

A person wearing a green mask with yellow and purple horizontal stripes, a long white wig, and a black dress with a small orange floral pattern is standing in a kitchen. They are wearing teal rubber gloves and are washing a white plate in a stainless steel sink. The person has two long, light-colored wooden sticks protruding from their head like antlers. The background shows wooden kitchen cabinets and a window with bare tree branches.

phaethon



Hannah Hoke
Figure Drawing

Mask design and front cover photo by Lidiya Norkina.

Back cover photo "A Foggy Morning on the Hill" by Vicki Brown.



Figure Drawing by Shuta Nishimura

About Phaethon

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

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

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

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

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AI Statement

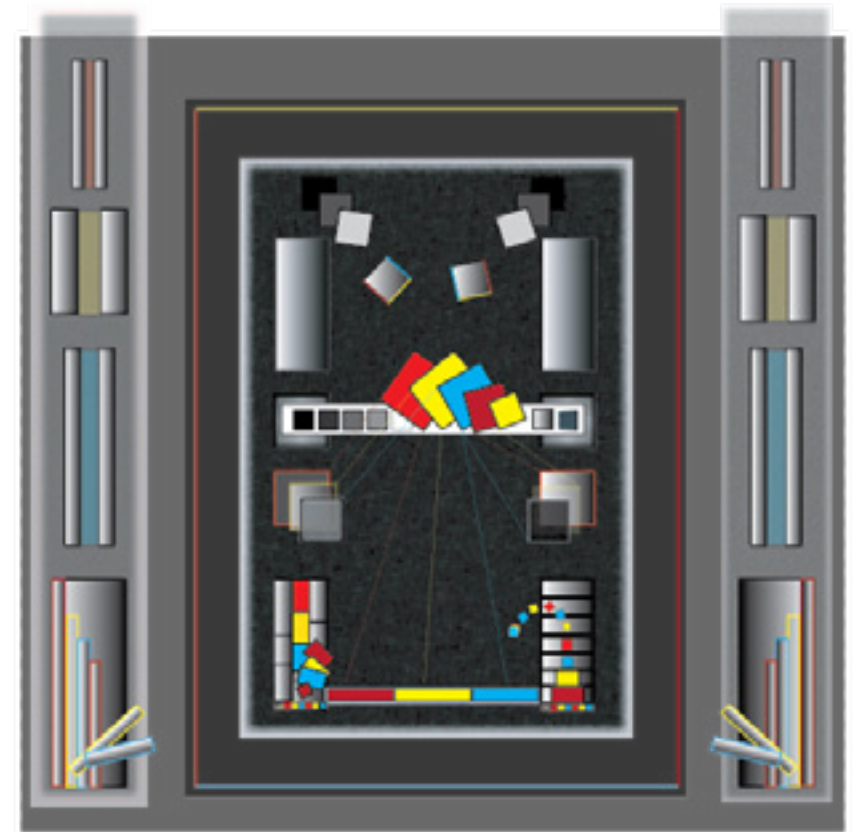
How did Phaethon feel inching closer to the sun? Did he feel his sun burnt arm hair curl away from his body? Did he feel cloud vapor kiss his face? What was he thinking as the horses whinnied, snorted, and ran? Did he feel the reins slip his grip? In free-fall, did he even have time to think? What was his final thought? Did he feel like a god?

Artificial Intelligence is not new. It has been part of our lives for years in sly ways: autocorrect, chatbots, smart home devices, facial recognition, and self-driving cars to name a few. Chat GPT can create fiction, plays, and film scripts based on a prompt. It can even mimic a particular style. DALL-E can create myriad images based on a prompt. There is human influence with the written prompt, but in both cases the AI is creating the final product. With the speed and quality of these recent advances, this use of AI for creative endeavors feels shockingly new.

For us at the Phaethon, this development raises questions. Is this art? If so, which is art – the prompt or the product? Is this a collaboration? If so, can one collaborate with an artificial intelligence? What about working artists? What are the effects on them? What does it mean to create art with AI assistance? AI is not going away anytime soon – so how are we to understand this technology and our relationship with it?

Throughout this issue you will see AI generated images paired with stories. Below the image will be the prompt inspired by the story used to create them. Please know that the editors have their own personal opinions about all of this, and none of us totally agree with each other. That said, we all agreed on the importance of starting a conversation about AI usage in a literary and arts magazine. What better place to test boundaries, relationships, and the very notion of art?

