

# *PORTALS*



Spring 2020



# PORTALS

*A Literary and Arts Magazine*

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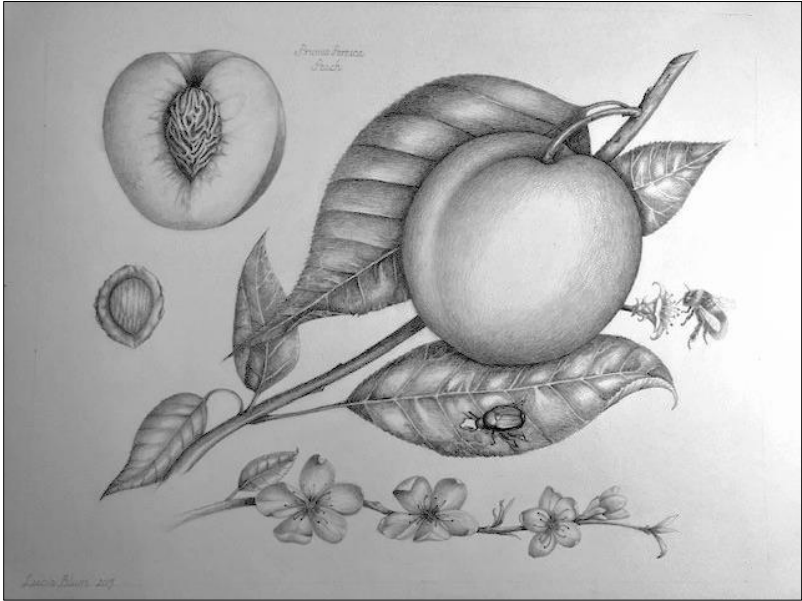
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Peach  
**Lucia Blum**  
**Art Award**

Naked Mole Rat  
**Connor McNamara**

We are naked mole rats  
Shoveling through earth to  
Find a tuber.

Dry crumbled cake of  
Soil pushed aside by tiny pink claws;  
Like snarled baby hands-

Scrambling in the dark, cool tunnels  
Hidden from bright sun;  
Wrinkled arms, heads, bodies, midget tails

Searching in the dark.  
Hundreds, climbing over and over each other  
A pornographic display of base craving

All to find  
That nugget of want.  
The treasure must be captured!

O viridescent gem of the ground  
Dripping sweet nectar  
Not just a root, the final prize of the desert



Winter is Cold  
**Karen Sboto**  
**Nonfiction Award**

That time when there were three of us left felt like a last supper. Soon we would be two, and Richard and I would be orphans. Is that the right word I wonder, when you are no longer of the age of Harry Potter or Anne of Green Gables, the age when orphan hood is written like a jaunty adventure. My father's death twelve years ago had splintered us. It took our passion, and some of our ability to be around each other. Now mom's terminal diagnosis loomed like a boat that was soon docking, and our imminent departure in the voyage that is dying, inevitable.

It was winter, the Winnipeg type, where the light shines clearly in the short day, and the nights are never quite dark. We are sitting around the table that holds within its wooden surface our lives for the past forty years. It is round and expands to accommodate everyone. It could be the metaphor for our family. There are times when there are many of us and others like tonight when there are only us three sharing a meal, tonight its boards lean, unneeded, against the wall of the closet.

We are eating by the window, and I remember walking home in my youth and seeing people engaged in normal scenes, cooking, eating, or watching tv. I would be steaming home, cold, dressed like an astronaut, secretly jealous of them. My cozy apartment and singularity awaited me, like a judgment. Winter was a hard time to be single.

Now, it seems like winter is also a very hard time to become motherless. Maybe it would be easier in summer, when you can get outside for a break, but then again, winter seems to suit the mood. It seems fitting to be sad at this time. Staying in bed is so much easier now, too. My mother and I take to lying in bed and doing cross words, at times we read books from cover to cover in only one day. Before this time when there was still treatment, I watched the World Series and knitted scarves while she drifted in and out of the chemo exhaustion.

That supper though was the beginning of the end. It was one of the last times that she ate. We had a diagnosis, knew the future, and understood that it was going to be a long voyage. We spoke about kids, and the rights of women to wear burkas, we spoke of putting fresh tomatoes into our fried rice. We are soft speakers and discuss things civilly. We know our future is going to be filled with the cancer topic so only talk of the past. It is nice to be with my tribe even at this time.

There will be others heading home tonight, longing for arrival. Maybe they will look at our peaceful scene and wish that it was them in our place. Their steps are crunchy in the snow, the steam of their breath frozen in their scarves. They are on their own journey, dreaming of destination.



It's Quiet in the Sky  
**Joy Shaver**

Divorce

**Rebecca Sixby**

Divorce is something you are quite familiar with; you have known about it since you were young. Growing up you hear various opinions on the subject, but as a child you despise it. Divorce is the cause for many issues growing up, like why you can't relate to your classmates in school when they talk fondly about their home life, to how you must raise your brother on your own until you are in high school. For years you hate people who choose divorce over making it work, including your mother. Growing up you boast that you will never be like your mother, because when you get married, it will be for life. Much later when you are faced with divorce it reminds you of your parents, like a band-aid covering an old wound you don't wish to expose. The fear of what if emerges, what if this makes you just like your mother? This thought paralyzes you at first, but you have learned so much since then. You take the time to remember how you got here. It takes you back to the summer of 1999.

You come home from school one afternoon and Mom tells you to go play outside, you don't question her because you always take the opportunity to play outside over homework. It's a typical hot California afternoon today, one that's best enjoyed in the shade. Your backyard does not disappoint; it has plenty of shade to spare while you play. Ancient sturdy trees extend their long arms over you, it makes your private playground feel quite enchanting. You lose track of time like you often do outside until your mother calls for you. Your brother is sitting on the pale blue love seat, she tells you to go sit next to him and wait. Your father comes home, but all is not right. Suddenly your father is given ten minutes by a stranger in a suit to grab his belongings and leave. Your father falls to his knees in front of you and weeps while holing you and your brother, who are also weeping in confusion. Ten minutes feel like ten seconds, and just like that your father is gone. Your mother has fled into her room leaving you all alone to try and process what just happened, all while you hold your little brother as you both continue to cry. That same night you are introduced to someone, this someone will be

the first of three stepfathers you will have. Your hatred for divorce begins that night, and it does nothing but grow for you here on out.

Life slows down for no one, and you are no exception. You are guilty of many things from then and now; skipping class, doing drugs, and running away to name a few. But now you live with your father, and you think things will be better. You were wrong. Since your father has never been able to shake the heartbreak and frustration of forcibly being ripped from his family and home, your new pastime is dodging the things he throws at you while he's intoxicated. But you don't blame him, you blame divorce, and your mother. Once you graduate high school as part of the 2008 class, you meet a guy through a mutual friend a few years later who you think is 'the one', that love at first sight kind of thing. You start dating him, but since he just joined the military, it's a long-distance relationship right from the start. Within that same year, to your surprise, he asks you to marry him. Everyone tells you to wait but you want out of that town, out of California. You tell him 'I do' and pack all your belongings and head into the unknown towards your new life as a married woman. Your new home is Jacksonville, North Carolina, and you are the happiest you have been in a long time.

You're both in the honeymoon stage for the first half of your marriage, everything is roses. You are now constantly learning new things about him, and the more you learn, the more you start to realize just how much you don't know about him. Some of the things you start to learn gives you some concern, like his quick, intense anger. Soon, things get worse. One midsummer afternoon when you come home from running errands, your husband's car is home. You find this odd because you thought he had duty this weekend. When you come inside you notice he's not in any of his usual spots, you look all over for him until you are face to face with the closed-door of the spare bedroom. This is the first of many times you will find him masturbating to pictures of a woman in his unit; one you met on spouse day. He was so angry that you didn't knock before walking in. He questions why you were even here and punches

the wall in anger, you stand in silence and listen as he screams and belittles you, all while her pictures are still up on his screen, pants at his ankles. He never apologized for his behavior or his actions, which in turn makes you think it's your fault all this is happening, and the start of yet another dark chapter in your life begins.

From that day forward you start to think of ways to fix your marriage. Since you think it's your fault somehow you start working out, thinking it must be your appearance. With hard work and dedication, you tone up and lose a bunch of weight. And he is suspicious of you. He places a key logger on your computer to try to see if you are cheating on him. He also starts collecting survival weapons, ranging from huge hunting knives to switchblades. You feel uncomfortable, your gut tells you to get out, but you stay. He finally agrees to see a therapist with you, after six one-hour sessions, she comes to the conclusion you are too afraid to make. In the car ride home, he tells you if you leave him, he will jump out of the car and commit suicide. He said it will be all your fault. You finally say you are done; no one deserves this. With some help from his staff sergeant and your new friends from work, you successfully file for divorce.

Growing up, you always thought divorce was bad, you despised anyone who got one. You think back to your younger self, but you don't apologize to her for your decision. You have now been through hell and back, and for you, the only way out was divorce. Not all divorce is the same, you see that now. While you still dislike the idea of divorce, it's not in the same way you did as a child. You don't like it because you know how soul-crushing it can feel to know that someone who you once were madly in love with, one who you thought was supposed to share the world with you, is all coming to an end. You hate it but accept it, because the world is not black and white. You know now that while some get a divorce for selfish reasons, like your mother, others do it to save their life or sanity, maybe even both. When asked if you had to go back and do it all again, you wouldn't hesitate. You would gladly go through all the heartache again; you would never try to take away an experience that helped you grow and allowed you to learn more about yourself.

You are almost thirty years old now, you have had one divorce,  
and you are nothing like your mother.



Bird  
**Jenna Stell**

Ode to the Koi Fish

**Kelsie Bennett**

**Transom Award—Best Overall**

who lived in the pond  
of my childhood home.

the first time my mother  
spent much more money

than she thought she deserved  
in order for my father

to have a threshold to carry  
her over as a married woman.

the pond was inherited  
with the purchase:

a bed frame, a microwave,  
& six orange-muddled fish.

free of charge, a moss-grown  
mirror lined with dimpled stones.

kois as full & round as soup cans.  
fuller once my mother was persuaded

to have children & began to feed them  
in maternal instinct.

my sister was newborn  
when a bird of prey dove talon-first

past her scarecrow & knotted gate  
and scooped up a fish as a lazy meal.

my mother's pond slimmed down



to the few she could salvage.

when one fish remained:  
standing halfway between cradle & pond,

my mother decided  
in order to raise children the right way,

some things must die.  
she closed the gate & came back inside.

