day running around for things to do. One of the many places we ended up that day was a quiet little cafe on the top floor of an otherwise busy building. We needed hot drinks to warm us up, and we decided to share some chocolate cake too. The waitress came over and asked if she could take our order in Korean, but her accent surprised me, so I looked up. She wasn't Korean either. She was Russian, but she didn't speak English, so we all spoke Korean because that was the language we had in common. Maybe it is because not many people who are not Korean speak Korean, or maybe it is just my ignorance as an American who grew up speaking only English, but speaking to another foreigner in Korean was a really strange experience for me. It felt wrong and exhilarating at the same time, like looking into a funhouse mirror.

습관: Habit (seup-gwan)

I accidentally bow at people all the time. Antagonistically. Unconsciously. Korean people don't resent it, but I get funny looks from Americans. Maybe they think it's some kind of tic. Perhaps it is.



영아: English (yeong-ah)

If you want to give yourself a headache, try explaining what English is to a two-year-old someone. Spanish is when we say "bibi!" and English is the language we are speaking right now. This doesn't get very far. Language is a hard concept to understand when you have no frame of reference for it.

커피: Coffee (keo-pa)

An American friend of mine just moved back to Kansas after living in Seoul for three years. She developed quite a coffee habit while she was there, but she didn't drink coffee at all before she lived in Korea. She decided to go to Starbucks yesterday and suddenly panicked. She didn't know how to order coffee in English. Yes, she's American. Yes, she's a native English speaker. But she had only ever ordered coffee in Korean.

눈물: Tears (noon-mool)

I am not a crier. I don't even think my parents have seen me cry since I was a child. But I cried for almost half of the 13-hour flight the last time I left Korea. It always feels like I'm leaving part of myself behind. A part that doesn't exist here. Even now I feel the edges of the gaping hole in my heart when I look for it.

눈싸움: Eye Fight (noon-sa-oom)

A lot of words sound completely absurd when translated literally. Do you know what an eye fight is? I sure don't. Noon-sa-oom is what we call a staring contest. It makes sense now, doesn't it? It is easy to miscommunicate if you focus too much on the literal meaning of words. Sometimes all you need is the perfect mistranslation.

정: [No Direct Translation Available] (jeong)

The concept of jeong doesn't exist in English. Affection. Attachment. Love. All of these words are lacking. None of them convey the magnitude of jeong. My love for the Korean language, culture, and people is just as unexplainable as the only word I can use to describe it: jeong. Why do I study Korean? Because of jeong. Why do I want to live in Korea? Because of jeong. There are no other words.

무중력: Zero-Gravity (muo-jeong-ryeok)

When I try to say something in another language, Korean almost always comes out first. Sometimes I even think in Korean when I'm trying to speak English. Sometimes my brain spits out sentences at me with seven different languages perfectly woven together in a way that no one but myself could possibly understand. Sometimes I feel like my words are floating in space and I can't tell if I'm flying or falling.



MORNING SUN

Lacey Sharp

During the hours of my deepest slumber,
When all my thoughts are still,
the dawn leaps
onto my bed, and pitter-patters
from my feet to my head.
She rubs my face,
nudges me with tingly
warmth
tries to wake me, and beg me
to begin the day.
I turn over, thrust
the sheets across my head,
and block out daylight.
Sleep is in my eyelids still
and I can pretend its night.
Just as dreams float back into place
Morning pounces on my face.
I peek out from the dark.
There, the of pair green eyes,
wet nose, and pink tongue
of my tabby sunrise
greet me, and insist I get up.
Oh unwelcome early morning,
thy name be house cat!

HEAT CIRCUS

Sabrina Hallberg

Taran woke to the smoldering sun bearing down through her room and found her mind swimming with thoughts of escaping her life. She rolled over on to her side and took a deep breath of dust covered blankets. Her eyes watered and she threw them back, avoiding inhaling any more of reality.

“Taran, get up! I need to go in to town!” Her mother bellowed through the house. Taran imagined the old window panes vibrating and the floor boards shaking off their age. She doubted if her father ever stirred from his drunken stupor long enough to register the 10 A.M. noise. In full dress, her mother would apply a heavy coat of thick, red lipstick to her cracked lips and drag Taran down every street in a 2 mile radius of the town, not to mention the 4 mile walk from their house.

With a groan, Taran sank into the mattress and thrust her arm over her eyes, shading herself from the glaring light. Her room was bleached with it, streaking the only other furniture in the room, a wooden desk and broken dresser, with faded southern rays. What little belongings Taran did have, were kept on the top shelf of the room’s thin closet; it was the only part of her life not hung out on the clothes line with a spotlight for everyone to see.

“Taran!” Another quake sounded through the house. She dragged herself over to the edge of the bed and set her feet on the wooden floor. With a heavy sigh, she took a fast glance towards the window, glaring at the intruding day. From the corner of the pane, Taran thought she saw something duck and disappear. She stood quickly, her heart racing, and placed a hand on the left side of her chest. Slowly, she approached the window and searched the flat landscape, expecting the movement to be from her imagination. The backyard stretched out into the tumbleweeds beyond and a small bush to the right obscured the front of the house. Something moved there. Something red. Leaning against the glass as much it would allow, Taran sought the red form but found nothing. She backed hesitantly away, breath held, and turned towards salvation.



Padding softly, so her mother wouldn't hear her, Taran entered her parent's bathroom. The room was beside the closed door that held her snoring father. Creeping in, she kept the light off and opened the cabinet, grabbing a large bottle of Amitriptyline. She counted out the pills one by one, *seven, eight, nine*, until she reached the bottom of the plastic and cupped them into her mouth. For months the young girl had been taking the chronic pain and sleeping pills from her mother. She never noticed that Taran did so because she'd stopped taking them. Taran wasn't sure why her mother had ceased the euphoria, but it gave her a small glimmer of escape.

The journey to the old southern town didn't stray from the routine Taran and her mother had settled into. It was easier with the medication, but lately Taran's heart hurt and her lungs burned, making the long trek more difficult to endure. But her mother didn't notice and continued to walk with her head up, smiling at each house with a picket fence and tipping her old Sunday hat at any man that would look their way. They took this walk a couple times a week. Taran always wondered why her mother made her go with, when she would only shuffle down the roads behind her, creating more caking dust. But a part of her understood. When her brother died at birth, Taran's mother became a recluse and her father became a drinker. A few years after, when her father crashed the car into a tree, her mother began to walk to the town, dragging a small Taran with her.

Being married to the town drunk gave the older woman a silent circle of what her mother liked to call *respect*. Taran saw it as avoidance; as if the two of them were the ones that reeked of liquor. The pair came upon the last house before the town and her mother stopped on the corner, admiring the pink paint that showcased the bright, pristine fence. Their own house didn't have the picket dream, only a scraggly weed or dozen that popped up day after day and stayed to terrorize the chipping paint. The perfect house wasn't worth a lot of money, but in her mother's eyes, with the picket fence it held all the riches she could ever want; a perfection that wasn't currently attainable. Taran wanted none of it.

About a half hour later, Taran sat outside of *Fanny's Florals*, watching ahead of her as a couple of small children chased each other under a shaded tree. It was in the center of town, hardly big enough to conceal a bike under, but it was some phase of life that hadn't died off. To her right held the town capital and the majority of the small shops with worn bricks and dusty windows. Every towns person in her line of view lingered through the swollen hours, searching for some kind of relief. The heat became blistering on Taran.

She swung her eyes to the left, away from the town and through the tall grass, imagining what lay beyond it. Something refreshing, she thought, something different. As she looked, the motionless meadow twitched red behind the first layer. A spark lit her memory and she thought of the blood colored movement this morning. Standing, she shielded her eyes and squinted, trying to see through the mass of dried vegetation. There it was again, darting from one point to another. Taran stepped off the curb and let the crunch of her shoes over the gravel carry her towards the movement. As she approached the edge of brush, she saw that whatever it was, had moved further in, disturbing the grass yards from where she now stood.

Gazing back at Fanny's, Taran was afraid her mother would notice the lack of Taran's hollowed bones parked on the weathered bench. She peered through the haze of warmth and observed her mother laughing with Fanny. Deciding the weeds wouldn't hide her too much, Taran stepped through, becoming enveloped up to her ribs. She brushed the satin strings away as a light breeze rustled over, trimming the tops of the high grass. Her eyes moved upward as she went further. Hearing a soft bell sound, her foot lost its ground and she tumbled forward. Submerged, the sunlight was much cooler beneath the cover and after a moment, she was crawling toward the edge to a clearing, her clothes catching on the scene around her every so often.

Breaking through, Taran climbed to her feet and turned in a slow circle, absently brushing off thistle pricks from her arms. She came to a halt with the field gently blowing at her back. Before her was a gigantic cherry crimson tent and behind her was nothing but gold. Where had the town gone? Where was *Fanny's Florals*? Where was her *mother*? The bell that she heard earlier rang high in the air. A soft resonance that carried past her and off and into the trees. With her hand



to her face, she raised her eyes to the top of the tent. A blackness with some kind of headdress sat atop the tent. As soon as Taran realized that the black blob was a person, it let go of its hold and slid down, disappearing. Taran ran towards the opening and pushed past the heavy curtains. Inside was the color of the coal her mother used to heat dinner every night, so dark that no light caught any of the corners. Suddenly, whiteness flashed before her and went out just as fast. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust. When they did, she noticed a faint light pointed in the middle of the big top. With caution she walked towards it.

At the center, a young girl was placed on a bed of blush colored lace, holding a bouquet of midnight roses. The girl's auburn hair was fanned out behind her like another sinister headdress. She could see that the girl's nails were caked in mud. A light dust covered her lips as well. Eyes stared straight up. Eyes that reminded her of her mother's blues. The girl was covered in ice. Taran went cold. It was her.

A whisper of fabric made her look up. Crawling from the shadows were people dressed in red glitter and leotards, tutus and dazzling costumes. There was a woman poised on her ballerina pointes, a boy crouched on his knees, a doll-like girl hanging from a sweep of burgundy silk – the sound she must have heard – and several performers beyond them hidden by an inky veil. A man dressed in an ebony suit with a matching hat and coattails stepped forward. He took the hat off and held it as his waist, watching Taran. A sad smile came upon his face.

“Welcome, to the In-Between,” he said.