- *The Editors*



New Age De Stijl by John Looby

Adobe Illustrator Vector Art



A Walk Amongst the Trees by Vicki Brown

Untitled

David Thomas

Invisible yet visible
and strangely indivisible.
It supports you and hides its deeds in the dark
being its student is no walk in the park.

It teaches you lessons of duality
and the means to challenge your reality.
Its the support you need on your darkest days
then it shows you light to help teach you its ways.

Infinite in size and scope
Its the source of all hope.
It's the support you need when you feel frail
its objective is not to let you fail.

It is felt but cannot be touched
its path it made for you cannot be rushed.
It seeks you when you are blind.
It is always inventing ways to heal the mind.

It encapsulates constructs such as time and space
It is always smiling on you but you cannot see its face.
It shows you your imperfections
and creates your path to correction

Infinite and invisible
and strangely indivisible
Is it a god or man
Is it a hoax or all part of a plan

In this infinite maze we call reality
can we only find our destination after we accept duality

So take a walk through the cosmos and enjoy its beauty
to find and spread hapiness is your true duty.

Be a Doll

By Natalie Crane



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, A mother and a daughter in their backyard garden. The daughter has a teddy bear in one hand, and is holding her mother's with the other. They are both wearing sundresses and are happy, but there is something ominous lurking from behind the shed in the backyard.

The room is spinning like a tornado, ravaging all my thoughts and senses. I start to look around. Outside the window, the world is black aside from a distant glow coming from our neighbors' windows. Warm light from our Pipi Zhu light fixtures casts a glow on our copper kettle, making it shine like a shield. The pure white granite countertops, specially sourced, glisten under their fresh cleaning. The black and white marble tile reflects my shadow as I look down. Continuing my gaze, I reach the blood. Dark and thick, pooling and running across my freshly mopped kitchen floors. Lying among it, or rather causing all of this mess, is my husband. His body is large, his long legs are sprawled out, every aspect of him is built strong and muscular. One arm is squeezing his opposite shoulder where the blood is gushing. His normally slicked back hair is falling into his face as his dark eyes stab into me.

"For once in your fucking life, Bianca," he starts with a cold calmness, "be a good fucking wife and help me!" he screams. I startle out of my daze. I'm suddenly more aware of the screen door which has been shattered, glass spread all over the floor, and the kettle which is screeching. I dash to the stove to make the noise stop but he yells again, "Bianca!"

I press my elbows onto the counter and my hands to my ears. Under the suction of my palms, I can hear my heartbeat daring me to do it. "So help me Bianca, I'll fucking kill you! Get over here right now!" he screams again, his voice always sending shivers down my spine.

Every day for the last four years have been sheer torture. Not one day have I been able to overcome the one mistake he forces upon me. Not once has living with him felt like less of a hell. Not once have I been able to breathe in his presence, without doing so wrong.

The day we got married was bliss. My father had wanted me to marry Alonzo for years leading to our unification. He told me Alonzo could protect me in a way he could not. That this marriage would keep me safe from what my father couldn't. I was young, only just twenty, and I was infatuated with the tall and broad man who promised me everything I ever wanted. He was four years older than I, and I thought everything about him was so mature and mysterious. I could get lost in his dark eyes for hours, he could convince me of anything, and he could erase

any memory he didn't want me to keep. He was my everything. My stars and moon. He made my worries melt away and made me excited for the future to come. The lavish livings and experiences he could provide were what I thought of as a mere bonus to his already perfect being. I was in love. With him, always more than myself.

The first year wasn't everything I expected, but I had known marriage wouldn't be a fantasy. Our honeymoon was a full European excursion. I finally got to go see the world just as I had always wished, and I loved it, however I was surprised by the amount of work he pursued even during our honeymoon. After a month we came back to New York. I was excited to be the perfect little housewife after he insisted he didn't want me to have a job. I embraced it and was sure I would be the best of them all. I fought hard to make him proud of me. I learned new recipes and kept the home miraculously clean and styled. It was off-putting to me when he wouldn't come home until all hours of the night and would only say he was "taking care of business." My disappointment was seen as immature by him, and we struggled to find our groove, but we did.