Where We Grow

**Amber Best**

**Poetry Award**

I grew at sea level,  
so does she.  
Where shrimp boats  
meet the dawn,  
we fly free like gulls  
over Molasses Creek.  
Cypress towering  
at sunrise,  
dogs are barking,  
we sip cherry kool-aid  
in the early morning heat.  
There's salt water  
in our blood  
pulsing through veins  
like the 608 highway  
to the sea.  
I choke on heavy smoke  
on the way to school  
she breathes  
sand and ocean  
off saw grass blades.  
In the dog days  
we eat butter corn  
With bar-b-que chicken  
*You damn skippy*  
When she asks  
Is this the happiest  
I've ever been.

## The Scars Love Leaves

**Natalie Harrell**

He stared at the door. Behind it he received his tattoos; the marks left permanently by the hands of his lover, painful and nonconsensual.

*We are addicted to the pain derived from drugs.*

His feet planted in the grass before her door. The freshly cut grass had been drenched by the rain from the night. His feet became wet.

*We are cleansed of our sins at the altar.*

His shadow grew longer with the day. He told himself if it reached the door before he did, he would leave. By five o'clock he remained only as a ghost.

*We run away when we are scared of the unknown.*

*We run headfirst with a sword when we are ignorant of the unknown.*

*Let's hope to forever be ignorant.*

August 23.

How does love start? Does it start in the middle of a party when two strangers look across the room and only see the other; spotlight on both; breathless, the both of them? No. Love begins in the simplest of ways: through friendship.

Both of us sat staring at the water. It was a Friday afternoon, and everyone decided the beach was where they wanted to be.

"When do you think it will start to be cold?" As a born and raised Wilmingtonian, I should know better than he would, but still I asked.

"The water or the weather?"

"Both."

"Probably late September. Maybe sooner."

"Well let's go in the water before we can't anymore."

We raced each other to where the shore met the sand and beyond.

I never wet my hair at the beach, but he pushed me in. I laughed like I had never laughed before. So unapologetically me. I got out before he did. His afro shone in the sun, glistening from the water, like a sponge that soaks up the whole ocean.

I looked at him differently that day. But he has a girlfriend, I reminded myself.

August 31.

Why do we stay away from those we love and stay with those we do not? We become entranced with the idea that someone could never love us the way we were loved the first time it happened. But what is love? Love is not controlling. Love is not hurtful. Love is not manipulative.

Love is warm, love is kind, and love is comforting. It is respectful.

“She what?”

“Yeah, see this mark?” He turned his neck to show the scar. The stark contrast made it seem much worse. The small patch of skin her nails hooked into only a few hours prior left a white mark on his dark skin. The only thing separating him from the incident and the present moment were a few hours of restless sleep.

“And you guys didn’t break up?”

Bewildered, he replied, “no.”

“Why not?”

“I’m scared no one else will love me as much as she does.”

September 1.

Why do we need romantic relationships to feel whole? Why do we jump from one to the next, or more importantly how could we jump from one to the next so seamlessly? When we find something different and exciting, we are thrilled. We leave the old for the new.

Behind his house on the other side of the gate he walked by my side. The amount of confidence one has to confess their

secrets coincides with the amount of alcohol in their bloodstream. I had none.

“Natalie, can I be real with you?”

“Go for it, bud.”

“I have a thing for you.”

Looking at him, a foot taller than myself, I said, “you need time to figure out who you are first.”

We walked back in the party like nothing had happened.

September 2.

Why do we trust the untrustworthy? Perhaps because they give us no choice but to trust them. Why do we fall for the broken? Perhaps because we wish to break as well.

In Mikey’s dimly lit kitchen the boys played poker. He and I were on the other side of the room.

“She might show up here.” By then they had ended things. He had ended things.

“Why?”

“She has my location on her phone.”

Later that night we stood alone in the kitchen. I tried to ignore the elephant in the room, what he had told me the night before. Then, as we stood two feet apart, he leaned into me. He pushed a strand of my hair behind my ear and as he leaned in, he said, “do you mind if I kissed you?”

My head violently shook to the side and as I walked away from him my throat produced a, “no,” heavy with tears.

I felt violated. Like a rebound. Like someone to be used and thrown away. I had no intention of being with him, no hopes to be his. Not at that time.

The next night we kissed. I regret it now. The thing about regret is that you cannot do anything about it except to just move on.

September 8.

When we feel anxious our hands shake and our heart race, we may even sweat a bit. When we feel love our hands

shake and our hearts race, we may even sweat a bit. So how are we supposed to tell the difference between anxiety and love?

Leaving the party from right down the street, we ran to his front door, laughing the entire way. I promised myself not to drink in front of him, I do not enjoy the feeling anyhow. He did not make a similar promise to himself. He grabbed my hand and led me the entire time we ran. On his porch he held me like I have never been held and kissed me in a way which felt so new yet so familiar. We forgot our situations, our trials and tribulations. We were only us, pure and true.

September 14.

Why do we want those who want us to be who they expect us to be, not who we are?

“Natalie, can I be honest with you?” We stood on the porch of Mikey’s. Everyone else calls him Mike, I like Mikey. It was midnight and everyone else was inside partying. He had just smoked a cigarette and I hated it, every part of it. That is how my grandfather died, granted it was sixty years of cigarettes, but sixty year’s worth cannot start without the first. But I stayed silent, it was his decision to smoke it and I would tell him later what I thought.

“Sure, what’s up?”

“I’m really surprised you didn’t say anything about that cigarette.”

“I didn’t love it, but what can I do but tell you it’s bad for you, I can’t make your decisions for you.”

“That’s wild.”

“Why?”

“If you were her, I would be in a screaming match right now.”

“I don’t scream. Anger doesn’t die when met with more anger. I choose to use my words, not my hands.” I looked at the scars on his neck, on his arm.

“You’re so different.”

“I would hope so.”

“I really like it.”

September 20.

How do you know what a feeling is when you have never felt it before?

I realized what I hold for him in my heart is love. True love. It's terrifying.

September 29.

We claim we want joy yet remove ourselves from those who bring us the most joy. Why? We are told to be fiercely independent, but no one can escape the reality of needing human connection, it moves society forward. When we find the best form of human connection, why do we run away? Perhaps because we are scared of the unknown.

Behind the wheel with heavy tears in my eyes. I looked away from him to hide the pain.

We pulled into the parking lot and walked around the dock. The sun set and we marveled at it, my wishes still unsaid. We waited until every star that was bright enough to be seen through the light pollution was out.

“When I was a kid I thought when the sun went down it was like a giant fort. The sky is just a tattered cloth and the stars are where the light shines through.” He nodded, not knowing what to say to that. “I think we should just be friends.”

“Hmm,” he waited for me to finish the thought. He knew there was more to my words. He knows my mind works in complex circles.

“And I think it would be best for me, and you, to not speak for a little while.”

He agreed and we walked back to the car and we drove home. We walked to opposite sides of the street. When I closed my door, I thought it would be the final time for a while. He still reached out for days to come, not respecting my space.

I have not spoken to him comfortably since that night under the tattered cloth.

October 8.

Why do we say the things we do? Why do we say things we do not mean, sometimes the complete opposite of what we mean? We are scared of the truth, but what terrifies us is what would happen if the truth came out.

He held me in the middle of my kitchen, gave me a hug because he knew I was broken, and he knew he was one of many who was handed the hammer and decided to take a hit instead of setting it down. I believed he would be the first to set it down.

He held me like I have never been held before. Our breathing synched. I was scared. "I hate you." My words came out seamlessly, but so did my tears.

He looked at me, knowing I had to say it as protection. He hated to hear it. "You don't hate me, Natalie."

"Don't tell me how I feel. I hate you." Through small sobs I managed to tell him, "get out of my house."

Then he left.

October 18.

What happens when the truth comes out?

Neither of us were in the right headspace. We stood, holding each other like a lifeline, in the middle of my room. The colored Christmas lights lit up his face.

I said his name. He said, "hmm?"

I said, "I need space from you. I need to not be around you."

"Why?"

"I love you." The truth finds a way.

"Natalie, I love you, but I cannot love you in the way you need to be loved right now." He kissed the top of my forehead. He walked out the door.



The next day at work, Sarah asked him what happened. He told her, “Natalie said she loves me.” Sarah asked what he replied with. He said, “I told her never to say that to me again.”

As you wish, Mr. Taylor.



Sweet Nectar  
**Matthew Noel**

Soulmate

**Victoria Christie**

Freckles on your face  
Constellations in your eyes  
Soft touch, thick hair  
I long to be there  
Fingers entwined  
Can we go back to  
Wu Tang on the radio  
Marlboro hanging out the window  
Looking at me and talking  
Your voice is my music  
The words are like fluid  
Kisses sweeter than wine  
I try to move on  
But you make it so hard  
To love anybody else  
Soulmate



Little Town  
**Joshua Harrell**

Come Quick Danger  
**Darius Brunson**  
**Fiction Award**

It's around three-thirty in the afternoon and the Texas sun has not let up. The snakes and spiders take refuge in the available shade made by randomized Arlington construction. Had humans not pitched tents in this area over a couple hundred years ago, the wildlife would've been stuck in their ancestral ways. But in the same breath, had humans not settled here, then I wouldn't be alive in this moment. With that said, the sun's rays make me wish otherwise or at the very least, grateful that we've evolved to invent A/C. After being on standby all morning, I and my partner, Juano, decide to leave our truck and finally get some food. Texas Health allows its EMS operators two half-hour breaks during our twelve hour shifts. Just enough time to park our truck in a small parking lot and race the clock to finish our meal. Some days, we can actually eat something nutritious.