THE CITY OF STONE

Jake Springborn

I dreamt I awoke, in a city of stone,
And the people who dwelt there were marble.
With manganese ships, sailing rivers of sand,
Casting long, silent, unmoving shadows.

As I looked to the east, I could see rolling hills,
Topped with statues of men carved in onyx.
All their faces were blank, like the dark violet sky,
With no sculptor to right their indifference.

When I took my first step, on the cold polished road,
with its streets made of granite, its gutters of gold,
I let go of my breath, as my feet carried west,
And I went to the place where the land and sea met.

As I crested the hill, and the sun hit the sea,
And the waves made of glass shimmered back spectral light.
The ruby sun disappeared into the black,
And the night took the land, and the sea, and sky back.

As I sit on the beach, where the sky meets with glass,
I remember the roads, and the hills, of the past.
Someday I'll return, and I'll walk to the north,
To the canyons of diamond, and lakes made of quartz.



THE DANCE OF THE RED ROSE

Bolingbroke

Every day, on his way to the piazza, Giacomo stops at a cafe for a cappuccino, a loaf of sour bread, cheese, and an egg. The egg comes to him with two holes in it through which he sucks it out, washing it down with half the cappuccino. The loaf and cheese will be his contribution to dinner that evening when he returns home. His friend, Salvatore, is a fencer in the lists, and tonight he will prize play for the Scholars' Laurel. It is an honor just to be asked to participate. A victory will earn Salvatore the Proctor's Rights and he can start his own school of fence. This has been Salvatore's dream since he and Giacomo met in the piazza when they were young boys. The loaf and cheese will be their celebration dinner. Giacomo will grab a bottle of wine after the event if Salvatore wins. Perhaps they shall buy some women as well. Giacomo quaffs his cappuccino and turns to the cobbled lane that will take him to the piazza. He tucks his provender into his doublet and saunters away, whistling.

When he gets there, the piazza is just beginning to bustle with its morning business. The relaxing chant of the water in the fountain in the center of the piazza struggles for dominance over the rising murmurs of the people there. They bob about looking for places to sit like pigeons looking for crumbs of bread. Although there are some merchants who come here to do business with one another, most of the people in the piazza are students and their pedagogues. They cluster together in little flocks in prearranged locations. For now they speak idly, but soon the lessons will start and the rigor of thinking and learning and discovery will begin. Giacomo comes here to learn philosophy, literature, and law. He hopes to become a jurist under the patronage of the Lord Mayor, perhaps someday even the Prince. Beatricé is here today and it lifts his heart. Later, he will ask her if she would like to go see Salvatore dance for his prize play. When Salvatore wins, maybe she will celebrate with him, then they will only need to buy one woman for Salvatore.

Giacomo takes a seat beside Beatricé and tells her good morning. She

smiles sweetly at him and returns his greeting. Giacomo gives her a little piece of paper, upon which he has written a poem for her. Beatricé reads it, then she curls her arm into his and gives it a squeeze before releasing him and taking out her journal and quill. The pedagogue has arrived and class will begin.

The sun has not yet cast its light onto the piazza, and Giacomo did not bring his cloak this morning. The damp chill is distracting him from the pedagogue's lecture, and he finds himself focused rather on the light of the sun shining on the high walls and windows of the tall and ancient buildings that are surrounding the piazza. Like sentries at a gate, they demand a toll of light and warmth before the sun can come into the piazza to do its business of performing the day. Giacomo fidgets impatiently as the light imperceptibly proceeds down the face of the buildings on the west and north sides. The pigeons begin to leave the tiled and paved floor of the piazza for the warmer heights of the sills and ledges and cornice edges of the buildings.

Suddenly, a raised angry voice is heard across the piazza, capturing Giacomo's attention and drawing his gaze down from the heights to somewhere beyond the fountain. It comes from near the vendors' carts. One sells hats, and the other sells quills and ink. The argument becomes louder, and it begins to distract all of the students in their cloisters around the fringes of the piazza. The general murmur of the piazza dies down with each crescendo of the bickering, and presently the voice of a pedagogue shouts to the malcontents to take their dispute elsewhere. "We are all trying to learn," he says. Beatricé tells Giacomo that she wishes they would stop, but Giacomo's attention is firmly held by the two men and their argument. They appear to be arguing over a cap. Giacomo cannot make out the details. He infers that perhaps there is only one contended cap left. One man is clearly Italian. The other is speaking Italian, but his accent and clothes belie that he is from Saxony. He is a big man as well, with ginger hair close shorn. They are yelling and spitting and posturing. The big German's face is close enough to kiss the Italian, cursing and red as a tomato. He gives the Italian a powerful shove.

The Italian, a small man and perhaps older, is thrown back but not upended. The whole piazza ignites with action as all run toward the fray and gather



about them in a wide circle, finally giving way to collective voyeurism despite the protests of their respective pedagogues. Giacomo gives in as well, even in the face of the fearful pleas of Beatricé. He finds himself blocked by the press of students immediately around the antagonists, makes for the fountain, and climbs upon its short wide wall. That is not enough, so he splashes into the reflecting pool and up he ascends amongst the urn laden cherubs. He can see clearly now and he listens intently, trying to hear the hard and bitter words of the angry men above the cajoling and urging of the crowd and the water of the fountain.

There is a short lull in the exchange, then the German calls the Italian's parentage into question. The older man responds that the German's childish behavior is not worth his time. He throws the hat at the German, hits him in the chest with it, and turns to leave. The German calls him a coward. The Italian is nonplussed, and tosses him an upheld fist in gesture without bothering to look behind or slow his pace as he leaves the argument. The piazza is silent. Giacomo is disappointed, he got wet for nothing. It seems there will be no fight.

But just as the Italian begins to melt into the press of people at the edge of the wide circle, the big German draws his longsword and rushes him. The crowd lets out a gasp and the circle inhales, growing significantly wider. The Italian reels about, quickly drawing his own steel as he does. The German, his blade high above his head, cuts down powerfully upon his foe. The Zornhau, thinks Giacomo. The Italian deftly passes toward the cut, off the line, and quickly cuts up on the draw to meet the German blade, deflecting it from its mark. Sparks fly from the impact. The Italian finishes with a turn on the balls of his feet to the rear and posts, in the high guard of The Window. The German is surprised by the older man's speed and finesse. He finishes his stroke and follows through, passing his foe, his sword in the low guard of The Fool. The crowd continues its instinctive dispersal to accommodate the dance that must ensue. Giacomo is thrilled.

All the years of friendship with Salvatore have given him insight into the art of the fence, although he never plays himself. Giacomo is a being of gentler spirit. He prefers scholarly pursuits. Giacomo takes pleasure in the the broader nuance and abstract principles of life. He enjoys the poetry of life and is ever

vigilant for the thread of it, which he believes runs through all things. The thread of truth from which we can divine right living. Giacomo feels that the thread can even be found in science as well as art. Which is why he can not help but to be intrigued now. He often watches Salvatore practice his art. He has watched the Dance of Fiore from guard to guard. He has watched as Salvatore would spar with other dancers at the school of fence next to the 'little' piazza, near the Lesser Gate. Salvatore finds in Giacomo an eager audience in whom to expound the principles of his art, and the details of its science. Salvatore calls fencing The Dance of the Red Rose. He has given Giacomo a working knowledge if not a practical one, and it allows him to live the manly art vicariously in some way through Salvatore, and that is good enough for Giacomo. Giacomo had once asked Salvatore if he had ever had to use his art in a real fight. Salvatore's face had become grim, and there was a silence that was brief and profound.

"Only once," he said.

"What happened?"

But Salvatore did not respond, and deftly changed the subject to Beatricé, and when was Giacomo going to finally bed her, or was he too afraid, and did he 'want some help with that', as Salvatore ran off down the lane, and Giacomo ran after him in feigned anger, laughing and shouting curses upon his name.

Soon, now, Giacomo will see it for himself, The Dance of the Red Rose. He will see poetry applied, and the thread of truth may reveal itself to him. He will have much to talk to Salvatore about after his prize play. He will be able to see Salvatore's art in a whole new light, a practical light.

The two swordsmen square up on each other. They are measuring, Giacomo knows, measuring distance and each other. The German stands in the guard, From the Roof. His blade is on his shoulder. He is crouched forward like a cat about to spring. He bounces very slightly upon his toes. The Italian turns on the balls of his feet sharply, facing about towards the German. From The Window, he rotates his blade in the air in a flourish, and then cuts down through the air to

his left. "From the teeth to the knee," thinks Giacomo. He notices how the Italian cuts from guard to guard even when he is not engaged, when he is only measuring. Salvatore has told him that this is the strength of the Italian school. No stroke is made apathetically or without intent. The Italian finishes his change in guard, eyes ever on his foe, to his new guard, The Tooth of the Boar. His body is upright and straight, his weight forward, the sword held low at his left side, point down but threatening.

There is silence in the piazza as the foes consider each other. Giacomo forgets to breathe. He begins to shiver in his wet clothes. The only thing that can be heard is the chant of the fountain, as the cherubs murmur to themselves, closing out any final wagers.

Then, as if upon a silent cue, the two combatants burst forward, closing the distance as they cut. The German deftly and slyly cuts sideways over his head, The Cross Stroke, at the head of his opponent. The Italian, stepping left to the outside line and out of the German's measure, thrusts up his Boar's Tooth, catches the German under the breast bone, and drives his longsword home to the strong of the blade, through his opponent's lung and heart. The point flashes out of the German's back. Somewhere in the piazza, a woman screams. The crowd gasps. The Italian withdraws his sword as the German crumples. He finishes in The Iron Gate. The big German falls face down onto the piazza. His blood flows quickly from his lifeless body and blossoms out, out from beneath him, out upon the ground. It traces along the lines between the tiles and paving stones on the piazza floor, lost forever to the body it nourished.

Giacomo sits on the top of the fountain, horrified, mouth agape. The thread of truth which runs through the poetry of the dance is not what he imagined, not at all. He thought there would be some beauty or art somewhere. When he watched Salvatore practice, it was strong and lovely. This bloody thing he saw was concise, calculated, violent, and effective. The Italian simply did the mathematics, and the dead German, covering the piazza in his blood, was the solution to the problem. Giacomo cannot believe how much blood is inside of one human being, and how urgently and gleefully it flees from the person at the first opportunity.