Three days after our one-year anniversary we found out I was pregnant, and I had never seen Alonzo so elated. In that time of life, I met a softness and warmth to him that I had been consistently seeking, and we were both so happy. When we found out we would have a girl Alonzo was over-joyed and couldn't wait to spoil his "baby-girl". I couldn't wait for the joy she would bring us both and the purpose she would give me, with the bonus of not feeling so lonely all day. My pregnancy was a dream and after our darling Kit Ailene was born, I felt as if I had died and rose to heaven. Alonzo was the perfect father. Kit quickly became his most prized possession and I felt proud to be the one to give her to him and take care of her. Everything I had dreamt our marriage would be fell into place. Alonzo and I lived in perfect harmony, constantly overjoyed by our precious daughter.

Everything changed when Kit was a little over a year old. It was about ten in the morning; Kit and I had just finished her snack and were going into our backyard to harvest some veggies for that night's dinner. The weather was perfect, both of us in flowy sundresses; neither hot nor cold. The world had a calmness to it. Maybe I should have been weary of the calm-

ness, but instead I reveled in it.

My shovel suddenly snapped, only the handle in my hand. Kit was peacefully playing with her stuffy just beside me. The yard was fully fenced, and the shed was only ten steps from the garden bed. I got up and happily strolled to the shed to find my shovel. Opening the door, I took a step in, as Alonzo insisted it would be best to have a large shed. Another step, and another, as I approached the corner where we kept the shovels. It was dark, yes, but why wouldn't it have been? There were no windows, it was a shed, but my foolishness led to my demise. My third step is where my heaven ended and my hell began, a deeper blackness enveloped around me as I lost all my senses. I was out.

When I woke up my head was pounding as misery slowly set in. As my mind sharpened, I rushed from the shed to find the back gate open and my Kit gone, her stuffy still lying in its former spot. I rushed through the house screaming her name and shredding everything to bits, but she was nowhere to be found. I called Alonzo, instructed never to call the police, and furious would be an understatement.

Kit was gone seven hours before she was back in our arms. Alonzo and his men "took care of it" and our precious girl was with us once again, unharmed. It was the worst day of my life. The mom guilt was the worst pain I had ever experienced. Turns out Alonzo and his stupid men did something to tick someone off. Kit was their leverage to get what they wanted, used like a piece of meat to control a dog. If it weren't for Alonzo's involvement in the damn mafia, our daughter never would have been taken from us. This is not the version he chooses to remember. Instead, it was my fault, and every day since that day, he has reminded me it was my fault. That I am an unfit mother. That I am a horrendous wife. That I will never be good enough. That I make him sick. Every single day since that day four years ago, I have lived in an inescapable hell.

"Bianca! Fucking get over here and help me patch this up right now. Bianca! Bianca!" he screamed, progressively getting louder and deeper with each threat. I stood over him, staring. I was told this man would keep me safe. The day Kit was stolen from us I stopped believing that, but today is only the second time violence has entered our home from an outside source, from his dealings, his 'business'. Alonzo brought the violence home himself. He was the torture, every

single day, and he was a master. No marks, no bruises, no physical damage, only years of being looked at and treated like a criminal, in my own home. Even my dearest Kit, has been poisoned to believe I am lesser than Alonzo. To her, he is her world, her light, her everything. He gives her everything she could ever wish for. He protects her, he loves her, he dotes on her. There is not one bad thing I could say about him as a father, yet he is my hell.

I look down at his desperate, anger filled face. Fury rises from within me.

“You fucking bastard,” I snarled, a smirk spreading across my lips. “You have brought this upon yourself. You and all of your damn ‘business’, that’s what has you lying on your kitchen floor bleeding out. You’ve destroyed your life, and I’m going to watch it melt away. Every drop of blood added to your puddle is wax off a candle. Fuck you, Alonzo.”

He grabbed me tightly by the ankle and I let out a scream as I fell to the ground. “Who do you think you are?” he whispered into my ear, “You’re going to let your husband die? You’re going to let your daughter down again? Be a good little wife and get your fucking supplies, Bianca,” he snapped through gritted teeth. My hands and knees were now covered in his blood, but I didn’t make an effort to move. I just sat there, staring down at him, when Kit ran in.

“Daddy!?” she exclaimed as she took in the horrifying scene before her. “Mommy, what did you do?” she screamed as she observed my blood-soaked self staring over him.

“No no, Kittie darling,” I started before being interrupted.