We park our truck at Taqueria La Nueva Mexicana off of East Division Street just east of the Great Southwest Parkway. We brave the intense heat to reach the pleasure of cold, sweet *horchata* and warm *tortillas* inside. The outside of the restaurant is bleached bone white; the inside is barren like the brittle bushes lining the parking lot. Entering the restaurant, it smells of my grandma's kitchen back in Tampico. The tables are the simplest kind you can find outside of some folding tables or planks of wood. The chairs are withered and exhausted with overuse. Numerous fans surround the dining room adorned with dust veils, showing the age of the place or the negligence of cleanliness. It is a space only meant for the working class, nothing more, nothing less. Where else can one get the best food in Arlington? I order five *carne asada tacos* and Juano gets a bowl of *caldo de pescado con tortillas*. We sit at one of the tables and begin talking, waiting for our food, babysitting our cups of water.

"This heat! My God this heat! It's unbearable at times," Juano proclaims.

“Ah, don’t complain so much, Juano. We’re in Texas, what else could you expect?” I say.

“I know that but it’s a hundred and eight degrees out right now. You hear me? One. O. Eight,” Juano responds using his fingers to form the numbers. Juano isn’t used to this heat. He moved to Texas from Oregon two years ago for a new life. We all need that sometimes, right? The poor man underestimated the humidity that was waiting for him here though. The thing about living in Texas, and in the South for the most part, is that the heat is different out here. It’s not just the blazing temperatures people worry about. That gets old fast. It’s the humidity! When you’re in humid heat, you get both burning daggers from the sun, and a sauna from the earth. Steam surrounds our heads, filling the lungs with superheated moist air. That’s the real danger. I and the rest of the squads get a lot of calls around this season for heat stroke so we carry extra supplies of saline solution during the summer months. Of course, the heat gets to me too sometimes, but I can’t let Juano know that. I have to keep some sort of superiority.

“Look, Juano. I always tell you, you shouldn’t have come here if you can’t handle the heat. You lived in the Northwest all your life; you really thought you could hang with the *guerreros* down here?”

He hates it when I call him out on his complaining. It warms my soul when he shows his discomfort. After being on the force with him for the past two years, I can start to pick up on what he may say; as well as him to me. Right now I expect him to call me by my nickname. Or, rather, it is my true name, my name from our common homeland.

“It’s not about where you’re from, it’s just too hot. I expect you to be used to the heat, Ceniza. The sun has already burned you down into nothing! How could you possibly feel what somebody still whole feels?” hse mocks.

“Well, from me comes *el fénix* and I shall be reborn anew! I call that a pretty big trade off from being a ‘fleshy’ like yourself,” I reply back to Juano while slapping his rotund stomach. He begins to start a new argument with me until our orders get announced.

“¡Pedidos de Ceniza y Juano!” a woman’s voice calls out. I leave our table to get our food and leave my dear Juano upset about the stomach slap. After I return with our food, we eat, finish our water and make our way back to the truck to continue our patrol. While cruising, I take in the artistry of North Central Texas. Dead armadillos show up on the side of the road every quarter-mile having lost the battle against a car’s tires. Cacti and Cedar Elms line the streets. The views of downtown Arlington are tinged a scorched, golden yellow from the still blazing sun with the Osage Plains to the north of the city. It’s as if looking at the skyline through a cathedral’s stained glass. Our service radio pops with static and we get periodic updates of the surrounding areas. None of the codes are for us to follow. The local news radio is on at the same time, adding more background noise with the city, religiously giving its spiel to locals. The big story now is the fear of stronger influences from the cartels of North Mexico. Dallas and Fort Worth have experienced an increase of activity over the past decade and Arlington is stuck in the middle. Most people figure it’s only a matter of time before we get our share. I believe that they’re already here making a strong influence. The media just hasn’t found a big enough story to sell yet. Some time passes before we start a random conversation again.

“Hey Ceniza, I never really asked you this, but how come you’re here?” Juano asks, breaking the silence.

“What are you talking about, man?” I reply back.

“I mean, these days it’s unusual to see people still in their hometown. I mean, you are from Arlington, and you’ve got Irving, Fort Worth and Dallas all within maybe, what, 30 minutes of each other? So it’s not like you’ll be bored. I don’t blame you for that. I’d stay here over Eugene any day but-” he says. Juano can tend to drag on if not careful so I tune him out sometimes. It can be a little annoying but it’s not intolerable.

He continues on, “I guess what I’m getting at is, what made *you*, Ceniza Alvarado, want to stay here? Did you ever want to live anywhere else?”

After thinking for a few seconds, I reply back, “I don’t... I don’t really know.” I was telling the truth.

I had never really thought of that. I just went through life, living. I've never really had dreams or aspirations. I never had any talents. I went through school kind-of absent minded and to myself, never failing but not competing for the principal's list either. Just another face in a sea of young brown kids. I spent my early twenties doing different trades, always earning enough to survive but never anything out of the ordinary. I've always lived in Arlington and I never questioned leaving. Even this EMS job sort of just came to me. I needed work, I asked an old friend for help, he lined me up with the hospital, I went to the interview, graduated from the courses and two years later, here I am. I've never, in my twenty-nine years of life, asked what led me to where I am now. No one ever asked. Not even my family. And after all that time, I've been asked a legitimate question that I can't find a legitimate answer for. I now realize that I never gained the ability to know how to respond in the first place.

"I guess I've never re-," a voice breaks through our conversation that grabs both of our attention. It's a dispatcher, who has come to remind us of our daily contribution to society.

"Unit 22, we have a code 323. Intersection of Bush and Flintlock Avenue, roughly 9 miles to your Southwest. Status is red. Begin immediate extraction. Prepare for L.O.L. You will be Prime 1. I repeat, unit 22, code 323-"

"Shit! That's bad!" I blurt out. I know that area. It's in South Arlington, by Vandergriff Park. The traffic gets bad in that area around this time. Juano has already accepted the GPS request from HQ, turned on the sirens and is barreling through traffic. I grab the responder and reply back.

"Roger, Ash Alvarado of Unit 22 confirmed for immediate extraction of a code 323 at Bush and Flintlock, en-route, lights up and moving. L.O.L warning confirmed, will request traffic override. Over."

"Negative, traffic override not confirmed. Over."

*Bastards! You give us this fucked situation this far out and traffic control can't make the stop lights work for us?!* Malice corrupts my patience. I wish I could yell it out, but professionalism is key, even now.

“Confirmed negative on traffic override. Eighteen minutes out. Over.” I respond back.

“Confirmed, eighteen minutes out. Big red and blue arriving in twelve. Over.”

“Confirmed. Over.” I respond back with the transponder ending its transmission.

“Negative? ¿Jodidamente negativo!?” Juano shouts astoundingly.

“*Si, si, negativo,*” I reluctantly confirm.

“We’re hauling ass to Vandergriff, we’re all the way out east of Angus Wayne and we’re already expecting multiple dead?! How can we get to the others if they won’t override the lights for us!?” he shrieks with venom.

“I know, I know” displeased agreement coming from me.

“*Ai, basura!*” I can’t blame Juano. I’m right there with him. I’m just as pissed as he is. HQ has just asked the damn near impossible from us. A two-car collision, multiple persons involved, two casualties likely with father time methodically working on the others and we will be the first EMS on scene with no other units in the area.

The rage that wells up in us is gradually coming to the surface. Juano is a much more expressive individual, he wears his heart on his sleeve. It takes very little to gauge his emotions. If others could see him now, they’d be surprised that the kind man could make such a face. Me, on the other hand, I tend to hide my emotions more. It’s difficult even for those close to me to tell what I’m feeling sometimes. But even though I don’t show it, I’m still human. And my rage at the current situation is no different than Juano’s. If I were to describe our current emotions, I’d say that Juano’s is that like a violent storm. A destructive tornado that obliterates all within its path, disappearing as quickly as it appears, or that of a raging river. Mine would be much like the ocean. On the surface, there is a calm and gentle ripple that evolves into slightly larger waves. But diving deeper, the currents get stronger, the light gradually fades, the pressure starts to squeeze harder, and a suffocating rage begins to encompass all. If we lose any lives because of HQ’s



incompetence, I pray they choose the quick and violent twister as opposed to being crushed by the cold weight of the ominous and all-engulfing sea.

When we arrive at the scene, I can tell it will already be one of the worst jobs I've worked. Arlington PD and Fire have localized the scene of the crash and it is a vivid site. What was once a gray, four door sedan of some kind, or at least I suspect it was, looks as if a child has switched the ends of the car around in a sick display of creativity. Back becoming the front, insides turned out, leather seats exploded and flayed out beside the car as if being displayed like trophy game. The roof is nonexistent; a crumpled steering wheel is lodged into the backseat leaving smudges of oil and blood from the engine block and of the poor, unfortunate soul manning the helm. The remaining two tires are barely on their axles, deflated and devoid of all air. It seems this car got the worst of the impact. Lying twenty yards away is party number two. The second vehicle is a Toyota Raptor truck lying upside down in a sad heap. All of its windows are blown out, the roof is caved-in and the back gate to the truck bed has flown off and is lying twelve feet away from the truck. Its front left tire and rim is obliterated and a slope beginning from the front of the truck ending to its left rear tire shows how it impacted the sedan and used it as a ramp to careen off into a barrel roll. Looking at the skid marks and where the collision presumably happened, it is obvious that the truck sped through the light and caused the crash. As Juano pulls into the scene, I open the back doors and jump out, gear in-tow, not wasting anytime as I ask the other first responders what the status is.

“What’s the situation?” I swiftly ask.

One of the responders escorts me to a line-up of bodies in between the vehicles while briefing me, “We’ve got two casualties, three in critical. The one in the middle is priority. Male, late thirties to early forties, grade-4 lacerations to the head, neck and chest area, low blood pressure, major bruising on lower lumbar area, supposed collapsed lung, a broken left femur and unresponsive. The other two are both males, mid-twenties, both have grade-3 major contusions to the head and neck area, grade-2 and 3 concussions and each a broken tibia and fibula

respectively. Also, unresponsive. None of them have any form of identification.”

As they are filling me in, I am simultaneously working on preparing the older gentleman for immediate transport. While preparing and running through procedure, Juano brings out the gurney and we load the man into the back of the truck. Before we leave, Juano tells the other responders that two more trucks are four minutes out before hopping into the front of the truck, with me in the back trying to stabilize the man, getting him ready to be received by the nearest hospital.