His mind races to imagine the blood of other things, rushing about inside of them, pulsing, throbbing, straining to escape. He thinks of his fellow students, of the pedagogue. He thinks of Beatricé. He thinks of himself. He thinks of things he has eaten, chickens, oxen, and pigs. He begins to grow ill and faint. He climbs down from the fountain, almost tumbling into the pool below. The bread and cheese are soaked. His stomach protests the raw egg and cappuccino he had earlier. Knowing he cannot resist its protests overlong he flees the piazza, lest he be seen and shame himself in public.

Giacomo runs into a narrow alleyway between the buildings. He dives into the shadows and violently gives up his breakfast to the pleadings of his innards. He feels pallid. He quivers as he tries to control the heavens that want to continue even after he has emptied himself. The sight of the steamy puce puddle of bile does but press his distress, and there is the smell. He turns and steps away from it, pulling out a wet shirt tail to wipe off his mouth. He wants to go to the fountain, to splash himself in the face with cool water, but he dares not let Beatricé see him in this humble and unmanly state.

He looks into the piazza. The City Guard has arrived. The Italian defender and some witnesses are providing details of the incident. The Italian's calm demeanor is unnerving to Giacomo. The older swordsman stands rather noble, relaxed, his hands folded before him, his foe face down at his feet. His longsword is sheathed now. It looks to Giacomo like a pointy, steely creature that has just fed, and now sits at its master's side. There is a serenity about the prospect, and Giacomo believes the Italian has earned his succor. But there is an unholiness that taints it. Giacomo wonders if Cain stood thus after he slew Abel.

Giacomo decides to go home. He is in no state to study. There are questions racing through his mind. There is poetry that must be unwritten. He is still ill, and feeling weak. He must be ready to watch Salvatore's prize play tonight. As soon as he thinks of Salvatore and his prize play, Giacomo's mind starts to ruminate on the art, on what it really is, on what it presents itself to be, on the artifice of the art. His stomach rolls over once and he has to steady himself against a wall. He closes his eyes and inhales deeply, but he sees the grim face of



Salvatore when Giacomo asked him the question. He realizes that it is the same face that was on the Italian in the piazza. The same grim determination was on the face of the German, albeit more animated, but not more passionate. He decides that he needs some wine to calm his stomach, maybe a lot of wine. Giacomo stumbles along the cobbled lane, making his way to the cafe where he got his breakfast.

Later, Salvatore is concerned. His friend Giacomo was not at his prize play. It is not like him not to come to Salvatore's events. He is always so interested, so academic. Salvatore wonders if Giacomo was delayed because he has finally wooed himself into Beatrice's bed. He would smile, if he didn't know that even Beatrice's soft curves and dark eyes would not keep his friend from seeing him fence for his prize play, such is the loyalty of Giacomo. Salvatore picks up the pace toward home. His footsteps echo from the cobbled lanes onto the high ancient walls of the city and up, up, up into the darkness.

When he arrives at the hostel where they live, he finds Giacomo lying across the door to their room, unconscious. There is the stench of vomit and wine about him, although the floor is clean. An empty bottle lies at his head. Salvatore rushes to his side and sits him up. Immediately Giacomo is awake with a start, and he struggles against Salvatore for a moment.

"Giacomo! Giacomo! What happened? It is not like you to lose yourself in wine!"

"Salvatore! Salvatore! Please do not kill me!"

"What?! What talk is this my dear friend? The wine is giving you fitful dreams I think. I would never harm you! Why were you not at my prize play, Giacomo? I am not wont to be angry, but your absence offended me, especially if I were to miss your cheers for this."

Giacomo lays frail and weak in Salvatore's arms. He looks into Salvatore's face. It is not grim and determined. It is the face of his childhood

friend. He whispers to Salvatore through his fermented stupor.

"Salvatore. Salvatore."

"Yes, Giacomo, tell me. What is wrong my friend?"

"Salvatore, I saw The Dance of the Red Rose today."

Now Salvatore's face was grim.

"Giacomo."

"There was a fight in the piazza. It came to swords. A German was killed. It was so quick Salvatore, so efficient, the dance."

"Yes, Giacomo."

"I thought there would be poetry! I thought there would be flow and beauty! But all I saw was a dead man, and a content man."

"Giacomo, sweet Giacomo, I am sorry."

Giacomo sits up and Salvatore sits next to him with his arm about his shoulders. Giacomo is staring at the empty bottle of wine. They are silent for a time.

"I saw it Salvatore. I saw the Red Rose."

"Yes." Giacomo quickly looks into Salvatore's eyes. The expression in his voice is serene. It sounds like an old Italian man standing relaxed and noble, his hands folded before him, sword sheathed at his side, no voice of compassion or sorrow. In Salvatore's eyes is a look of one who proselytizes and has won another convert, has won favor.

“Why Salvatore? Why are you thus?”

Salvatore shrugs his shoulders. “Giacomo, I cannot tell you. To me,
Salvatore shrugs his shoulders. “Giacomo, I cannot tell you. To me, the
dance is a beautiful thing, an expression of power. The Rose is the consummation
of that power. All who dance, feel this way.”

Salvatore stands up, turns to open the door, and goes into the room.
Giacomo sits there on the step. Tomorrow he will find other lodgings. After a
moment he begins to weep silently.

SNAPSHOT: HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Matt Passant

Bastards of Rome

Suckled by a bitch wolf

Descendants of licentious

Caligula and Nero,

Inheritors of that ancient

Empire’s blood soaked

Heritage, drunken orgies

And wine splashings,

Laugh and gorge yourselves

With muscles of dead animals

While feeding others

Humans for fodder.

Straight streets run red!

Cheer the sight of blood!



Family Tree



Mary S. Brink



Roots of Influence

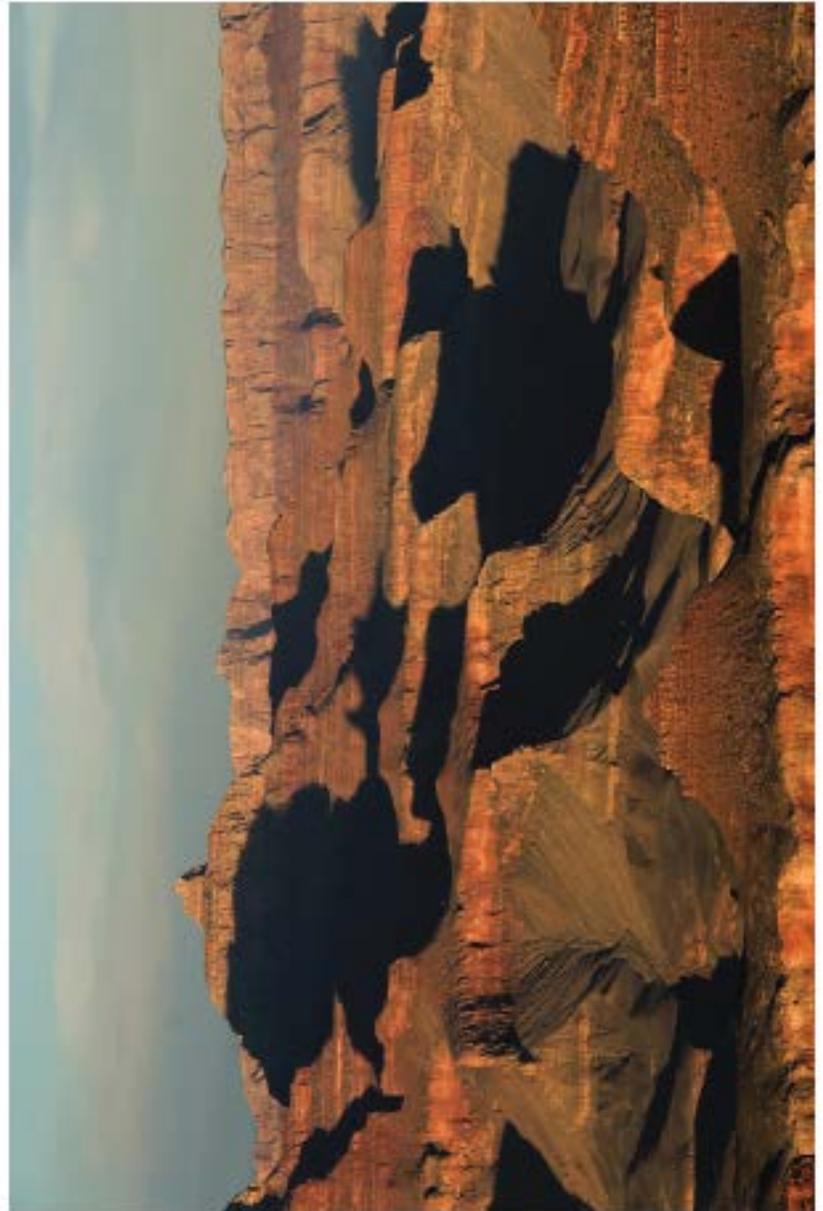
Alex Dittiro

Trains



Jon Watts

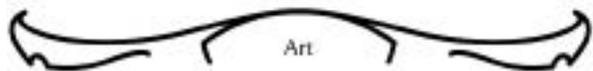
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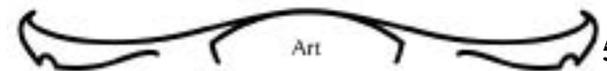
Luke Waguespack