“Babygirl, all is good and well, mommy just made another little mistake,” Alonzo started, “Why don’t you help mommy and go get her medical supplies from the closet?” Kittie ran off and back into the room in just an instant. She hurriedly shoved the bag into my arms and waited for me to save her dearest daddy. I looked down at Alonzo, blood soaked and smirking up at me, “Be a doll and help me out, would you?”



Ryan Jenkins
Plaster Casts



The Note

Sam Valente



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, a young man lying in bed in a disheveled room. He is metaphorically wasting away from his misery. A dark cloud looms above him as time passes, feeling as if there is no point to anything.

It's two in the afternoon. I just woke up. I was up all night, like most nights. Every night I try not to fall asleep. Hoping to avoid tomorrow. But every night I succumb. I often wonder why I bother. Why I wake up and get out of bed at all. I don't see a point. Yet day after day I wake up. I guess that's what it is to be alive. To wake up day after day with no reason at all to do so.

Since I graduated high school and broke up with my girlfriend, I don't know what to do with my life. I just sit in my apartment and rot away. I need to get out more. But when I do, it doesn't help. It just reminds me of how miserable life is. Everybody and everything in this town is lifeless. Even the sky. It's suffocating. I know no matter how hard I try I'll never escape this place. That's why I don't. There's no point.

I don't know how people do it. How they live. How they wake up every morning and are excited to be alive. I don't understand. Maybe it's just me. Maybe for some reason or another, I'm just not able to be happy. Maybe the only way to be truly happy is to be stupid. That seems to be it. Out of everyone I know it's always the stupid ones who are happy.

I have to change something. There's no point in doing this. Drowning in my misery every day. I'll go on a drive. Better than nothing, I guess. I get in my little beat-down rusty silver SUV I've had since I was seventeen and leave.

It's been over a year since the last time I left my apartment. I was hoping things would've changed around here. They didn't of course. Nothing ever really does. Things can change for a short time of course but, they quickly go to shit again. That's life.

There's a homeless man at the corner of the intersection I'm stopped at. I roll down my window to give him some money. I grab my wallet out of my pocket, look down, and see I only have a few bucks. I change my mind but, it's already too late. My window is down and he's walking over. So, I grab the few bucks and hand it to him. "Thank you," he says. I give him a slight nod. The light turns green, and I drive off. I wonder why he's still alive. From the looks of him, he's been on the streets for a while. Why doesn't he just kill himself. I would've a long time ago if I was him. Maybe that's just me. Maybe I'm the only one who doesn't

care to be alive. I'm going back to my apartment. I've had enough of this place.

It's only five, but I'm already ready to go to bed. Escape life for a while. I lay down, close my eyes, and try not to think about anything.

It's one A.M. I slept for longer than I was expecting. I'm not feeling good. Yesterday made me feel worse. I have no motivation to do anything. It's miserable out there. It's miserable in here. Maybe it's just me. I really wonder if I killed myself if I'll miss anything. Does it matter? I won't know the difference. Maybe I should.

I think I will. I've tried everything I can to make it better and nothing has helped. I don't see any other option. I go to my kitchen and find the sharpest knife I can. I grab it and go into the bathroom. I sit in the shower with the knife in my hand.

I always used to wonder what pushed people to kill themselves. I know now. It's repetition. I guess that's why millionaires kill themselves too. No matter what it is. Good or bad. Doing the same thing every day will kill you. I see that now. Maybe if I realized this sooner, I could've done something. Well, it's too late now I guess. I don't care anymore. It's hard to wrap my mind around the thought of not being alive for the rest of eternity. It's scary. But, I guess I'm going to die anyway. If not today, it'll be another day. Might as well make it today. I take the knife and run it deep into both of my wrists.

I've always heard from people who failed suicide that they regretted it instantly. I don't. I feel an immense sense of relief and warmth. I made the right decision. I wish I had done it sooner. It would've saved me a lot of suffering. My vision fading. This is good. I did the right thing.



Ilmir Kireev
Composite Image

Locker Door

Landon Smith



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In realistic Scandinavian folk art style, a student is graduating from high school. He is thanking the high school janitor, with tears in his eyes, who helped him through the years.

When I was in my senior year of high school, I had been assigned a faulty locker. It was one of those knobs you had to turn in three different rotations to unlock it, and it only worked half of the time. The latch to open the door was only attached to one of the pegs used to let up on the frame, and it always had to be jiggled in order to pop free.