Speeding down Cooper Street, Juano rushes us to Arlington Memorial which is fourteen minutes away. I hear him in the front telling the hospital what to prepare for and the kind of patient we are bringing. I’ve gotta say, this guy is a bad case. I’m surprised the old man didn’t croak on scene. But now that he’s with us, it is our job to get him to the ER as fast as possible. As for my task, it is my responsibility to see that he is as stabilized as possible. I’ve had enough times where I’ve seen a life slip away in this truck and I don’t feel like adding to that list today.

As I go through the motions, something is bothering me. The responders said they had no identification and that’s not uncommon. We are in Texas, so illegal aliens are everywhere. But it’s something I heard. Earlier, as I was tending to the man’s wounds I briefly heard somebody speak. It was a drawn breath that seemed to come from the direction of the injured men. Though they were unresponsive, I swear one of them muttered “*Jefe*”. I tried my best to focus on the man. I continue looking over his body for signs of injury but I stop when I reach his stomach. After removing his shirt to view his torso, I am greeted with a peculiar symbol. A tattoo of a shield with three sections. On the bottom is a picture of Mexico. In the top left is a picture of Tamaulipas, one of the coastal states of Mexico. And in the top right is the letter ‘Z’. I’ve seen this symbol before. It’s a part of any Arlingtonian’s memory at this point. It’s a cartel insignia. And not just any cartel. The *Los Zetas*! The second-most dangerous cartel in all of Mexico right now! It makes sense now. They must have been speeding to do something and then they

crashed. They don't have identification because they're not just aliens, but they're cartel. This situation is the worst possible outcome for them. They can't afford to get identified for anything or else they'd get exposed. Then there's this guy! *Oficiales* and *soldados* dream of his status. I definitely have a high member of the *Los Zetas* in my truck right now, he's bleeding out and we are less than two miles from the hospital! I feel my vision turn inside-out.

"*Cálmese, Ash, cálmese.*" I calm myself.

Now that I know who I'm dealing with, it makes this even more impossible. *I can't fuck this up*, I think to myself, *I just can't! It's not just this man's life at stake anymore. If anything happens to him, I'm fucked! He's barely alive, blood pressure is plummeting, bleeding out everywhere and his pupils are dilating. There's no way I can keep him stabilized long enough. There's no way I ca-*. And just like that, whether it be a flash of brilliance or an invitation from the devil, I make a sudden realization. *Faced with such an impossible situation, nine times out of ten the patient would already be dead. If it's by natural causes, and he doesn't make it, then wouldn't this be the best for the community?* As my synapses overload, I look at the support machines I have him hooked up to.

I pray to my Lord, "*Señor por favor ayúdame.*"



Friendship Bun  
**Maidie Brianne Wright**

The White Devil  
**Brittney Bourget**

Oh sweet supple sphere of sweet red  
Why can you not sate my hunger or quench my thirst like in the  
days of old  
For what reason have you not become as sweet as when we were  
still young and naive  
What changed throughout our years of our evolution  
Have our tongues changed their shape and desire more of a glide  
on such an organ  
Something that we can reach for in a moment's notice or sip with  
fervor  
Cold as ice yet lights up our minds like a fireworks display of  
wonder and energy  
Oh sweet hell and machinations of our addled minds that seek  
such a chemical wonder of love  
That comes in more colors of the rainbow but only four are  
needed like the body humors  
Of ebony, brunet, cream, and crystalline white  
How can an apple compete with such a wonder  
As valued as a diamond and with as much blood in its history  
We thirst for such a treat that glides so silky and yet is a monster  
in disguise that lurks and hides  
In plain sight yet hidden behind the fancy words and so easily  
gotten  
How can one stay away from such a love that is a match made in  
nature so sanctified  
Yet acts more like a parasite from hell that controls its subjects  
with an iron fist to the brain  
It's our vice and pleasure and the source of pain and all that  
comes with its indulgence  
Oh sweet apple can you not come back from that high priced  
grave that's been dug for you

The sweetness of wine and cherries have been replaced by beet  
and cane

The words are everywhere yet no one can read them well and  
heed them

So is all lost in this fight of humanity for such a simple apple  
We altered the course of our own evolution and with it a price  
must be paid

Sometimes in blood sometimes in teeth sometimes in feet  
Mindless are we when we grab for such a twisted appetizing  
thing in all its colors and fizz

So supple is the mind while it courses through our veins as it  
wakes us up from slumber

Such a white devil

That sugar is.

The Search

**Heather Tripp**

Based on evidence presented

Infinity

Complexity of cosmos, Law of gravity

Structure and evidence of design that is perfect and timed

The dial set and finely tuned

Acceleration of Earth and moon

The truth is not that hard to find

Not some far-off mystery that appears sublime

Human evidence

Organs, tissues, brain, heart, cells, DNA

5s and 3s

As and Ts

Gs and Cs

Structure, order, sequence

RNA to proteins

Transcription, translation

What's the destination?

Not new thinking, neither is it profound

Truth is consistent, clear, leaves no room for doubt

Nothing comes from nothing

Everything has a cause

For anything to exist there would have to be some being that has always existed

The warning is, question everything

Question what you're told

Allow yourself to be wrong, allow yourself to be bold

Seek out the truth and find it

Truth is not all inclusive or there would be no need for it

If there is no such thing as truth, is that true?

What is the purpose of life? Does anything happen to us after we die?

Question everything and seek answers that satisfy

What is it that you seek?  
Chromosomes created and placed  
Intricately designed, perfect and timed  
We forget that helix is in us all  
All of us similar at the most basic and minute level of life  
Every detail of who we are, at the very core is the same

Oh but don't underestimate the power of differences  
Unique sequences of genes and individual skillsets  
The way a heart pours itself on a canvas  
The vast number of ideas and mindsets  
Each person with their gifts  
Crossing caverns to greet one another despite great rifts  
Barriers that divide can be the bridges that unite  
Design gives us purpose in our lives  
Each part important to the whole  
The clock turns with each piece placed  
Each part with a function planned for time and space

Remember that next time you think you are worthless  
There is more to you than appears at the surface  
Every inch of your breathing body down to the microscopic cell  
is full of purpose





Coexist  
**Laura Little**

Dotted Line

**Joanna Proctor**

If the sun is bound to consistency,  
am I to think I am not?  
For the laws of nature do not yield,  
and I am of nature's plot.  
So who am I to believe in change?  
This, I contemplate oft.  
I was not born to have the world,  
but for the world to have me,  
yet on this dotted line, I sign  
in hopes, from fate, to be free...

Rather foolish, I must be,  
but we will see,  
we will see.



L-Train Chicago  
**Steven Zimbrich**

The Warning  
**Robert DeMers**  
**Faculty/Staff Award**

Mary Beth was not taking anything with her; she was leaving the same way she had entered this unforgiving world. She stood naked on the precipice, with her toes curled over the edge. She had fought the desire in the past; now, she could not think of a good reason to continue living. She closed her eyes, and leaned forward — slightly. Her heart was pounding in her ears. The wind buffeted her slender form; her body stiffened. Her body rocked, to and fro. Wind and gravity would help her escape the emptiness that ravaged her soul.

A dark flash jolted her forcing her to regain her balance. It was as though some evil form tried to snatch her from where she stood. Fear flooded her mind. Again it came, this time almost enveloping her head. Its scream forced her mouth and eyes to shoot open in terror. The piercing shriek came at her once more, as the raptor struck her on the head with its beak, knocking her to the ground. Momentarily paralyzed by fear and pain, she lay there, unable to gather her senses, unable to respond. The raptor ripped at the flesh, just below her left eye, as she batted at it with her hands. She ran towards her clothes, screaming, arms flailing to ward off the next assault.

The peregrine falcon screamed from above, and dove at her, striking her on the head and swooping away. The bird looped and dove striking her again, and again. She fell to the ground, covering her head with her garments, then lay there until the falcon's shrill screams had subsided. She continued to lie there, hiding her face. She cried, huge sobs exploded from her petite frame, her body shuddering convulsively. She cried in frustration; once more she was not in control of her destiny. She cried, because that was the summation of her life.

When she could cry no more, she lay there hoping her heart would stop and her torment would end. Hours passed, the sun began to set below the edge of the abyss. Finally, her fear and frustration worn into hopeless anger, she sat up, holding her clothes against her chest. Her lips began to curl and her eyes

began squinting tears. Her hand shot toward the abyss, pointing at the vanished foe, and yelled, "The most important day in my life!" She wiped her face with her hand. Blood — on her face, her clothes, and matted in her hair. "How many times did that damn thing attack me?" she cried. She tried to recall the details of the punishment she had endured. "Seven — seven times, at least! What was wrong with that demonic creature?" She looked toward the abyss. Why did it attack me over and over again, Why? She wondered

Seven, she thought. The seven deadly sins. I didn't know they included a bird. She smiled, remembering eighth grade parochial school, and Sister Gerard. The seven deadly sins and the seven contrary virtues. She counted them on her fingers: humility against pride, kindness against envy, abstinence against gluttony, chastity against lust, patience against anger, liberality against greed, and diligence against sloth. "Well, I've certainly lived them all, haven't I," she said aloud. "At least the sins." Then overcome with feelings of fear, reverence, wonder, and deliverance, she again looked toward the cliff's edge. Maybe . . . she thought. Why would a bird do that? No, it was more than a bird striking out, because of, whatever. Was it . . . my guardian angel, maybe? Why seven? It was a message from . . . God . . . Sister Gerard? No, she hated me. If you don't change your attitude, Mary Beth, you will burn for eternity in hell. If you would, just once, practice one of the seven corporal works of mercy, you may have a chance at seeing the face of God. Otherwise, you will be tormented for eternity by winged demons that will perpetually tear out your organs until the end of time. She was a sweetheart. Corporal works of mercy? "Let's see," she said aloud, "feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter to strangers, clothe the naked, visit the sick . . .?" She looked at the two remaining fingers and shrugged. She started getting dressed. I need a place to stay. Maybe I'll stop by the 7<sup>th</sup> street shelter. Maybe I can help them out for a few days. What the hell, she thought.

The peregrine took a head count of her chicks, several feet below the edge of the cliff, then gathered them under her wings and tucked her head into her chest, for the night.