Kevin Peterson



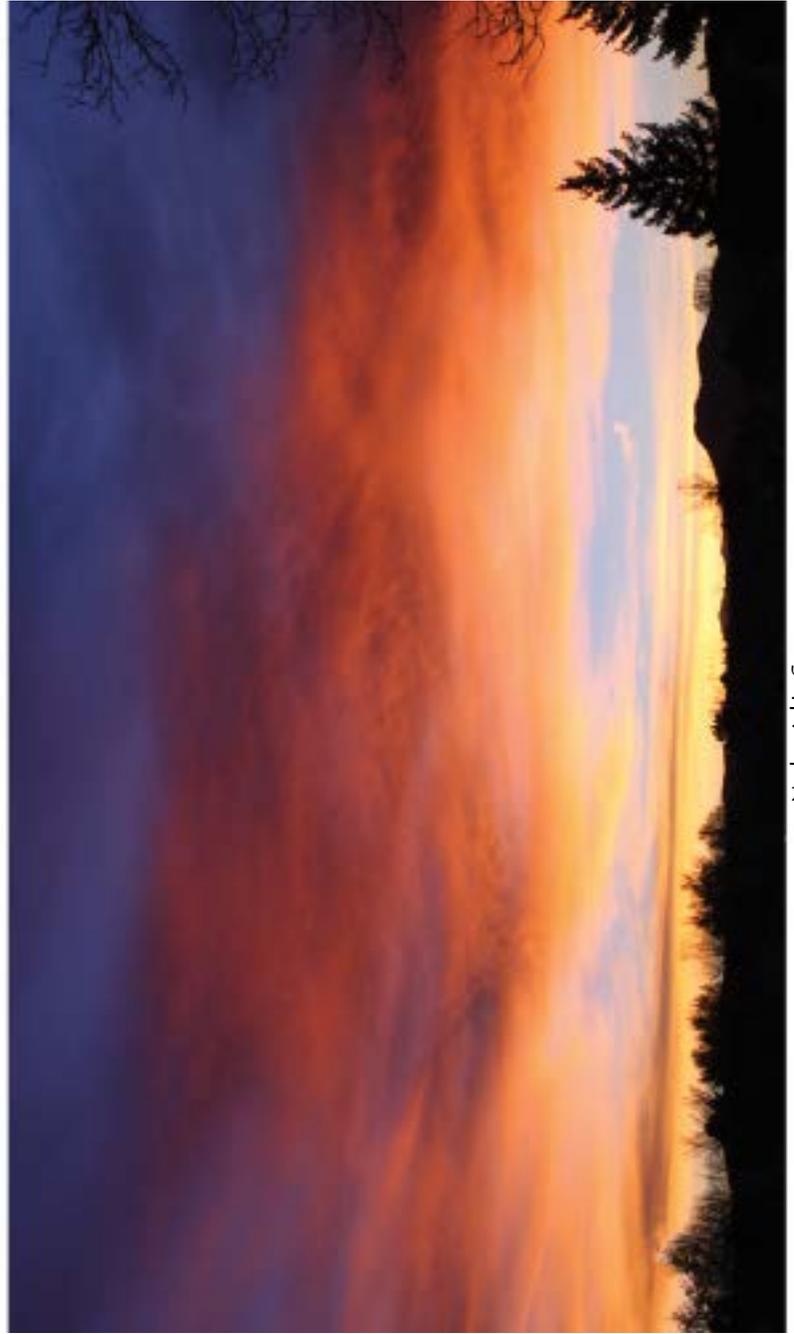
Luke Waguespack





Dark Radiance

Mary S. Brink



Sunset Alameda

Nathaniel LaCruce



Hot Air Balloons



Alex Ditirro

Sullen Tree



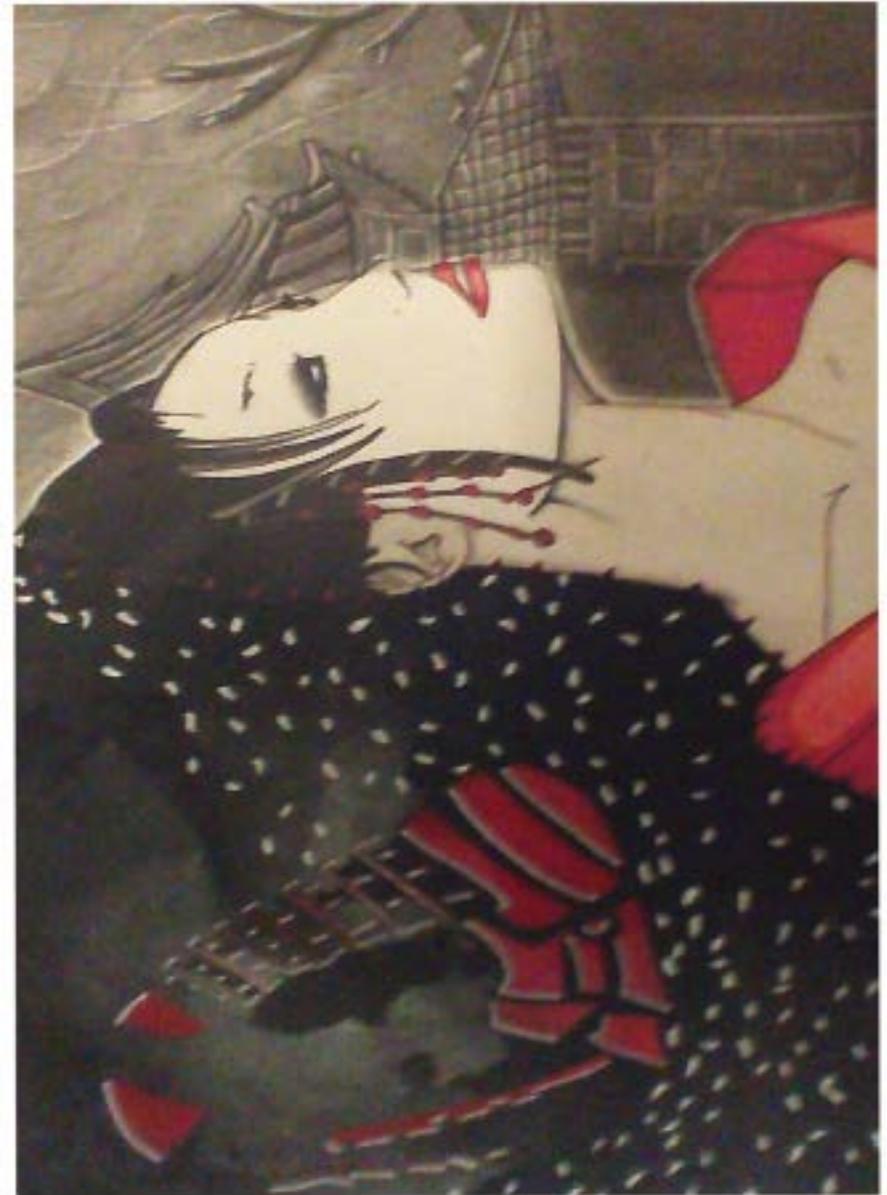
Luke Waguespack

Moon in the Pendant



Briele Graham

Geisha Girl



Brett Stearns

Pine Tree



Jon Watts



59



Winter Looms



Julian Elwood



60



Puppy at Feet



Yalan Wu

Splitting Headache



Mary S. Brink

Under the Bridge



Mary P. Siebert



MODERNYSM

K.C. Thomas

All black
Black clothing
Clothing dawned
Dawned eerily
Eerily forced
Forced gathering
Gathering here
Here incapable
Incapable joy
Joy killed
Killed laughter
Laughter missing
Missing nephew
Nephew obituary
Obituary processed
Processed queer
Queer ridiculed
Ridiculed sadly
Sadly terminated
Terminated unfairly
Unfairly violated
Violated whilst
Whilst xenophobic
Xenophobic zero
Zero All



INSPIRATION

By E.M.

To many a theater is just a place. A destination, just another room with seats, lights, and curtains, filled to the point of spilling with mundane, ordinary objects. To me, it doesn't feel so pedestrian. Every miscellaneous object is a prop. The chairs are a promise of an audience, of human souls that are willing to be touched by my own. These curtains are not meant to exclude the sunshine; they are the frame of a window through which we may observe the core of humanity. Plays reflect the true nature of the world we live in and thus are a driving force for social and political change. The audience is confronted with an issue; they leave considering it, and occasionally will take action in an attempt to change their reality.

I love the theater itself, perhaps more than I love acting. I could spend hours exploring prop storage and costume shops. They contain endless possibilities, limited only by my own imagination. Within them, boredom is an impossibility. The stale smell of sweat and powder that lingers in the dressing rooms is something I find comfort in. I often compare these feelings to those of church goers. It is where I celebrate my triumphs, where I learn, grow and expand, where my community gathers, and where I turn when times are troubling. The stage allows me a kind of vulnerability I would never allow myself. Through the characters I portray I get to experience and examine the whole emotional spectrum without there being any consequences. As Juliet I am permitted to obsess, to be consumed by love, to disobey, to end my own life. In reality, if someone stood under a window and professed their affection they would be arrested and slammed with a harassment charge. The stage is an alternate universe with completely different limitations. While trotting the boards one is free to feel whatever they wish and express those emotions however they please. The theater is a punching bag. With tact and grace it quietly absorbs everything I throw at it. It is the only space that has the capacity to listen without judgment. When my feet are solidly planted on the stage, I can feel both, the force my body exudes on it, and the opposite force with which it supports me. This physical sensation is what lets me know that it is okay. That I have free range to be myself, that no matter how poisonous I feel it will

always be supporting me.

Aristotle believed in Telos, the concept that every living being on Earth has a specific reason for being here, something fundamental to their nature. I suppose I have a similar belief. Organisms are designed to excel in their own niches. Millions of years of evolution have programmed us all to preform certain tasks. Watching something do what it was intended to do is strikingly beautiful to me. When horses gallop it makes me giddy. When birds take flight I am wonderstruck. Witnessing a cat hunt awes me. I have a loving bond with acting, but it's not my Telos. Recently though, I was lucky enough to observe someone who is truly meant for the craft.

To me the theater is my ecosystem. I take to it like a fish to water. I interact with it, move amongst it, and allow it to sustain me. It is a wonderful symbiotic relationship we have. Alex is not a fish in this ocean, she is an oxygen atom. She is the water. They are one and the same, unable to be separated. While I look on, amazed, I realize that performance is an innate part of her; it is her and she is it. Her lips are a megaphone through which the heart of performance communicates. I bring to my parts only the understanding of a fish; in comparison, Alex carries with her the wisdom of entire oceans. I heard her shout the line "get out of here", and a wave, containing all-encompassing frustration and anger, crashed against my chest. It held me captive, threatening to drown me in angst. In that instant I understood the total significance of the words. I gazed, dazzled by her magnificence. Costumes, makeup, and lighting can only create the aesthetic illusion of beauty as it only truly dwells within the spirit. At that moment her essence radiated. It transcended the delusional concept of time and the container of space, and presented itself as pure, unadulterated, breathtaking beauty. Despite this great talent, she still remains modest. She is a friendly, helpful bit of oxygen willing to lend herself to another's gills. With her there is rarely a lack of understanding and empathy. All this adds to her unwavering vivacity.