I know all of its defects now, but that was only thanks to the head janitor of our school, Patrick. Big Pat was a busy man, and I was a stressed high school student. While he was trying to keep the building from crumbling, I was swamped in tight schedules and mountains of homework. I suppose looking back on it, we made a pretty good duo.

Pat was the one who forced my locker open on many occasions, too many to not be an embarrassing amount, so that number stays a secret. But out of the one hundred and thirty-eight days I was in school, he opened my locker for me more than double that number.

I should ultimately be very thankful. I struggled to make even the most surface level friendships at seventeen.

One morning was particularly bad as I recall.

“Open, you dumb cunt!” I kicked the base of the door with force that chipped the red paint from it in a single knife-like streak.

“Oh boy, my favorite part of the day,” laughed the big man as he approached, triangle ruler in hand. “What seems to be the problem this time?”

“I jiggled the lock. Up, right, then left and right. It won’t fucking open.”

“Alright, step aside. Let me work my magic.” He slotted the ruler between the frame and the door like a coin to a vending machine.

“I gotta get to class, I’m super late already and I don’t want to suffer Mrs. Murch’s wrath again.”

“Hold your hat on, I got it. Did you get a pass from your other class?” He buckled the ruler upwards, abruptly.

“I...didn’t, like...I thought I had the time.” That made him chuckle

lightly.

“You always think you have the time, little buddy.”

“I don’t even know what my grade is in chemistry anymore. Prob’ly like a six. God.”

“Well in a second you can go make it a seven.” He jerked the ruler up and out of the slot, popping the locker open. I spilled my armload of books into the bottom and snatched the faded pink one from the top shelf.

“Thanks Pat, you’re the best!” I shouted over my shoulder as I raced down the hall towards chemistry. As I was running, I heard his voice below “VAMOS!” after me. I shook my head, but a subtle smile tugged the corners of my mouth.

I passed chemistry. Barely. And eventually, with my diploma in hand and sitting amid a sea of strangers to me, I tossed my cap into the air. For a moment, I bathed in the magical feeling of freedom.

But the cap fell. And for some reason, my heart sunk with it. I was about to head off to college after a brief respite. Though sciences elude me still to this day, I was a promising writer. My opportunities were vast, and I’d dreamt of a future where I could teach the skill I loved.

...Alone. So alone. I would be alone through all of that, with no Big Pat to open my doors for me.

That feeling of muted dread in my stomach accompanied me through the congratulatory handshakes and family selfies taken that would immortalize that moment.

And as I passed by the crowds of smiles and photos to the red exit sign ahead, I stopped. I turned a corner through an open doorway and through myself into the open arms of Patrick.

I admit I wept openly enough to prick the poor man’s heart.

The embrace lasted long, and between my sobs, I said to him my final words I will ever get to.

“Thank you. Thank you for fixing my problems, thank you for being my

friend.”

And he replied in kind, in a low soothing voice.

“You’re all grown up now. Go and get ‘em.”

I now type the final lines of this at my desk in my third year of college. The late Patrick Dugan’s last words to me were never wasted, thankfully. I had feared that my time in college would be much the same as high school, putting about without a soul to care for me.

I consulted the Registrar’s Office in an attempt to fix my bungled schedule, trying to remove a class I wasn’t in sapping away my money. Just another problem, another hiccup, and on my first semester. But I opened the support woman’s door only to barge in on another student trying emphatically to explain how “Ethics I” had nothing to do with his psychology major. I excused myself and waited in the main office until he came out in a flustered shade of apple-red, glancing over at me sitting in the corner before he gruffly exited the room.

After having what I can only assume was a fairly similar experience with the woman, I left heatedly only to bump into the same student. He berated the system, pouring out his heart’s frustrations to me, a stranger who listened. And after he was done, I agreed. He stopped his rant, and he looked cooled down from his anger.

We started talking after that event, a couple times a week, a few times everyday. Admittedly, it struck a lot later than it should have; I had a friend.

And again, here I am. Motivated to write, inspired to tell this story. All from some simple imperfections.

I did it, Pat. I went and got ‘em.