Natural Bridge State Park  
**Steven Zimbrich**

## Natalie Harrell

I walk home in the middle of the street. *Look left, right, then left again. This will keep you safe.*

I lay on my mattress like it is the middle of the circle  
and stare at the ceiling, imagining the morning sky in its place.  
*I wonder why I love people*  
when I know I would rather fall in love  
with stories of the past, the words between pages, and the ever  
changing world  
than to feel pain again.

Yearning for change,  
but more than that, yearning for the ability to *embrace change*  
*without fear.*

So I decide to cut my bangs instead of continuing to grow them  
because people hate when you change who you are and because I  
forget the reason I cut them in the first place was to become  
unrecognizable to the past.

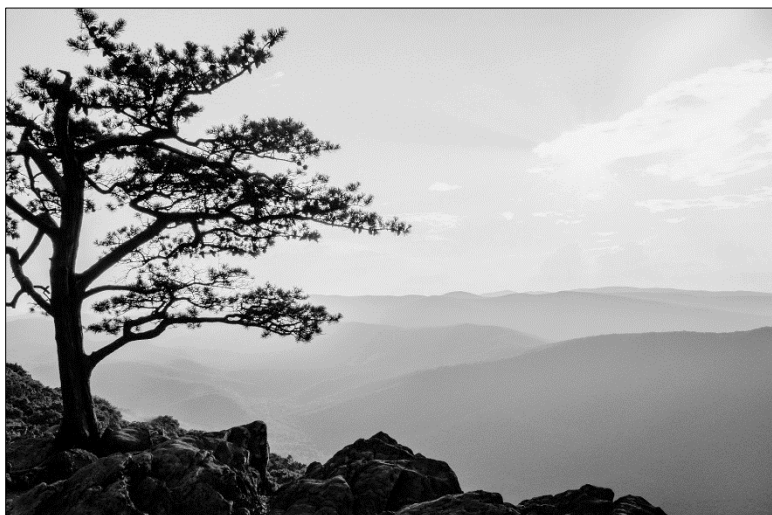
Again, I crawl in my bed, it is warm.

You were warm and all I wanted was to be held by you.

*You are cold and all I want is to be held by who you once were.*  
In my dreams your arms are inviting and I want to crawl inside  
of you and never reveal my hiding place to the rest of the world.  
Still, I wake each morning and look outside at the falling leaves,  
reminding me, *our season is over.*

As I hold the browned flower,  
I still hope to see summer again.





Skyline Drive  
**Kelsie Bennett**

## The Road Less Traveled

**Laura Hegarty**

Summer that year had been sensationally hot for Cape Cod. Fall being my favorite, I was eager for the cooler temperatures and for the spooky festivities the season brought along with it. It had been a Halloween tradition of mine to indulge in haunted hayrides, ghost walks and really anything mildly festive. That Halloween, however, would change everything. On October 30, 2016, I was assaulted at the hand of someone I considered family. These are the events that transpired after. My assaulter and I had been dating for over five years. To a 23-year-old, five years feels like a lifetime. I know it did for me. I will not put energy into explaining the assault. I will say that he was someone who had attended weddings with me, celebrated six wonderful birthdays and had even helped write my first college paper. This person was not only my friend but also, he became my family too. The incident felt almost surreal, like watching someone else's life falling apart. In the same instant I lost the person I was going to spend my life with and the future I had worked so hard to build for us.

Immediately after I was assaulted, I tried to put back together the pieces of my life. I immersed myself with work, drifting through extra shifts at the hospital. I spent more time with family and friends. As is expected with group mentality, our loved ones took sides. The added conflict caused me more stress. I noticed that the more time I spent keeping busy, the more detached I truly became. I began to distrust people, even people whom I have known my entire life. Getting out of bed became more like a chore than a blessing. I carried my pain around with me like a disease.

November 16, 2016 came to me like a beacon. My parents had been trying to sell their house for a staggering two years. That November, someone put an offer in on our home. Even though my parents would never admit it, the sale of the house was a blessing for everyone. After the assault, I had been existing in their home. Having no place to live now, I moved back in with them. This was a very different environment than

the previous years spent living with my assaulter. In two short weeks a younger couple would be moving in. My parents decided their new home would be Wilmington, North Carolina, a place that evoked warm childhood memories. When I learned they were moving to Wilmington, I quit my job and made the decision to start a “new” life in a new state with them.

The first six months in Wilmington were harder than the actual assault. I spent most of my time in my Grandmother’s guest room, secluding myself from the three people who still made the effort to be around the angry person I had become. Six months had passed until I became more acquainted with the new town. After much pressure from my parents, I hesitantly explored downtown Wilmington. My first outing I visited a brewery. I remember how cozy I felt in the historical building. It was the first time in months my shoulders were not tense from stress and my jaw was not held clenched. I knew I had a connection to the old building. That same day I applied for a job at the brewery. Two days later, I had my first day of work.

Before I knew it, a year had passed. I had made friends with common interests. I looked forward to going into work and spending time with the friends who had adopted me. I excelled at my job. Another year passed and just like the seasons, I also changed. I started reading books again, something I had always enjoyed before the incident. I attended concerts, became a regular at downtown spots and invested more time into getting to know my friends. It was comforting to slip into my new identity and a new hope simmered inside of me.

Time has a funny way of passing if you aren’t paying too close attention. One more year had passed. Since then, I had grown out of two jobs. These jobs gave me the tools to succeed at my present career that I love. Old friendships dwindled and stronger ones were cultivated. The broken bonds within my family formed back together with patience, effort and sheer faith. Life had become, once again, something to fight for and the future held promise. I had scrambled up the highest peak of my mountain and I was about to be rewarded with the view.

From a very young age, hiking had always been an intense passion of mine. Hiking was an interest I shared with my

assaulter, as hiking had become a fixture in our relationship. After the assault, I lost my passion to explore. The incident had stolen so much from me. I could not separate my love for exploration without reliving the pain of the incident. Happy memories and the cravings to make more intertwined deep with pain and confusion. After years of not acknowledging that part of myself, I started to want it again. I allowed myself time to heal and from that the passion for hiking grew. This year I have planned multiple camping trips. I have hiked 3,765 steps, three glorious mountains and felt the tickle of eight waterfalls. I may not be the hiker that I once was, but I've welcomed my zest for life back. Like an old friend, the need to travel has crept back into my life. I don't know how I survived this long without it.

I am a survivor. I survived assault from another being and then from my own self. I have grown from the good as well as the bad lessons that life has awarded me. I have chosen to live a happy and healthy life because I was given a second chance to. For a long time, I let a tragic incident define who I was. I refuse to let it control me any longer.

The famous environmental philosopher John Muir once said, "Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt." This advice is a metaphor, for not all paths you are dealt in life are perfect. Some can be littered with potholes, roadwork and speed bumps. Most paths, I have discovered, are covered in dirt. These are the roads we may not set out to take, but they are the ones that are the most rewarding. It may take a little longer to travel them but all roads lead to the same destination. My journey to self-love is far from over, but I wake up every day looking face forward, to the light. No matter which path we take, it is our choice, and ours alone, to enjoy our journey. I think I'll take the road less traveled. I've heard it has a beautiful view.



Cape Fear  
**Briana Wilson**



Rough Journey  
**Gabrielle Ackley**

## Board Games

### Eric Killion

When the man on the table opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was an energy saver light bulb dangling from a greasy length of wire about 30 inches above his exposed abdomen. He couldn't move his arms or legs and had to roll his eyes downward to the point of discomfort to see past his first of several chins. On the table, he began to writhe, attempting to unsuccessfully break free of his bondage. He was naked above the waist, his protruding gut exposed and undulating. He perspired profusely. He could taste the onions from his veal stew in the rivulets of sweat that began to pool and drip down his lips and into his fat, privileged mouth. His panicked eyes impotently scanned the room for a sense of familiarity to relay to his quickly dissolving psyche. Other than the lightbulb, he could see a large set of metal shelves in the northwest corner of his narrow field of vision. On the shelves, rested vague shapes of horror drenched in the colors of mildew, rust, and evil. On the other side of his half-circle of vision he could see only the contours of darkness, merely suggesting the presence of clutter in this dank and unknown place.

This looks like one of the places Carmine Mulhaney used to bring young politicians when they went too far off the script during a speech, he thought to himself, his nerves vibrating with increasing intensity as he tried to recall what he may have done to bring about the wrath of Carmine. Carmine is the Irish-Italian CEO of Sea Salt Realty, LLC. Sea Salt Realty, LLC is the shell corporation that launders all the money Carmine and his army of bureaucrats and uniformed thugs, known to the taxpaying public as cops, collect up and down the Dogwood Coast.

As the sense of familiarity arrived, it provided no comfort the man on the table's confused, terrified mind. Carmine has no reason to bring me here. I'm no politician! I'm a god damned businessman! The only script I follow is the tax code and I've given that fat bastard every penny he thinks he

deserves and then some. His state of advanced fear had given the voice of his thoughts a dialect of primal rage.

Unbeknownst to the man restrained on the table, his raging thoughts pleased the man in the mask standing out of view, behind a panel of two-way glass. The man in the mask was a telepath, and not one of the man-made sorts that had to take pills and intravenous particle transfusions to sustain the ability. He was the real deal; an honest-to-your-God mind reader from birth. Primarily for this reason, he preferred to work alone. The man in the mask was never good at taking orders and only followed enough of his own rules to keep himself alive and out of prison.

It was almost time for the man in the mask to begin his work. His work was always appalling and vicious, but he enjoyed the brutality of his attention to detail. Yes, his work was brutal, but the games he played when his work was finished were enough to make the devil weep with pity for the poor soul strapped to the game board.

The poor soul currently strapped to the game board heard a large-sounding metal door slide open across a concrete floor. His anxious trembling instantly switched to absolute paralysis. The only part of him that moved was his eyes. They had frozen themselves to the dangling light bulb, now blinding the man with incandescent hypnosis. A breeze from the open door had turned the lightbulb into a nerve-racking pendulum, forecasting a nightmarish near future for the fat, rich man with a full calendar of business lunches, campaign fundraisers and rendezvous with underage prostitutes lined up for tomorrow. It was election season, after all.

The man on the table heard the man in the mask's slow, equidistant footsteps approaching from behind his expensive toupee. The scratching of the masked man's feet was in direct syncopation with the pendulum sway of the dangling light bulb, giving full sensory arousal to the man on the table's life-threatening state of pure terror.