I have never seen this woman be anything other than genuine. For these reasons, I find her to be a source of inspiration. I am encouraged to find the strength to pursue my passions, to realize my own Telos. I am hopeful that one day



I may be fortunate enough to be such a beautiful individual. That one day I reach someone the way she reached me. That by simply doing what was preordained for me I can have a positive impact on another person and leave the world a little bit better off, just a tiny bit brighter than it was when I entered it.

A STRAY'S LOVE POEM

Lacey Sharp

I am a mongrel of a mutt-dog,
Head bowed at your feet.
With spine and ribs rippling through
Beaten scar skin and strings of black hair,
Muddy eyes, and mouth of death.
Slinking around on crooked stilt legs
Trying to escape my own stench,
And find a morsel of meat
To fill my throbbing gut.

The only thing I whimper harder for
Is just a drop of your affection.
For you to pass your eyes over me, just once
Pat my head, and maybe even say «good girl».
And if you deemed me a very good dog,
I could sleep at your feet tonight.
Give and receive warmth while the evening
Bred black, raw, rainy, cold.

And with my company, I might prove
that I will trail you farther
than any other woman
that has ever slept here before.
Farther than those who've pawed at your chest,
licked your neck and pet your hair;
Those who played with you like a toy
Or who sat up and begged for you,
But turned tail and ran
At first sight of the winding path you make.



SECRET REBELLIONS WITH BAZOOKA JOE

Matt Passant

Unlike them, though, I will shadow you,
Go up your mountains behind you
Into forest tangles and
cave mazes ahead of you.
I will throw myself
At man-eating bears and wolves.
Stagger away, on wounded limbs
And follow you still.

My heart bounces when I see you,
And if you let me
(Which I hope with all
My ragtag body that you will),
I'll come to all of the edges of the earth with you
And be your mans best friend.

Eyes bulging slightly, cheeks distended as far as they will go with the discomfort of so many pieces of Bazooka Bubble Gum, I am Dizzy Gillespie blowing his horn at Birdland. My mouth is full, but I continue to cram more and more pieces in it. I can't move my jaw to chew the giant conglomeration of pink and sweet tasting excess to a more manageable size. A small twinge in my gut growing bigger and bigger until it is a full blown panic, and I feel like laughing. Nothing can get past the Bazooka roadblock in my mouth, not even a smile. Feeling the drool run down the front of my chin, I can only make small noises through my nose, snorting. Leaning against the inside of the car door, I can think only of my own laughter and spitting this unwieldy blob of pure sugar out of my mouth. Grabbing the crank, I turn it as fast as I can, lowering the backseat window until it will go no further but still only halfway. Lifting my head to meet the rushing air, I thrust it out of the opening, wind lashing and chopping at my face, banshees screaming in my ears. Pushing the giant piece of gum as far as I can to the front of my mouth, I inhale through my nose, and wait for the exact right moment, that indefinable moment that is only known when it happens. Exhaling through my mouth with force, it is gone, hitting the back of our car with a loud thud and bouncing off into oblivion.

My mother sitting in the front passenger seat, quickly, with an intonation of violence, turns and rips us to shreds with one piercing look. We face front as fast as we can and look back at her trying to be brave, trying not to laugh. Knowing that her point has been made, she slowly turns back to the front facing world of grown-ups and pours another thermos top cup of coffee for my father behind the wheel. When I'm sure the coast is clear, I lean over to my sister, sitting on the other side of the backseat. Elbowing her in the ribs, I whisper, too loud not to be heard, "OK, now it's your turn" implying with a more hostile undertone, "Beat that... if you can."



My sister, six years older than my eight, scoffs at my comment with a snort, unwraps a piece of bubblegum and plops it in her mouth, immediately followed by another and then another. Settling in to the challenge, she finds a routine designed to aggravate me: opening the gum wrapper all the way, she reads the comic strip that comes with each piece, chuckles, shakes her head as if to say “That crazy Bazooka Joe”, defiantly darts a look at me and stuffs the comic strip in her jeans pocket. She knows how much I love those comics, and she hopes to provoke me. I keep my cool; she won’t beat me. My sister has a huge mouth. This is the first time I’ve ever noticed it. She opens it wide and I can’t even see the back of it. It’s a dark, dark cavern. With fifteen pieces in, I concede, but she keeps going stuffing more and more in, just to prove a point, just to rub it in. There are twenty pieces in her mouth, and I am so angry I can’t even look at her. Turning my head away, I look out the window and see it, the Royal Gorge Bridge.

“We’re here!”

My father guides the car into the parking area, and before he has completely stopped, we jump out of both sides, running towards the bridge, joyous for our freedom, and to be leaving our parents behind. Getting to the threshold of the bridge, we stop to catch our breath and take in the sight. It is massive, much bigger than we imagined. Reverently, we step onto the bridge and begin to make our way across. A wind races through the walkway, causing the bridge to sway slightly, just enough for us to notice; a dull anxiety sets in on our nerves. Numb, I can feel the panic from earlier, but this time there is no laughter. Frozen in place about halfway across the bridge, I grab onto my sister and she is frozen too. We are too curious and fascinated by the unknown just over the side, to stop now. Still holding onto each other we approach the railing and grab on to the top of it tightly. Standing next to each other we tilt our heads just enough to see over the edge. The sparkling Arkansas River cuts its way through hard rock and earth, leaving a scar, too wide to mend, too deep to heal. My sister and I take in the impossible height together swaying with the bridge; our heads buzzing our hearts beating so that we can feel it in our whole body, the only sounds are the footfalls behind us on the wooden planks.



“Everything is so small.”

She approves of my comment with an intake of breath and a thoughtful nod. Looking at her, trying not to look down at the scarred earth, she is still chewing the huge wad of gum from the car; we had both forgotten about it until now. A smile creeps slowly over her face as she chews. With every bite an idea takes shape in her mind, a secret rebellion, budding, soon to be blooming. Looking down at the rocky terrain and shining river, I know what’s coming.

It just seems like a thing that would be frowned upon by them, the universal them, we never really know who they are, but we know that they would disapprove. They never said we couldn’t, but it wasn’t encouraged either. No sign read, “Forbidden: no spitting off the bridge”; if there had been, we surely would have thought of it sooner. It had to be done; there was no speaking, no planning, just a silent mutual acknowledgment of what was going to happen.

Getting as close to the railing as we dare, we grasp it, this time so hard that our knuckles turn white, we tip our heads forward again looking to see if anything is down there. The wind from above and underfoot makes the wooden planks groan and creak. Nothing can be seen from this height anyway. My senses are heightened as my sister leans over the railing more than I think is safe. Opening her mouth, she makes the shape of an “O”. I can see the pink mass as her tongue moves it to the front of her mouth. It is smooth with a slight sheen of saliva, and I am transfixed, frozen again, barely breathing. She breathes in through her nose and time stops at mid-measure, suspended and heightened. Like a closely watched grasshopper unexpectedly leaping, she breathes out through her mouth and the gum is sent flying, falling with a trail of spittle that the wind dissolves. The giant pink blob of Bazooka Bubble Gum falls, continuously gaining momentum, finding further to go, faster, it is smaller and smaller in the ever expanding world around it.

My sister’s giggles break me of my concentration. Taking my eyes off of the trajectory of the gum, I begin to giggle too. We look at each other and lock eyes in silent recognition of what we have done, something that was, maybe not criminal, but definitely disapproved of.



Turning back to where I had last seen the gum, it was nowhere to be found. I looked and strained and scanned all of the terrain calculating the path it would have taken in its free fall. Nothing, it is gone, it may never land for all I know. Turning to my sister for help locating our clandestine globule, she is also gone. Walking away giggling, she has bored of our adventure and decides to catch up with our parents who have past us in all the excitement.

Hey!

Running towards her and my family, I stop when she turns around to face me still some distance away. A smile seems out of place on her face now, twisted, it is neither amused nor angry but only screwed on, forced and contorted. Her eyes are blank, not malicious and not benevolent. Her hand slides in her pocket and we lock eyes: hers blank still, mine confused. Slowly taking her hand out of her pocket, she has all of the comics that she kept from me earlier when she was chomping on so many pieces of bubblegum. I can see them in her fist blowing slightly in the breeze, squeezing out from between her fingers. She opens her hand and the comics, on thin paper already, go flying in the air, taken by the breeze lifted away and gone. I watch them go, briefly and then look back at her, as angry as I was in the car. She shrugs turns around laughing and catches up to my parents.

Hey!

RESPLENDENCE

Sabrina Hallberg

I take your hand and trail the tips of your fingers lazily down my bare side.
It's the chill I crave before the light interrupts us,
Before it heats the back of the curtains with an unwelcome lick.

Your words follow the sensuous pause
Between our breaths,
Causing the clock to stutter for a second.

I'm not ready for our final moment of embrace,
When our minds are forced to untangle themselves
And life resumes again.



IT WAS FRENCH

L. Alexandra

The afternoon sun has outlined and inked everything in the living room, but has only just begun to shade the kitchen. It has been five days since she has had to make her coffee with somebody else's beans, but her new bag sits unopened, pressed between the microwave and a never-before-used porcelain container whose name fruitlessly cries for FLOUR. She told herself it was silly to open a new bag before finishing the old one. She chided "Waste not, want not, Carole," just like her mother used to over uneaten peas on Sundays. There aren't that many cups in a bag anyway, right?

It has been five days since the door slammed, and the bag is almost empty. He never wrote things on the grocery list until after he had already run out. Carole stares at his bag of beans before reaching out and unrolling its top on impulse. She can't pronounce the name of his coffee. It is French. She preferred... she can't remember. She hasn't had it in years. Her coffee beans were green and she would roast them at home. But they'd sold that roaster two years ago during a garage sale, hadn't they? They had never used it.

A glance slipped into her empty mug. The coffee stains were slowly evaporating into an eerie likeness of Jimmy Hoffa. She wonders if coffee stains can tell fortunes as well as tea leaves. She wonders what kind of coffee Jimmy Hoffa liked. She wonders if he was chained to habit too. But then, maybe it wasn't habit so much as homeostasis, a balance found in life's basic motions. Waking meant coffee, and Carole is awake. There was little point in delaying any longer.