Intro To Ceramics



Gabriel Kilbourn



Hannah Whaley



Maddison Winters



Sarah Wood



Hannah Whaley



Hannah Whaley



Delaney Beardsley



Caroline Furner



Glowing Stones by Nataly Hernandez

Like Father Like Son

Melton Chisom

My mother told me that no weapons
Formed against me shall prosper
Prosper

My daddy told me that I wouldn't be
Shit so why even bother
Bother

Heavenly Father
Forgive me for my sins
I'm just like my father
Maybe even worse than him
So when even bother
Fuck it
I just go with the grain
One in the same
Deal with the pain of trying to find
Myself through selfish gain
I need some shelter from the rain
I'm soak-n-wet
Look at my sons and wonder how
The fuck could I neglect
My mother loved him till death
She wouldn't leave him
Through all the beatings and cheating
How could I be him
Call on Jesus

Lord help me find my way
Before I make it to them Pearly gates
Like Father like son
My sons deserve the best of me
My Father done won
His demons keep on testing me
Father

My mother told me that no weapon
Formed against me shall prosper
Prosper

My daddy told me that I wouldn't be
Shit so why even bother
Bother

Heavenly Father
Here I am here I stand
My second coming like Christ
Am I the son of man
I need your guidance somehow
Seems like I lost my way
I need you here in my life
I need your love today
What must I do
What must I sacrifice
What must I give
What does it take to live
A righteous life
What is the cost

If it's my life
Feel like I paid the price
Isaiah (my son) told me
Get in tune with my soul
So lord I pray tonight

My mother told me that no weapon
Formed against me shall prosper
Prosper

My daddy told me that I wouldn't be
Shit so why even bother
Bother

Heavenly Father

Pier 57

Ajiana Martinez



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, A boardwalk with calm waves in the ocean and a beautiful sunset. Two people on the boardwalk are on their first date.

My hands clammy, my mind racing. At that point I couldn't tell if it was the heat or my nerves that was making me sweat so much. As I rode down the elevator, I gave myself a small pep talk. Why was I shaking? I've known him for so long there was no reason to be frightened by the thought of seeing him. As I step out of the elevator, I shake the nerves out and take one last deep breath, then step outside. Before I even think about approaching him, I take a second to take him in. The army green he wears looks amazing against the darkness of his skin. "Why was his shirt so tight?" was one of the first things I said to myself. When I took a second to look, it was just because his arms were raised.

I couldn't help but laugh as I started to walk towards him, watching him down his water due to the dying heat. I couldn't think of anything to say, I could hear my heart pounding louder than my footsteps on the ground. It was as if I was barely touching the sidewalk, like I was trying to tiptoe my way towards him. So instead of speaking I decided to tap his shoulder. It was funny seeing as that was my first interaction with him... and he jumped. Did I intentionally try to scare him? No. But was it funny to see? Yes. The first thing that he did was hug me. Now I don't like hugs but his? I could hold him forever. And I could feel that he was thinking the same. The warmth from being buried in his chest, and the smell of amber, and mahogany reminds me of playing in the trees as a child, it only gave me one feeling, happiness.

The train ride to our destination was... something else. At least something I haven't experienced in a long time. a woman, drugged up, just going in and out of consciousness. Every time she would lean over too far, she would make the most blood-curdling scream, it was like she was dying while she was awake. When we got to the next stop, he grabbed my hand and said let's go. I didn't know where we were going, but I knew for a fact that this wasn't our stop. He had made us move train cars. He and I quote "didn't want me to be uncomfortable." How sweet of him I guess but there are crackheads and drug addicts everywhere, I'm used to seeing shit like that. This car was fuller than the first so instead of sitting with me, he let me sit down and he stood over me. Sounds weird I know but if you've ever been on a subway or public bus you would understand what I mean. Sitting there all I could do was look up at him and smile. His eyes were closed, and his head was bobbing to

the music blasting from his AirPods. I guess he could feel my wandering eyes, cause the moment I returned to looking back at his face, he was looking right back at me with the sincerest smile ever. Looking up at him I got a feeling of safety. I trusted him more than words can say.

When we reached our destination, I was in awe. I had been here before but not this part. When you think of this place you think of the big skyscrapers and the loud beeps and honks of the vehicles almost getting into accidents. But the scenery? So beautiful. The calmness of the waves and the silent sounds of the leaves blowing in the air. The smell of gasoline coming from food trucks mixed with the smell of seafood coming from the small restaurant in the corner. As the sun beams down on my face, on one of the hottest days of the summer I couldn't be happier to be baked alive in 90-degree weather. The breeze felt amazing against my hot skin, and I had a smile on my face shining brighter than the sun. So did he. As we relaxed in each other's presence, we let the peace consume us. Even though we had never been physically with each other, we were comfortable like we did this every day.