The man in the mask did not sync his footsteps with the light bulb intentionally. However, as the man on the table became mentally aware of the phenomenon, so did the man in



the mask. Though unplanned, he took delight in the happy coincidence and chalked it up to the dramatic irony of the cosmos.

The man in the mask's scraping footsteps finally ceased after what seemed like a thousand years to the man on the table. The important businessman had not been counting footsteps, but the man in the mask who could read minds had, for he had made this short trek numerous times, always with patience. 27 steps. His lucky number.

The man on the table felt the presence of a figure he could not see. A few moments of quaking silence had passed since the last scrape of a footstep when the man on the table heard the low, resonant exhalation of the man in the mask behind him. The man on the table's panic-induced paralysis ceased and once again his body shifted to violent trembling.

"W-w-wh..." He couldn't finish the first syllable before a hand too big to be human appeared from invisible shadows and placed itself on his mouth, pinning all noise under its weight.

The man in the mask could hear his thoughts, however, and answered the question the man on the table had not been able to ask out loud. "I'm going to make you a better person and give you a chance at redemption in the next life because that is something you have lost the ability to attain in your current life. If you're waiting for an angel to rescue you, wait no longer, for I am he. It is with great love that I perform my spiritual work upon your flesh today because I cannot provide assistance to those for whom I feel hate. Yes, I hate your flesh, because your flesh propagates the evil lie of the Neo-Man, the "God" man." The man in the mask's voice transformed from the cold, rational tone of a computer to the phlegmy warble of a drunken blues singer, "You are no God! You're nothing but a bureaucratic warlord! You pillage with ballpoint pens and empty gestures!"

"Mrrrrrph!" A familiar noise of carnal exasperation rumbled and seeped through the giant hand on the now-sobbing businessman's mouth. In a singular, superhuman motion, the man in the mask plunged his thumb and index finger into the other man's mouth and back out again. Pressed between his frighteningly long but well-maintained fingernails was a small

piece of the other man's tongue, about a quarter of an inch in diameter. The man on the table began to choke on his own blood.

The loud clanging of a metal latch being released screamed with furious reverb against the dank metal walls of the masked man's nest of torture. Suddenly, the man on the table and the table itself were standing upright and perfectly straight.

"Tell me, do you taste the evil in your blood?" asked the man in the mask. "The sour poison of a life spent taking everything you can from those you deem weak and undeserving, all the while deluding yourself into a grand sense of nobility and purpose? Your scum-flesh must be potent enough to burn your taste buds to oblivion. Or, perhaps you've developed a craving for scum over the years, the way a cannibal is said to become addicted to the taste of human meat. More likely, the taste pleases you, like the shanks of veal from your stew. You are aroused by the consumption of frailty, of exerting your presumed power over the helpless." Beneath his mask, the man's face squirmed with disgust and he felt the urge to spit, but could not, so instead, he grunted, "Scum-flesh!"

The man in the mask wrapped both of his enormous hands around the man on the table's face, pressed his guised visage against it. "You are weakness wrapped in fat and stolen money. You have stepped on the heads of good men, reached your sweaty lips to the suckling teat of the criminal pig of the day. You have lofted your ego to the mantle, extinguished your dignity, forgotten your empathy. Today, you will beg for what you have forgotten."

That night, the garbled and blood-soaked screams of the important man on the table could be heard neither in the heavens nor anywhere on Earth. However, when the news broke of his death, no one mourned, but all along the Dogwood Coast, crocodiles began to shed their tears at the foot of the money tree.

## Complementary Colors

**Samantha Slezak**

On Friday, Oct 18, I went to watch the sunrise. It was a quiet morning. The first chilly one of fall dropping into the lower 40s, and dew covered everything that touched the air. The sky was a dark navy blue that was barely lit up by the moon and the street light had blinded me as I first walked out the door. My eyes soon adjusted to both the cold air sudden change from light to dark as we started to drive down the road. As we made our way through the town, being stopped by only a few red lights, the sky began to change from navy to a royal grey color. As we crossed the Wrightsville Beach Bridge, the water began to run while only becoming a little splashed as it hit the side of the dock. It was a still morning in Wilmington. We made our way down the road and Sarra chose to park in an access that was different from our normal sunrise spot. It was perfect. As I opened the door, I hit it on the palm tree that we were parked way too close to, inching my way out of the seat and squeezing through the little window I had. I grabbed my camera, through every sweater I had, and began to make my way down the path to the water. Sarra was right behind me in her hat, gloves, and throw blanket she snatched off her bed as we walked out the door with squinty eyes only 20 minutes prior. When we made it through the trail, the sky began to change from royal grey to a blue that was being saturated by the sun. It was beautiful. We got close to the water but stayed just far enough away as the water began to slowly creep up towards the shore. There were no waves, just a trickling sea that had the smallest increments of energy surging through it. Sarra laid down the blanket and we popped a squat. Through our time sitting there, we watched the sun slowly begin to rise. It took a while, but in that time I began to realize how the Lord is revealing himself to me through art.

Last semester I took a design class. We learned about many basic rules and principles of art. It seemed silly and it felt like 6th grade the things I was learning, but now as I watch the sunrise, I see that it was the Lord foreshadowing to me his

beauty and intentionality behind little things like colors and the sunrise. We spent a few weeks on the color wheel and the different types of combinations, analogous, monochromatic, neutrals, and complementary. The way certain colors lay next to one another could determine the overall message of a design or piece of art. My favorite to learn about was complementary. These were colors that lay opposite to one another on the color wheel, or directly across from each other. Yellow and purple, red and green, and orange and blue. Colors that are completely opposite can somehow complement each other. They can make each other appear brighter, stand out, mix to create neutral hues, and be blended for shadows.

I wonder what it would be like if we choose to look at other people like complementary colors. Not like they are blue, orange, green and red people. But, they are people that are different from me, the complete opposite from me, like different things than me and sing different songs than me, yet we all complement each other. And, as we are all made in the image of God, by Him, the true artist, we complement Him. Just as there are intentions behind each color on the color wheel, how they lie, what they do when you sit them next to one another, and how they complement, so are there exact intentions created by our Father that lie in every person on this earth, adjacent or opposite of you. Made to complement a bigger purpose, a big God and His redeeming power. When we focus on this idea of complementing each other and not just sitting opposite from others we get to see this beautiful piece of art called the world painted out, right in front of us, just as the Lord intended.

Something that amazes me about complementary colors is the power they have to change the state of each other. Bear with me. If you were to mix two complements evenly, orange and blue, they create a neutral grey, used for shadowing in painting, creating depth. But when colors just sit opposite from one another, they are surface level. There is no shadow creating depth in the relationship, it is also just surface level. They are hellos when you walk through the door and goodbyes as you

exit. They aren't intentional, meaningful or purpose-filled. They are definitely not state changing. For us to change the state of our relationships, we have to mix them. Not 10 percent orange and 90 percent blue, not 70-30, and not even 60-40, it has to be 50 percent of each color. The whole purpose of mixing two colors is to enhance the mood of a piece of art and the same goes for us today. To enhance our moods, whether positive or negative, create meaning and depth, and dig below the surface we have to reach those that complement us. These colors sit opposite one another for a reason. They are the farthest in distances, yet the most impacting. For us to create these relationships we have to reach those that are farthest away.

As the sun began to rise, just before hitting the horizon, just where the water met with the sky, orange began to glow as it announced that the sun was almost ready. The orange complementing the blue in the most amazing way I've ever seen colors used. Probably because God was the artist who painted this picture, and knows the true intention behind every color and how they work best with one another, as He was the creator of them all. He is an intentional God and filled with so much purpose.

Lady Lazuli

**Brenna Gross**

There is a burden in my reflection  
For the water deceives a perfection.  
Within myself I bear no goddess.  
No spirit's golden crown and bodice.  
I am but a faithless muck  
Born to sink with any luck.  
The sand beneath my feet draws me  
To the seventh sea like something holy.  
I pray to sink this heavy thought,  
And too my corpse so set to rot.  
The saline begins to nip at my toes;  
The chilling thrill of drowning grows.  
My body's inner stairs do creak  
As my faithless fate looks more bleak.  
Neck deep tows under, a sunken angel must fly.  
The ocean tides crashing as my last wave goodbye.



Seascape Treasures  
**Eden Mills**

Smoke and Mirrors

**Natalie Harrell**

Before you found me, I sat at the edge of the water, watching the clouds open as I did.

My joy was found between my fingers as I smoked Smooths.

They tasted like candy.

I stopped. I knew it was bad for me, so I stopped. We met around  
that time,

as if the sky above and the water below convinced me I needed  
to be better

for what was coming into my life.

The storm passed and maybe I was naive to believe those would  
be the last clouds.

I remember that night, as I remember most. It was the night you found me

I had left my body, swearing never to return, and somehow you mistook the vacancy as an open room and you needed a place to crash, so you stormed into my world

You learned about how I burnt the bridge that stretched from my feet to his.

You learned about how he turned his back after he saw my tears glisten amongst the flames.

His world was bland and disheartening, making me someone I'm not.

Your world is vivid and glorious, making me into who I am  
meant to be

We ran as fast as our feet could take us



Our souls intertwined as our minds' mazes merged Our  
idiosyncrasies fell into place like puzzle pieces on the same table  
where we fell in love You mock me for flipping pennies to see  
Lincoln Or how I Hail Mary as we pass the cemeteries in town  
(The dead deserve to rest in peace, for if their lives were  
anything like ours, they deserve serenity in the end)

You don't understand but still  
make me feel like Darlene Love Like her I know you are just  
what I have been waiting for and this time it is not my  
imagination when we

kiss

when we kiss

please, can we just kiss?

We know the fights will end because this is right.

We know this is right.

Do you know how right this is?

I know she hurt you, and I promise never to hurt you,  
never the way she did. I do not have it in me

I remember that night, as I remember most. It was the night you  
found me.

You were in her arms; the same arms which hurt you.

And like Hell, I entered disguised as a saint.  
I cast an unbreakable spell and you were charmed.  
Be careful, I whispered across the room.

Be careful, you screamed into my ear.  
You forced your way out of her arms, shed them like snake skin  
Then you grabbed my hand-  
A bond I swear to never break.