She opens the bag the rest of the way and carefully shakes a third of a cup of beans into the grinder. One still manages to throw itself out. Picking it up, she pauses for a moment, pinching it and examining its blackened body, running a trimmed nail along the line dividing its halves. It splits in two. She watches the two pieces fall to the counter, freed by the pressure of her grip. They are just as effective apart as they were together. The beans are destined to be crushed either way, and the coffee will taste the same regardless of how it happens. He will still

linger in its acrid aftertaste.

Closing the grinder, she hums a single note in harmony with its whirl. When she opens it a moment later, she is surprised to see how finely ground the beans are. She prefers hers coarse, but habit had gotten in the way. She pours the grounds into the filter and firmly presses the start button whose faded letters betray its unwillingness to begin again. The familiar sound of the coffee maker's digestive distress strives to fill the room just as it fills her cup with a heat she does not want. Once it sputters to an exhausted halt, she takes the cup and sits at the table. She watches the shadows stretch for...

What time is it? A glance at the clock reveals that it is precisely 2PM, though her pjs would argue that point. They were the same pjs she had worn yesterday, the same as she had worn the day before that. She had started waking up later by day three, hoping it would make things easier. But it hadn't. Once again, she is struck by the realization that she has nothing to do. The apartment is immaculate, with the exception of the two coffee cups. One is abandoned and cold on the kitchen counter, while hers now rests on the most recent issue of Vogue she's read in years. She bought it a month after they had met.

She thinks about his face in the smoke-smeared lighting of the pub. The way his eyes lit up when she said she was a designer, the way he choked on his beer when she said she had never seen Casablanca. Carole takes a sip of coffee and is certain it had just attempted to bite off the tip of her tongue. The first time he told her that it was suicide taking a sip sooner than five minutes after brewing, she had joked that his coffee tasted better after a round of Russian roulette. She still believes that. Is it still his coffee? She isn't sure. Tenses and possessive pronouns had become confusing, so she tries to avoid thinking about them. Instead, she just let the past and present blur together, pretending they could make the future.

A sudden knock on the door destroyed her ancient Vogue under a boiling wave, sloshed over the startled rim of the mug. She is halfway to the door, nearly tripping over the end table when she hears her neighbor greeting someone. It wasn't her door. The minutes inside her head pass beyond the scope of reality, leaving her standing in the middle of the entryway, half-holding a cup of coffee she doesn't want, half-letting it drip onto a floor she doesn't give a damn about. The mug drops and cracks in three, and she follows after it, collapsing into the mess and



only bothering to add tears to it. *It's over, Carole.*

Those words, for five days she had fought them off, for five days, she pretended it was still the first, for five days she waited for him to wake up and take his coffee. *How long did you think we could play house before she found out?* Forever. Why not? That's how long make believe was supposed to last, wasn't it? For five years he helped shape her, for five years he took care of her. *Look, don't worry. I'll keep paying for the place until you're ready to move out, alright?* Of course it was alright. Everything would be alright. Just as soon as he woke up and took his damn coffee. But then, it is 3PM, and he is already gone, and the coffee is getting cold.

She stares at the soggy carpet and the puddle in the snapped bottom of the mug. Too small to drown in, which is probably for the best. It has been five days since she has had to make her coffee with somebody else's beans, but there are still two cups left.

WRAPPED UP

Natasha Albrecht

Silk sheets,
black,
soft to the touch.
Enveloped, nothing to see,
Senses tossed assunder.

Lost.

Veiled shadows caressing sarkness,
Wandering through textures unknown.

Bets are off,

Gauntlets thrown.

All welcoming, all dangerous,
strangers met have yet to own
the parts adrift in sin.

Another world outside these sheets.

Swamps of cotton and polyblends.

A forest of mismatched items,
but that terrain can not be seen.

Senses masked, silhouettes entwined,

Shapeless shades moving blind.

At once commanding and pliant.

Power can move mountains.

But, shrouded in fluid waves of silk,

desperate pleas lead to bargaining,

Hiding everything and nothing.

There's a place that blurs the lines
caught between nightmares and dreams.



FOR THE LOVE OF NACHOS

Ben Glasscock

“Give me all your money bitch! Do it now and you won’t get hurt!”

A large hooded man appeared at the counter. The employee, a female twenty-something, screamed and fell to the ground, paralyzed by fear. The man cursed again and went around to the door at the side of the enclosure built around the cash booth. Kicking the door down, he saw the girl fumbling for the silent alarm button. Cursing loudly once more he raised his pistol and fired several times. The 9mm rounds ripped through the girl’s chest, her arm falling lifelessly to the ground inches before reaching its target.

Unfazed by the body lying in a spreading pool of blood, the man stepped over it and headed to the register. With no immediate threats, he decided to take his time, counting out the money as he placed it in a small bag in his coat. He turned to look at the cigarettes lining the wall behind him, but was stopped short by a low growling sound behind him. He looked down and began to panic.

“What... What the hell? You’re dead!”

The man started shooting wildly at the girl he had killed. The rounds tore through her body as she slowly staggered to her feet, splashing gore across the walls. The impact did nothing to stop the thing as it advanced. The man continued to pull the trigger, the soft clicking noise not registering in his mind. Sweat started dripping from his face as his eyes opened wide with terror. The girl lunged at him, eliciting an otherworldly shriek from the robber. He dropped his gun and turned to run. His legs were ripped out from under him just before he reached the door. He looked up only to see the girl fall voraciously upon him, tearing through his stomach. Screaming loudly, he tried to fight, but a wave of pain exploded through him, sending him into shock. As his vision faded to black, the last thing he saw was a blood soaked girl beginning to feast on his entrails, a demented grin contorting her face.

“What did you just say?”

“Dude, I didn’t say anything”

“Dang, totally thought I heard something about nachos...DUDE! Let’s get some freakin nachos!”

The sound of laughter echoed through the smoke filled room. Steve looked over at his buddy Kyle, laughing hysterically at the odd declaration. Kyle was struggling to get out of his easy chair, a combination of weed and violently nodding in agreement causing him to lose his balance. When he finally got up, the two men made their way out of the house, heading towards the convenience store down the street. Bright sunlight filtered through the trees causing the duo to pause while their eyes adjusted from the dimly lit dorm room. As they made their way through the neighborhood, the pair chatted idly, trying to see who could come up with the funniest words.

Snorting in laughter, the duo arrived at the store. Steve headed single mindedly straight for the nachos while Kyle found himself entranced by the light bouncing off the hotdog rollers. He stared for a few minutes before something by the register caught his eye, the Slim Jim display. He called over to Steve, who looked over from pouring excessive amounts of cheese into the container and ran over, cradling a goopy mess in his arms. As they grabbed the Slim Jims and started going on about the amazing properties and hilarity of salted meat sticks, the cashier began growling and banging on the window, blood staining the glass.

“Whoa, nice costume lady. Is this a new ad campaign or something? I totally dig it.”

The cashier continued to make loud noises and Kyle figured she was probably too into her character to respond. He fumbled around in his pockets for a moment before producing a crumpled wad of cash.



“The dead can’t talk, eh? Here, keep the change, I friggin love what you’re doing man. Keep that shit up!”

They walked out, leaving the money on the counter and munching on their snacks. As they turned the corner back towards their dorm, something grabbed Steve from behind. An elderly man with half his face missing had him by the arm.

“Hey man, this is nacho cheese, get your own!”

Chuckling at his own terrible joke, Steve ripped his arm free from the old man’s clutches. It came at him again, and he took a big swing at his assailant. His fist collided with the man’s head, causing the man to stagger back. Steve looked over at Kyle.

“Let’s get out of here, this dude’s insane!”

They turned and ran off, Steve still clutching his nachos. As they made their way towards the university, the emptiness and eerie silence startled them. The normally bustling grounds were lifeless. The guys stopped, utterly perplexed as to what was going on.

“Dude, where is everyone? Do you think this has something to do with all those sirens the other day? What if something happened and everyone left town?”

“You’re just stoned man, the weed is making you all paranoid. Everyone is probably just in class already.”

As Steve considered that possibility, a scream rent the still air. They looked up and saw a girl running towards them, chased by two men.

Kyle dropped his junk food and sprinted to help her. Steve stood there for a moment, trying to decide if he should save his nachos or the girl. He opted for both, and carefully set his chips down before hurrying over. Kyle had already reached her and pulled her behind him. The men were badly deformed; there were chunks of flesh missing, pale bones sticking out through gaunt discolored skin.

Assuming they were zombies, but not quite knowing what to make of them, Kyle reached into his pocket for the only weapon he had on him, his trusty pipe. He hit one of the men as hard as he could before jamming his pipe firmly into the assailant’s eye. Steve appeared from the side with a large stick he had inexplicably acquired and began wailing on the other man. The stick splintered uselessly; it wasn’t enough to deter him. Screaming wildly, he wound up for a thunderous right hook and caved in the side of the man’s head.

“Dude, I think I’m the Hulk or something! You see that?”

“That was freakin sick man. How’d you do that?”

The two exchanged high-fives, adrenaline giving them a different high. The girl stared at the two, dumbfounded. Steve turned to her and asked if she was okay. She nodded, bent over, and threw up. The smell of rotting bodies began to increase as the three walked away, trying to make sense of what was happening. Steve suggested finding a place to hole up and come up with a plan. They headed into the school, to a room just inside the main entrance where the campus police were stationed. Reaching the door, they hurried inside and locked it behind them. Grabbing chairs, Steve began asking the girl what was going on.

“Where have you guys been? There was an accident in one of the labs and some chemicals escaped. The school was locked down, but things spiraled out of control fast. Anyone who inhaled the chemicals died quickly, but came back and started attacking people.”

Kyle looked at her incredulously.

“Wait, are you saying this really is a zombie apocalypse?”

Steve turned and nodded at him.

“Didn’t you see those guys back there? They had to be zombies. It seems difficult to believe, but I can’t think of another explanation. It totally explains the chick at the store and that old guy we met on our way here too. That also means



that the whole town is probably infected.”

The girl shook her head. “That might not be true. I was with a group of people who thought they could barricade themselves in the auto shop until they could come up with an escape plan. We ran into a group of ghouls a few days ago and I got separated, but they might still be alive. We should try to find them.”

Kyle grinned. “Maybe they’re building a tank to plow through those things. I’ve always wanted to drive a truck through a zombie horde.”