This was the first date I had ever been on. We didn't do much, but it was enough. We sat on a beautiful pier, talked and got to know one another just like the first time we met, except it was in person. I feel as though meeting online first helped us be more comfortable with one another in real life. He was such a gentleman, something I had never experienced before. He held every door, walked on the outside of the sidewalk much to my dismay, and paid for everything we ate. I remember looking up from my phone for a second while we were walking, and he had his hand reaching out behind him, waiting for mine. In that moment I felt a wave of emotions, none were of those negative.

At our age, this is where we tend to find love, friendships, heartaches and pain. All I can say is that during these 7 hours I spent with this man he showed me a part of him I hadn't know through the phone. Through playful smiles and the irritable heat, we shared an amazing moment full of laughter, love and joy. Not to mention being high in the sky, looking down upon the waves and into the distance, the view looked just as good as he did.



Swept Away by Jack Barkett

Prisoners of the Silver Road

J. Hotaling



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, A character named Crotek walks along a surreal silver road that spans sea of green. Mythological threats lurk in the periphery.

My name is Crotek, I live on the silver road. It may be small to the giant gods, but in my world it goes on for an eternity we call the 'never-never,' because it never ends. I'm foraging for my family of 100, and trying to get home without perishing. As I pass by some poor sods exoshell that's had the life sucked out of it, I decide to scurry.

Sometimes I wonder if our futile existence is in vain. Legend of our purpose has never been inscribed on an ancient tomb of understanding. Feeling like we risk it all just to dredge the silver road, try not to die from our mortal enemies 'the speeders,' or fall into the 'great beyond' of the endless 'sea of green'. Continuing on I'm aware, this is not a good stretch of road.

Out here working and traveling can cost you your life. For instance; you could fall over the ledge and perish in the 'sea of green.' The beyond goes as far as you can see. All our ancestors that have traveled over the edge have never come back from the 'green.' It sways with invisible forces that could even sweep you right off the road into the sea, the tears of the giant gods could wash you into the 'green,' or worst of all there are the 'speeders.' They snatch you up in the flash of your eyes, suck out your life force, and leave your exoskeleton for dead. They hunt us and our young without remorse. I have lost many family members, including unborn young, to them. If you travel too close to their domain, which is constantly changing, you may never be seen again! 'Speeders' pounce on you, string you up and complete their blood sacrifices to their giant gods!

It's so perplexing to think, 'are our gods the same gods?' We all originate here on the same silver road, and have similar myths of creation. One day that may be revealed, but for now we're just terrorized by the 'speeders.' I wonder if we wanted to be the apex predators, would the giant gods permit it? I hate thinking we are food, and our lives are in vain. Maybe, we fight back and war could change things so we could eat them! One day we will rise up and take back what is ours from the 'speeder' infestation and catching nets.

'Speeders' protect all of their caves with catching nets that are impossible to escape. There just has to be something beyond the 'sea of green' or the end of the silver road. Exploration of the never-never is a must, and to go down below where not many dare to venture into the 'green.' Everyone

knows you never come back.

I have been working on a way to use the speeder catching net material and climb down to the 'sea of green.' Once it's complete, I will only need a floater for exploration. For now I'll just keep gathering sustenance and bring it back to the community. Pushing on with stealth, I pass a 'speeder' region.

Quietly gathering the last bit of speeder catching net for my 'descension coil.' This will let me climb down to the sea below. Just when I have enough to hypothetically reach the bottom, I feel the vibrations, I have gone too far! Reducing my scurry to a crawl, knowing it's futile because less eyes and 2 less legs will surely be my demise. As my vision widens, I realize I'm in the worst area of the 'speeder' domain. They must have moved again since my journeys beginning. Fear sets in as I hear the clicking of teeth and the scraping of their built in spears. Death is all I perceive through my receptors. Desperately I secure my 'descension coil' to the road. It's now or never, knowing the gods are deciding who wins, flight or food.

Suddenly, across the road, a 'speeder' is rampaging towards me with unimaginable quickness. With spears up, it intends to kill me. I'm no match with only 6 legs. I've no time to think, it's blind faith in the giant gods and my coil! I scurry for the ledge as the spears attack and graze my exoskeleton. With saliva spraying me with anticipation of it's prize, my only option vs. death is obvious. So I Jump!