I have said my piece but still am without peace.

I must leave for a while  
Because her dresses still hang on the skeletons in your closet.  
The floral fabrics taunt me.  
I do not deserve this. No one deserves this. What did I do to  
deserve this?

Dear, if you wish to find me again, I will be at the edge of the  
water

Zion

**George Brown**

When they find me, they'll think this was premeditated. How could they not? No one sneaks off from his own birthday party his friends hosted for him into the bathroom to swallow enough Percocet and Klonopin to kill himself three times over. When they find me, they'll be angry. They'll think it was a slap in the face. Annie especially. To do this in her house? In her bathroom? To leave with no warning, with no note, with nothing but an empty pill bottle, the label long since ripped off, sitting neatly on the faucet counter with the lid screwed back on. When they find me, they'll be confused. The young well-to-do man, on the fast track to corporate success at his first gig right out of college. Exuberant, passionate, full of "spunk," lying dead on the bathroom floor of his very own workplace sweetheart. A young man who seemed to have everything going for him, a career railroaded straight to the top, a seemingly "well-adjusted" mindset, and an almost cinematic office romance that suggested something like love. When they find me, that's how most of them will remember me.

I turn the shower on to drown out the muffled kick of 808 drums from the speakers and the non-specific shouts and slurs that come after about the third hour of heavy drinking. I strip out of my clothes and the tacky dollar store "birthday boy" hat and sit on the floor of the shower with my legs curled up to my chest. If you're looking to maximize the numbness and detachment from your substance of choice, here's what's always worked for me: run the water hot, sit on the shower floor, close your eyes and curl up fetal. Float in prenatal repose and wait for the drugs to kick in.

Some of them might have had a clue for a while. An inkling of a suspicion tucked in their subconscious that they refused to recognize. The smarter ones might figure that I was probably just too weak to beat this thing. And they'll get that part right. Joey sure will. He's got a cousin who was hooked on

H for five years, and now he's been clean twice as long. If he could stop sticking a needle in his arm, there's no reason I couldn't stop throwing pills down my throat. They'll think I gave up, and in a way I guess that's the truth. It's giving up in the same way a soldier puts a gun to his head rather than being captured, he's already lost, it's just a matter of how he's going to end the game.

Clean Percocet always starts from the neck. The first wave of warmth feels like a tickle, and sometimes makes you writhe, more so with anticipation than pleasure. Clean Percocet makes you itch and sweat, and hot showers don't do any favors. But stepping out and lying on the tile floor does just the trick. Clean Percocet does its job, and so does Klonopin. Fatal depression of the central nervous system; of all the ways drug abuse can do a person in, it's one of the more merciful

Here's something nobody knows about dying, when you're close you start attributing meaning to all sorts of trivial things. Everybody's religious at the end, even if it's in a superstitious sort of way. You start taking notes of all your lasts: your last shower, the last outfit you'll ever wear, shit like that. You look around at your surroundings, trying to extract some sort of meaning or significance out of them, some final lesson to be learned.

The hard ceramic tile, the manic patter of water droplets hitting the shower floor, surely now long devoid of any heat. More 808s from the boombox, softer, fainter now than before. The laughter had subsided, replaced by fatigued groaning and the crunching of cans into overflowing trash bags. The clank of ceramic against the stainless steel sink. Tabby insists on doing the dishes after every house party, there's always a big fuss over it.

I need you to pay attention now, because there's not much time. CNS depression sneaks up on you quick, you think all those poor blue-faced souls in the projects would've rolled over into their beds if they could feel what was happening to

them? So I need you to listen close, however it is you're hearing this, because I'm going to go ahead and tell you how this story ends. Tabby, in her vodka-induced stupor, stumbles over to Layla and complains that she's got no hot water, and that's when Layla hears for the first time all night the faint rumbling of the water running through the pipes in the walls. Almost cinematic, isn't it? If it wasn't so awful. That poor girl had the sight of me slinking off into the bathroom in the back of her head throughout the whole party, but was too kind and timid to come check on me, to draw attention to and maybe embarrass me. At least, that's how I hope it went down. I'm lying on the bathroom tile, slowly losing the ability to breathe remember? I have absolutely no clue what it feels like to be in her head any more than she knows what it's been like to be in mine. And with the night winding down, and everyone's attention wandering to either dark and more sentimental topics or to the front door, Layla slips away to check on me, and Tabby, with a sudden look of realization on her face, runs after her through Layla's bedroom and into her bathroom where Layla's frantically knocking on the hollow wooden door and calling my name with equal parts concern and hopeful inquisitiveness. Then her knocks turn to raps turn to bangs and her voice fills with suggestive cracks and squeals as premonitions flash through her head. Then Tabby's boyfriend, Trevor, rushes in and repeatedly rams his shoulder into the door with a vain, but well intentioned, sense of urgency, and he breaks through the flimsy carpentry and reaches a bloody arm through and turns the brass doorknob and...well, you can't expect me to know what happens after that? But what happens after that, that's not important. It's what happens right before that, right before Trevor steps into Layla's bedroom and drops what would turn out to be the last alcoholic beverage of his life, a brown bottled Miller almost down to the swill, but just enough to leave a stain on Layla's carpet in just the right spot that, no matter where she rearranged her bed, either the battered bathroom door or the light brown beer stain would always be in view.

I'm not selling you this sense of urgency for my sake, I'm dead as a doornail, buddy. I've got nothing but time for endless digressions. No, this is for your sake: living, breathing, blood pumping through your flesh. What do you think of the whole, "life flashing before your eyes" cliché? Because I'll tell you the last thing I ever learned before I died that scared the everloving shit out of me. Your life doesn't flash before your eyes, there's no film reel, no shining light or loving embrace other than the empty one from whatever opiates you might have put in your body before getting to this point. You probably could have guessed that much though. No, there's no highlight reel, but you do get memories. A few of them. Your childhood cat curled up in your crib, tail batting against your face. Being called down to the principal's office where your mother sits with the look of pure fed-upness that only mothers can experience, a snotty-nosed little boy with dirt streaks on his cheek and his clothes, an uncomfortable but still assuring hand of his father on his shoulder, standing behind him with an oddly effeminate posture, a pot belly hanging out of his salmon dress shirt, tucked into his Walmart bought khakis, even though he worked from home it turned out. The guy generally looking like just as much, if not more of a pushover than his son. And you glare at the father and think to yourself, with all the world weary certainty that third graders possess, that this guy's wife had left him because he was gay. Not meeting until later, after death, his wife who'd actually succumbed to throat cancer the summer before, which the oncologist had diagnosed as early stage two, and therefore very much manageable, and she'd of course communicated this to her son, that it was nothing serious, mommy was pretty sick but the doctors were gonna fix her up, although it might take a while and she might look different and things will be a little tough in the meantime. But of course, you know where this story is going: mommy lost some weight, then some hair, then some more weight, then the rest of her hair, and dad had to learn how to feed their chihuahua and walk her during the middle of the workday, and eventually he was able to convince his good-hearted boss to let him work from home temporarily, because he was just sitting at a computer in a cubicle all day anyway. And so then he was

able to walk Sierra and have time to bring McDonald's to his son and eat with him at lunch, since he'd started sitting alone, and the dad would even bring lunch for a couple of his son's friends, until a bunch of the other boys in the class caught wind and started sitting with him, acting best buds, hoping to score a Big Mac that they'd only ever take a couple of bites out of. And for a couple days, Ben Witherspoon was the most popular kid in school, until the fights broke out over who his real friends were, and it became such an issue for the teacher assistants who walked the kids to and from lunch that the principal had to step in and tell the kid and his dad if they wanted to eat together they could do it in the teacher lunch room, and of course the poor boy dropped right back down to being one of the least liked kids in school, and he'd sit in the teacher break room table across from his father, stern and silently staring at his Big Mac with a tiny bite in it, the father in an unconscious display of stress rubbing his hand along his deeply receded hairline that he made a halfhearted effort to comb forward because the alternative, if he shaved it off, is the poor baby-faced fella would look like a thumb.

And they'd sit in silence until the father would ask a meek and inoffensive question and Ben would spew venom with the accuracy and disregard only kids have, and storm off with his super hero book that the dad had bought from the hospital gift shop, but given to his wife to give as a gift, from her, to her son. And Ben Witherspoon would storm off back to his old table in the cafeteria that had been commandeered by some pretty girls from the grade above, but Ben would sit down and bury his head into his book even as the girls would whisper not so quietly, wondering where he'd come from and what he was doing there. And when they'd ask he'd say, "This is my seat" and go back to his book. And the girls would make a show of mocking him, crossing their arms and in a hyperbolic voice going "This is *my* seat!" One of the girls saying, "Hey Ben, wanna be my boyfriend? You can come sit next to me?" Followed by a "Oh wait, that's *your* seat."

So the father and son lunches stopped, and Ben got bounced around cafeteria tables like a ping pong ball, up until the day Ben's dad came to check him out, and Ben was out of school for two weeks, and the TAs let him sit at their table the rest of the year. Yeah, you don't need me to tell you what happened after he met his dad in the lobby and heard they were going to the hospital. I'll spare you anymore details, but here's the sad irony: that entire time, Ben's father had his own polyps inside his stomach that wouldn't be caught until they were stage 4. The point being that Ben's father and I are going to have a hell of a laugh once I die and are outside time about how just juvenile, naive, and completely off the mark my first impression of him was, and more importantly how ridiculous it was that this is what I'm choosing to think about in my last moments.

That's right. Ben Witherspoon. I'm down to my last few hundred seconds and all I'm getting are flashes of Ben fucking Witherspoon. A reject throughout public school, no mom, and then no dad. Ben Witherspoon had a hell of a rough time inside, almost certainly far worse than mine. I have people who love me and care for me, and all the suffering I've ever endured has been self-afflicted. Yeah, it all sounds cliché and nausea-inducing, doesn't it? Another well-to-do privileged son-of-a-bitch who couldn't reconcile with his faults and ends up killing himself, whining about how he doesn't know how to love. Trust me, I hate the scene just as much as you do, but clichés are clichés for a reason, there's something universally human hidden inside them, and apparently I'm a poster-child for this particular cliché.