Steve chuckled while the girl looked on in confusion.

“How can you find this so funny? People are dying and coming back and we might be killed soon ourselves. Why the hell are you laughing?”

“Oh come on, lighten up. Everyone dreams of an undead apocalypse these days. We’re living in a land of the living dead, in a society that’s already conditioned us for this scenario. What good are all those hours playing Left 4 Dead if we can’t put that to use now? Let’s see if we can find any weapons in here and go see about that murder truck. What’s your name by the way? If we’re doing this, we might as well introduce ourselves.”

“It’s Judith.”

Kyle snorted. “Er, sorry, it’s nothing, that’s just an oddly appropriate name. I’m Kyle, that’s Steve.”

Judith acknowledged him with a wary nod, and the trio split up to search the room. Several minutes later, all they had turned up was a couple of tasers. A pounding sound echoed from the back of the room, followed by a loud splintering noise as Steve broke down a cabinet door. Eyes opening wide, he beckoned the other two over to him, pointing excitedly at a cabinet in the corner. It was full of items confiscated from students. Amid a collection of useless items, they pulled out a couple knives, and, most importantly, a small bag of weed. Grinning like idiots, the guys sat down and sparked up, passing around a vibrantly painted pipe Kyle always carried with him. Judith stood off to the side, watching disgustedly, not sure what to make of her new companions.

Eyes reddened, they left the office twenty minutes later, making their way through the school keeping an eye out for survivors. Seeing no one in their immediate vicinity, they started toward the back exit near the auto shop. Advancing slowly down the corridor, they spotted several of the wretches ahead of them. The guys charged in headlong, while Judith followed cautiously, hoping her taser would be effective. Steve and Kyle dispatched the zombies easily enough, slamming knives into their faces. They turned to exchange high fives, but were stopped short by a shrill scream from behind them.

“There’s another one! GET DOWN!”

The boys dropped quickly as Judith pointed and fired her taser. The putrid stench of burning flesh filled the air as the zombie began to convulse. What was left of its muscles became unwieldy, slowing it almost to a crawl. Steve lashed out, sweeping the thing’s legs out from under it. He pivoted and fell hard, driving his elbow into the zombie’s face. It exploded in a gush of blood and brain matter, covering the walls in sticky goo.

“There it is, the People’s Elbow! Doesn’t look like he’ll recover from this one, he’s down for the count! The Rock is the People’s Champion once again!”

Kyle grabbed Steve’s hand and raised it over his head in a mock victory celebration. Judith walked over to them, disdain mingling with a slight smirk on her face.

“Alright guys, enough clowning around, we’ve got to keep looking.”

They continued down the hall, dropping any zombies they came upon. Spotting a maintenance closet, they stopped and broke off a broom handle to replace Judith’s spent taser. Winding their way through the corridors, they reached the exit without further incident. Slowly opening the door to the courtyard, they carefully slid out, hearing banging and growling noises up ahead. Hurrying onwards, they saw a group of zombies trying to break through the garage door.



Slots had been hastily cut in the sheet metal, and through them someone was attempting to fend off the attackers with various sharpened objects.

The trio rushed forward, plunging headlong into the undead. Steve and Kyle started stabbing as hard and fast as they could while Judith twirled among them, lancing zombies in the face and smacking them upside the head in a deadly dance. Years of ballet lessons as a child finally paid dividends in real life as she helped set the guys up for easy kills. After carving their way through a dozen or so of the creeps, they stood there panting, soaked in blackened blood as the last zombie fell. Kyle turned towards the door and called out.

“Hey, it’s clear, let us in will ya?”

He banged on the door for dramatic effect. They could hear rustling and scraping sounds as the people inside moved objects aside to make a path through their barricade. The door slowly opened, and a sickly, gangly fellow hurriedly beckoned them inside. There was a group of people huddled inside the atrium, looking terrified and suspicious of the new comers.

“None of you have been bit have you?”

Steve looked at the gangly guy as he asked this. The guy shook his head quickly and introduced himself as Gary.

“Thank God someone else is alive. How is it out there? We sent a couple guys for food but they haven’t come back yet. I’ve been fearing the worst.”

Kyle bluntly confirmed his fears. “I don’t think there’s anyone left alive in the school.”

“Who’s in charge here?” Steve asked.

Gary sighed sadly and answered.

“No one really. A few people have been brave enough to gather some

supplies from the wood shop, but we were all holding onto hope that this thing might blow over and we’d be fine if we just protected ourselves here.”

Kyle interjected quickly. “Nah man, don’t you watch movies? It could be weeks before help arrives. And if this thing gets out of town and starts spreading, we may never see it at all. What we gotta do is gear up and get out of here. Try to find someplace more secure, with lots of food, and then we can come up with a long term plan if no one comes for us.”

The other occupants had started to gather around, desperate for any news, and several of them began to nod in agreement. Steve quickly hopped onto a work table and beckoned for the rest to come listen. Quickly deciding to take charge, he started rattling off a speech.

“Listen up everyone! The school is overrun by zombies as you may have noticed. There’s no way we can survive in here with no food and no telling how long this thing will last. We need to get out. It looks like you’ve got plenty of weapons and plenty of people to use them. We’re going to cut our way off campus and see if we can’t find someplace safe to hole up until help arrives, or we all die. You know, whatever. The supermarket sounds like the most logical place to start. I may not be the best leader, but I’ve seen a lot of movies, and logged a lot of hours on my Xbox. I know how to deal with zombies. It’s not that hard really. They’re slow and stupid, and we’re, uh, hopefully not. If we work together, we can get through this. Now let’s get moving!”

Steve jumped down amid a round of cheers and applause from the crowd. Kyle walked up to him and said, “Dude, you just want more nachos don’t you?”

“Of course, I totally forgot mine back on the lawn.”

Kyle chuckled and readied his knife. “Well, you got them riled up, time for you to lead buddy.”

Steve grinned and set to work. There were knives, screwdrivers, nail guns and other tools pilfered from the workshops and there was gas and oil aplenty

to make molotovs. The group began divvying up the tools, and started crafting makeshift spears and other weapons out of scrap metal. As people started gearing up and preparing to leave, screams erupted from the back office. Panic took hold of the students and Kyle grabbed Gary.

“What’s going on? Who all is back there?”

Gary’s eyes darted around as he started trembling, realization not quite entering his mind as he surveyed the chaos starting to spread around him.

“We had some people injured on the way here. We put them in the office to help them recuperate, but a few of them were bleeding very badly.”

“You fucking idiots! Have you seriously not seen the movies? You get bit or you die, you turn. You have to crush their brain stem, only way to stop them. Wait, where are you going?”

As he said this, Gary turned and ran for the door. Overwhelmed by fear he started tearing apart the barricade, screaming to get out. A wave of terror flooded the garage, spreading more chaos in its wake. Several weaker willed students joined Gary’s attack on their defenses, knocking containers off tables as they ran. Steve and Kyle pulled out their knives and hurried towards the office, only to find Judith standing there, a blood soaked shiv in her hand. Seeing the pile of bodies, Steve tried to restore order while Kyle checked on Judith.

Hearing her name being called, she started to shake. The metal shard fell from her hands and she dropped to her knees, sobbing.

“Hey, it’s alright. You probably just saved us all. You should be proud of yourself”

Judith looked up at him, her cheeks glistening with a mix of blood and tears.

“I came in to check on them, see if I could help in any way. I was in the nursing program, so I thought I could at least try to do something. But this one girl began begging me to kill her. Said she couldn’t take the pain. She was crying, pleading with me to end it. She started to convulse, then just died right in front of me. I know I’ve killed a few zombies but this was different. I couldn’t help her. A few other people died shortly after, but then they got back up and attacked us. Now they’re dead, all of them. I couldn’t do anything.”

Screaming broke out again, this time from the front of the garage. Steve had managed to talk Gary and the others down, but the barricade had been severely weakened. A low groaning was followed by a massive crash as the undead forced their way through the door. Gary went down screaming as a mob tore him to shreds. Steve quickly retreated and rallied everyone towards the back exit. The barricade hastily thrown aside, the door was thrown open and a mass of bodies barreled out of it, fighting for their lives. Someone lit a Molotov and threw it back into the open door. Several jugs had fallen in the panic, and the now oil soaked garage was quickly engulfed. The group hastily left the area and when they paused for a breather, Steve took stock of the situation.

There were about fifteen of them now, plenty enough to stand up to most any sized group of zombies they may encounter. They were decently armed, but very panicked. In their abrupt exit they had left a lot behind and were not fully prepared, but they had no choice now. They had to go on. Steve rounded everyone up and got them moving. They made their way along the side of the school, easily dealing with the few scattered zombies they came across. They exited the campus and hurried towards the local grocery store.

As they climbed the hill overlooking the store, the group was in relatively good spirits. They were slightly battered, but really no worse for the wear, feeling like they could take on the world. Little resistance had been met on the road and they began to think they might actually make it. Looking down towards the parking lot though, that elation quickly sank. There had to be scores of those things gathered down there. Steve stared down in disbelief.



“Shit, this may have been a terrible idea. If I go down, make sure to cut off my head yourself. Stick it on a wall or something, I’d make a good hat rack.”

Kyle grimaced at Steve’s joke, but nodded anyway. He gathered the group up and split them into two groups, making sure there were several people with molotovs in each one. Everyone knew what needed to be done and waited silently for the sign to attack. Steve raised his hand in the air, then threw it down as he charged down the hill, screaming maniacally.

The group raced after him. Several people hurled their bottles into the horde as they got close. Flames ripped through the zombies as they stumbled through each other, setting their undead compatriots aflame as well. Despite killing dozens in the initial attack, there were still too many for anyone to count. As the group collided with the wall of zombies, they started to take casualties. Within minutes, those who fell came back to join the fight for the other side.

Steve, Judith and Kyle found themselves surrounded in the center of the fight. They formed a triangle and continued to slash and stab anything that came near. They held the horde at bay for a few minutes, but a legless zombie managed to penetrate their defense. It grabbed Steve and chewed through his ankle. He went down screaming. Kyle and Judith killed it, but it was too late, the damage was done. They stood beside Steve, trying to fend off the attackers and get him to safety. Kyle picked him up and they dragged him away as several members of their group fought their way towards them. Judith joined with the others and began hacking her way through with reckless abandon. Numbing herself to the slaughter around her, she became a killing machine. Deep inside she may not have like it, but she was adapting fast to the ways of this brutal new world. They managed to make it into the supermarket, but Steve was fading fast. Kyle set him down on a bench just inside the door and looked at him.