This is what Mr. Witherspoon and I are going to be laughing about, or have been laughing about if you really want to get down to how time breaks down after you die. The absurdity of spending your last few moments reliving haunted memories from elementary school and regretting snap judgments you made before you were ten, and then agonizing about how you're wasting your last few precious moments, which in turn wastes even more precious moments. It would be comical



if it wasn't so tragic. And all the answers as to why I'm like this are locked up here, in this weak and fading brain of mine. Locked up along with twenty four years of images and I only get one, maybe two more to relive. But here's the hard part, the one part you didn't want to hear: you have to choose too, and not just someday; the clock's already started. We're right here at the end now, they're pounding at the door. You knew how long this was. So what's it gonna be?

If I die, call my mom

**Chance Rochelle**

“If I die, call my mom.”

Under neon lights and excruciating noise.

We sit on a leather brown couch of a rundown house owned by parents who work hard while their children don't appreciate them.

But who can blame them? They're young. They're wild. They're terrified of what's next.

Everything seemed silent as the tab dissolved on my tongue but I knew there was noise around me. Messy and chaotic like a young galaxy. Jumbled together gravity and stars that don't shine as bright as they use to.

Disappointed times and sorrows, I'm holding your hand under this neon light. Telling you to call my mom if I get feverish. If I get the sudden urge to speak my mind and not hide in my shell. If my eyes start to blur and my mouth starts to say things I wouldn't say. If I start to figure out that I might truly be happier without all of this- without you. Call my mom. If this goes well and I don't die. Still, call my mom.



Master Study of Waterhouse's Miranda  
(The Tempest)  
**Sarah Rhue**

The Tribulations of John Beasley  
**Jacob Palumbo**

I find myself walking down a familiar hallway, but I cannot put my finger on the location, or when exactly I had been there last. The lighting seems to be coming from candles, yet I cannot find the source, now I am becoming uneasy. Staring one way or the other I cannot see the end in either direction. With every step the boards of the floor creak, confused and alone I push forward past empty chest of drawers whose owners had long ago left them behind.

The air sour and the wallpaper peeling off the walls entirely in sections. Occasionally I find a bottle hoping the contents might replace my worries, but every bottle is empty. My stress grows just as the length of the hallway seems to grow, two feet for every step that I am taking. I desperately want to leave, but maybe if I could take one left or right I would be content with exploring further, maybe if there had been a door to lead me to another room full of empty chests and stale air but there was none and I continued to float through the least meandering labyrinth a dull mind could shape. I grew more tired of my situation by the moment.

Where are my things? Have I ever even had any possessions? How have I been unlucky enough to find myself in such a predicament? While all these thoughts run through my head, I reach into my pocket and feel a round metal object. I pull it out to realize that it is attached to my waist band by a small chain. A clock, I open the front to see the timepiece is not operating but it has the name John Beasley engraved upon the brass and for a moment a beautiful face passes through my memories, fading away as quickly as she appeared.

As I continue my journey gazing at the watch, I suddenly realize that I know this hallway, yet I know most certainly the condition is not in such disrepair. This hallway is in my home. All of my things have been taken out of their chest and the doors that lead to my bedroom and my study have vanished. My discovery leaves me panicked and I frantically began running back the way I had come from.

I ran and I did not grow tired. I ran and hours seemed to pass. I ran even though running felt hopeless. I ran to try to free myself from this hell, I want my things to be in their chest, I want a door to bring me to my bed. My wife may be there lying in wait for me to return to her, for I have no idea how long I have been gone.

Terrified I stumbled through my prison, until I saw a light. There at what appeared to be the end of the hallway it called to me. I moved forward slowly as if not to make it aware of my location. When I had gotten about fifty meters away I made the discovery that this light was actually a mirror. This was no ordinary mirror, I scarcely saw myself, and past that I saw my living room.

I stare through and see my red couch. There sits my wife Anne and her friend Mary, Anne is crying and Mary is doing her best to comfort her. I call for her but she does not hear my crie., I slam my fist on the glass but I cannot get their attention. Alone here at the end of this imposter that made itself appear to be my home I stand and watch my wife sob. After quite a while of the two of them exchanging no words I hear Anne say “Damn this war, he was only twenty two.” and then she goes right back to crying.

My stomach sank and I could feel a tight grip in my chest. The horror that swept through my body was unmatched to the horrors of which brought me to this place. I remember how I got here. As soon as I have this epiphany, I am ripped through clouds of smoke, away from Anne.

Six months until I’m back in your arms I wrote in what would be my last letter to my beautiful wife. Our unit was stationed on the island of Lemnos awaiting orders. The first push was a failed naval assault led by us and the French. Now, we must storm the beaches. Until this news I had the utmost optimism that I would go home to Yorkshire, but now I could feel something heavy following me around those last days I spent on that Grecian Island. I ate my crackers as I always did, I smoked my cigarettes and had my coffee, yet I knew in the back of my mind that this would be the last few times that I would enjoy these pleasures in peace.

Each night before the invasion I slept very little. On the last night I got up to look at the stars and have a cigarette. In those stars I saw the heroes of antiquity. I began to cry because I knew that I would not be placed in the heavens along with Hercules. I am just a private in the British Army. I will die here in Gallipoli and I will not be remembered.

The day we were set to leave I was terribly nervous. I knew that I would not receive a letter from Anne during this excursion. All I could think of was her as we loaded on to our vessels. The waters were rough as we approached the coast of the Gallipoli peninsula, every wave seemed to be pushing us away, as if to warn us to turn around and go home to Britain. We were really just a bunch of scared boys. Most of us had not even become men yet and I was older than the majority at twenty two.

Just a bunch of boys going to give their lives to fight the Turkish. They will never know a wife or what their sons would have looked like. They will never feel pride, or joy, or sorrow again. Their waning moments will be filled with fear and pain. Our sergeant is yelling orders and preparing us for the landing, I look around at the faces of these boys and they look as if they have already become ghosts, apparitions with rifles held in their trembling hands.

We grow closer to the shore and I know that I must have my wits about me, I don't want to die, I want to go home to Yorkshire and hold my wife, If I could I would have never let her go. Bodies fall as quickly as they exit the vessel and the sand is already stained red by the time my unit makes it to the beach. Flying pieces of lead hit bodies and cause explosions of sand. I run and seek cover behind a makeshift barrier, and for the first time in my life my body shakes uncontrollably. I return fire and have fire returned at me. The day seemed to last ten years.

We had secured the beach head, news came quick that our Australian and New Zealander allies had also secured their beach. Small victories are nothing to celebrate, as we are surrounded by the bodies of young men already dead or dying. It did not take long for the flies to swarm. I light a cigarette and my hands still won't stop shaking. I feel as if they are stuck this way and even if I ever made it home they would shake for the rest of

my life. We pushed inland and began digging trenches and setting up camp. Those young faces covered in blood and sand haunt me as I dig, those boys should be at university and instead they are dead on a beach far from home.

For the first time since we had received our orders, I felt like I might still go home to Anne. I imagined sitting with her by our fireplace reading our books and enjoying each other's company. I felt hopeful and as I day dreamed about my beautiful wife back home in Yorkshire the clouds opened up and for a small moment we all felt like we were back at home in Britain.

What I thought would be a short campaign has dragged out much longer than I had hoped. Every day that we do not secure victory is one more day that I might die here, I know that I cannot stand to eat anymore of this bully beef. I have been in this trench for two weeks and keeping your feet dry is nearly impossible, there have already been tens of men who have succumbed to gangrene just in our unit. What a horrible fate to be stuck in a trench watching as your limbs rot off of your body.

I have lost at least one stone since we've been here and I can now see my ribs through my skin. I feel as if my life is ebbing away and I grow more tired every day. Stuck in these trenches taking tremendous fire and we have gained no ground. We have pushed many times only to have the Turks push right back. The trench reeks of death as we really have no place to put the bodies of our fellow Englishmen. The rats consume their flesh and we are forced to watch this ordeal waiting and wondering when our turn to feed the rodents will be.

I had not had a cigarette in three days when a small unit of French soldiers arrived to give us support. Luckily a young man had extras to pass to our unit. If we had had the power of the Catholic Church we would have made him a saint right then and there. The man's name was also John and just like me he would die tonight, here in this trench far from home. The evening was calm and we all enjoyed the company of the new soldiers and especially their cigarettes. We joked and laughed until the night.

I found myself lying in a little cubby that we had dug out of the side of the trench. There were not very many places to

sleep that were dry, and it had started to rain again so I didn't really mind lying next to the bodies of my fallen friends. Eventually your nose becomes blind to the putrid smell of rotting meat. I take off my boots for some relief and see that my feet are water logged. Gangrene is a real possibility and I don't want my feet amputated nor do I want to die. As I rub my feet, pieces of skin peel off into my hands and I grow more concerned, I decide to leave them alone and hope they may dry out before I wake up.

I drift away into the dream world as thoughts of Anne run through my head. Peaceful moments have been hard to come by, but if you are able to get any sleep it brings the release we all so desperately crave. My bliss is shattered and I am suddenly brought back to life as a rat bites my toe. Apparently he thought I was his dinner. I shooed him away and put my boots back on. In the silence of night a piercing explosion shatters the air. I know that sound, it is the sound of heavy artillery.

The ground shakes as the shell hits the ground maybe less than one hundred meters away, followed by more explosions. The French and English alike begin to scurry like the rats about the trench. There is no use in their efforts as there is nowhere to go. I lay there in my cubby and I prayed.

I asked God to please take me away from here, I did not care where he took me, all I wanted was to be taken out of this trench In Gallipoli, to have dry feet, and to see my Anne again. Shell after shell pounded the ground around me. I knew that my fears were justified and that I would die here certainly. Then for what I think was the first time in my life, God heard my prayer and answered it swiftly. Before I had time to even contemplate what I had wished for, a large shell pierced through the ceiling of my makeshift shelter and God took me out of that trench. She had brought her divine intervention and gave me everything that I had asked for.





Self-Portrait / In My Skin  
**Jacob Clayton**

Undaunted

**Joanna Proctor**

Here stands a girl  
with her sights on the world,  
her dreams to unfurl  
upon it.

Though life can be hard  
and she's got the scars,  
battered and marred  
she flaunts it.

For they taunt and jeer  
but all she can hear  
is her heart's acclamation,  
undaunted.