“I’m sorry bro, I gotta do this...”

Judith looked on lifelessly as Steve nodded.

“Damn, I just wanted a snack. Why did I have to try to be the hero? Those poor bastards always die at the end.”

He gave a pained laugh, a goofy smirk plastered on his face. Kyle tried to respond in kind but only managed something more akin to a sob. He took a deep breath, raised his knife, and brought it down hard.



PERFECTION OF VIOLENCE

Matt Passant

River rocks are smoothed and rounded over great periods of time against their will, but not without their complicity. Currents of river and tributary, strong and weak, pour over the rocks, lifting sediment, other rocks and more than is known from the river bottom. The rocks, crashing and banging, scratching each other, weather themselves with force and abrasion. Tumbling over, one against the other, rubbing and worrying as the water washes over them continuously until there is a place to land, and silently they drift to the bottom of river or tributary.

The current, though, never stops. Strong or weak, its creation is illusion. Rushing over a fixed point: the river rock stationary in its place of refuge. An idea of motion created by force without truth, as misguided as the early astronomers believing the fixed sun circled the orbital earth. The river rock, in a constant inaction, is worn down by the perpetual motion of current.

Over time, there are no more jagged edges, no rough patches, only the roundness and smoothness of perfected river rocks.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Natasha Albrecht is a part-time student and employee at Red Rocks Community College, and hopes to transfer to University of Colorado- Denver. She is involved in leadership through Phi Theta Kappa as well as the National Society of Leadership and Success. Natasha sings in a 24 piece swing band, William and the Romantics, who play regularly in Denver. She is an aspiring songwriter, and chose to take a creative writing class to, “get her juices flowing”. Her inspiration for this poem was the result of a looming deadline and writers block. She found herself playing with some amusing words and wishing she could just go to bed. *Wrapped Up* is the final result.

L. Alexandra is a Red Rocks Community College student and communications tutor of eclectic interests. Her work has appeared in previous issues of *Obscura*, its interdisciplinary scholarly journal counterpart, *Claro*, and in *Crack the Spine*. While L. started as a fiction writer, favoring fantasy, she has since written academic essays, creative nonfiction, poetry, flash fiction, and various short stories. “It was French” was initially an exercise in writing outside of her comfort zone, using present tense, restraint, and an unfamiliar secondary subject matter (she loathes coffee). The story was refined to explore subtler elements of relationship dynamics and the way everyday items can echo emotions as much as memories. Outside of the rigors of overanalyzing her writing, she spends her days talking in excess, over indulging in fiction in its many forms, and clinging to the delusion that she will be able to remain in school forever.

Bolingbroke is almost 50, married with 3 children and 5 grandchildren. He lives in the mountains southwest of Denver with his wife Beth. He enjoys the synthesizing of the liberal arts and considers the ability to do so more important than science. He is in school to become a tutor for the under-privileged in his mountain community. His favorite thing in all the world is to sit and listen to the hearts of others, recognizing the cross-cultural threads of similarity that bind us together, and enjoying their fellowship.

Cherie Cash is a history major who loves to dabble in writing. Finished with her Associate of Arts degree, Cherie will be transferring to Metropolitan State University of Denver in the fall. “Whispers” was originally started in a Fiction Writing class. It’s still a work in progress but with the support of the instructors and students who have supported her writing she hopes to have it fine-tuned and polished soon. Cherie would like to thank her family and friends, with an added special thank you to Jennifer Dumford. Without her guidance, this story never would have happened and the character’s voices would never be heard.

Alex Ditirro’s piece, *Roots of Influence*, is done in scratchboard and as the picture turns into roots, the roots then form the outlines of different geographical regions that have cultural influence on the US. The *Hot Air Balloons* one is also done in scratchboard and was only done for fun.

Julian Elwood is a bit of a renaissance man, concept art, however, is his passion. He is attending Community College for arts classes. Good books and making things are also always on his “To Do” list. Julian is pursuing a career in video game concept art, and loves the emerging art of interactive entertainment, and would love to further the industry in any way possible. His piece is *Winter Looms*.

Ben Glasscock is a music student who enjoys dabbling in writing on the side. He studies bass, classical guitar and piano and one day hopes to work in a studio. He enjoys fantasy and has been known to drift off into his own world, occasionally getting into arguments with imaginary characters. Action and comedy are his favorite styles to write, and he’s still trying to create the perfect formula to blend the two.

Briele Graham is an art student who likes a little bit of everything. She plays the flute, covers blank pages with sketches poetry and writing, and practices Kung-Fu in her spare time. Amidst the crazyness of attempting to complete a degree she has discovered that every medium has its place. Her dream is to utilize these creative tools to help people expand themselves, probably by publishing her own works.



Sabrina Hallberg is a Creative Writing Major who is hoping to pursue her dreams of inking the world with beautiful one liners. “Heat Circus” was written for a Fiction class, *Resplendence* for a Poetry class and *Words* for a Digital Story in a Creative Nonfiction class. She has a very lyrical and dark style of writing that relies heavy on description and narrative. Sabrina is almost finished with her Associates Degree, but is still searching for the right words to come next. She would like to thank everyone that has supported her thus far, and hopes to return the favor some day.

Emily Johnson is an artist, writer, and casual linguist currently attending RRCC. She studies several languages, but is most proficient in Korean. One of her many goals is to become fluent in more than ten languages. “Perfect Mistranslation” was born from thoughts about how language impacts us at the core of who we are and the nature of language itself.

Ceyi Ceyi Laflen was originally born in Anchorage, AK. She currently resides in Lakewood CO, after moving to Denver in 2012. She enjoys many hobbies, some of which are: reading, writing poetry, drawing, and playing classic video games. She states that her passion for life is often reflected in her art and writing, and that many of her ideas are inspired by her dedication to discover beauty in anything, in everything. Her piece, *The Winter Promise*, was inspired similarly when taking photographs of the first buds on a tree outside her house. She is currently pursuing a Business degree.

Matt Passant is a student at RRCC and firmly believes that the less said, the better.

Kevin Peterson usually writes about the feelings of love and abandonment and the human condition in an attempt to get people to understand him. This is the first illustrated work of his to be published. The piece, aside from starting as a pencil sketch, was created entirely on an iPad. He spends far too much time talking about Disney on Twitter. He likes kittens and cupcakes.

Lacey Sharp’s poem, *Morning Sun*, sympathizes with other cat owners, who truly know how persistent cats can be. *A Stray’s Love Poem*, on the other hand, started as an intentional cheesy love poem, but then from a particular motivating line, turned into a statement of affection for her husband. Lacey has gone to Red Rocks for two years now and has finally decided to pursue a career in zoology. Though science and literature are two very different animals, Lacey has dabbled in writing, even participating in the making of *Obscura’s* magazine last year. She still writes from time to time, and is thrilled that the *Obscura* staff believes that her poems are worth publishing. With that, she would like to say thank you to them, because she knows how hard making this magazine is. Life without expression is meaningless drudgery, and this publication helps expression along.

Mary P. Siebert has been a student at Red Rocks for a number of years, and earned an Associate of Arts degree. *Under the Bridge* was adapted from a photograph of a young lady who was a student at Red Rocks at the time and who has other ties to Red Rocks. The photograph was taken under the Bridge at Red Rocks, a location that has wonderful natural light.

Jake Springborn has been writing all his life. He’s a passionate storyteller and artist, with an interest in all forms of human expression. He is somewhat new to poetry, but he has found it to be a very enjoyable and interesting writing experience. *The City of Stone* is his first complete work of poetry.

Jake has been a screenwriter since 2009, and has aspired to be a writer for television since high school. He considers himself first and foremost a writer, but also has interest in the visual arts. He paints, sculpts, and works in digital illustration. Jake is currently working on writing and illustrating his first graphic novel. Though he is interested in various forms of art such as writing and painting, his true passion is storytelling. His desire to create a compelling narrative is the one thing he hopes will shine through in his works.

K.C. Thomas is an unaccomplished author, poet, songwriter, and current writer and editor for the independent comic book company SilverTrePublishing©. His writing style is often dry and usually heavily sarcastic, including sharp cynicism and horribly off color humor. His sad and unpolished tones can often alienate mainstream audiences, but he would say that it is a risk worth taking. Most of K.C.'s time is spent promoting his comic company (now seeking artists) or working on a number of pet projects. He is very glad that his work was chosen to be published and gives halfhearted thanks to everyone involved.

This specific piece *Modernysm* is a mechanical exercise and a great example of subtlety and implied imagery. The reader is likely to "see" what isn't ever even touched upon because of the lack of specifics. What started off as little more than a brainteaser turned into the piece presented here.

Luke Waguespack has been a student at Red Rocks for three years, and he will transfer to Colorado School of Mines for Mechanical Engineering. He is fanatical about the outdoors, and a couple years ago, he started taking photographs of his adventures. He is now hooked on nature photography, and you will rarely find him without his camera if he is outside. *Sullen Tree* was taken along the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Luke was attracted to the isolation of the tree on the edge of the rocks and how it contrasted with the sky. *Nature's Paintbrush* was taken in the Holy Cross Wilderness of Colorado. He liked the vivid colors of Indian paintbrush contrasting with the gray log. *Shadows* was taken on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Luke liked the mystery that the shapes of the shadows added to the scene.

Yalan Wu, which means orchids in Chinese came from China two years ago and drew *Puppy at Feet* during the same year, which is also the same year that Sophie (the puppy) was born and became her friend. She loves her dog. She is part of Yalan's life.



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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Contributors must be Red Rocks Community College students at the time of submission. Each student may submit up to a total of three pieces. All work must be submitted to rccobscura@gmail.com and contributors are encouraged to frequently check their emails after submitting.

WE ACCEPT:

Fiction/Nonfiction

up to 5,000 words

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Poetry

up to 4/5 pages in length

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All forms of visual art are accepted

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Please take high quality pictures!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Printer: The Digital Frontier

The Den

RRCC A/V Department

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Amy Braziller & Paul Gallagher

Thank you to everyone who submitted this year!

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