Upon my leap of faith, I imagine this could be a worse fate than a quick 'speeder' death. As I sail down for an eternity towards, the sea, all my thoughts of family and my life pass in a fleeting moment. Then Splash, I hit the sea!

After flirting with the god of death, I'm not dying in a sea, but I'm in what appears to be a dense growth of green vertical structures. Slightly dazed, looking up from my leap of death, there stands another just like me!

I get ready to scurry and he tells me not to be afraid, and if I want to survive the 'forest of green', I'd better follow. There are worse things than

'speeders' in the 'great beyond!' Welcome to the rebellion cousin!

The brave little bug on the aluminum window sill, what a small world you live in. As I sit in this prison chapel I wonder, in my jungle of razor wire and steel, what does my god have in store for me. A spider just chased you off the sill. I think you may have lucked out and jumped into the grass, but then what adventure awaits you in your prison beyond the ledge? Well I assume life would be in vain if our gods didn't have a plan for each of us.

Dallas's Day Out

Ashley Linen



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, Two forty-year-old men and an older lady drinking coffee and eating fresh blueberry muffins in a kitchen with yellow walls and oak furniture. One of the men is solemn.

As I looked out of our bedroom window, I remembered all the memories from the past 12 years. Navigating a world, I'm afraid to step foot in. "Agoraphobia" my wife Sasha laughed when she heard the doctor diagnose me, how I wish I could hear that laugh once more. It's been two days since she passed away, and one since I tried to step into the outside world. I had to mail off my next batch of greeting cards to my distributor and was left standing on the first step for three hours before the next-door neighbor came to assist. I'm a grown man. I should have been able to support my wife, but it was her all these years being my backbone. "Dallas just close your eyes and take one extra step a day" she'd say. Well, there's 2476 steps to the funeral home and not enough days to try. I love my wife. I miss her dearly, but I just don't know if I love her more than I fear the outside.

I make my way downstairs to the kitchen to make some breakfast and I am interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Dallas! It's Michael! Hannah made some muffins this morning and we were wondering if you'd like some!" He screams through the door.

Michael and his daughter Hannah moved in next door a few years back. They were always kind neighbors, offering to go to the store for me when Sasha had to go out of town to visit family. Michael's the one who found me yesterday, frozen on that damn first step. Normally I'm no friend to visitors but normally my wife's not dead either. Opening the door, I see he's already started to retreat back to his home, probably assuming I don't want to be bothered.

"I could use a muffin...and someone to enjoy it with," I say. He turns around and rushes to me quickly.

"I'm coming Dallas, wait right there," he says, as if I was going to meet him halfway, I joke to myself and lead him inside.

We settle into the dining room and the aroma of blueberries fill the room. We stare at each other, neither knowing how to break the silence. I know why he's here. I look around at the yellow walls that Sasha thought were so beautiful. Before we got married, she used to always talk about how she dreamed about having a kitchen and matching dining room with

yellow walls and oak furniture. Thinking now I always hated the color yellow.

“How are you doing today?” He interrupts my thoughts.

“Well, the day’s just begun. So not too bad,” I reply.

“Listen, Hannah and I were talking, and we’d like to help you anyway we could. For as long as you need.” There it goes. I knew these had to be sympathy muffins. He continues, “Look Dallas I know this is a hard time and even harder with what you have to go through.”

“Michael, I appreciate the offer, but this is something I must do on my own. I haven’t stepped foot outside in 12 years. And, losing her feels like losing the world all over again.”

“Dall-” He’s interrupted this time by a knock on the door.

“Hold that thought,” I say, as I go to see who it could be this time.

“Hey Dall, it’s Marie.” She smiles as I open the door. Marie is a stern old woman. She’s lived here for as long as the neighborhood has been here. Sasha always said Marie could tell the sun when to shine and it would listen.

“Hey Marie, to what do I owe the pleasure?” Barging in before giving an answer. She looks around before answering. This is the most outsiders I’ve had here in decades.

“I brought over some coffee for us to have and talk.” She really means to talk.

“Marie, I have a coffee machine, and Michael’s over having breakfast,” I say trying to get her to leave.

“Nonsense, I have coffee freshly made imported from Italy. I’m sure Michael won’t mind me joining you both.” She makes her way to the dining room. Unlike Michael, Marie has been here before. When we used to have people over, before the accidents, before agoraphobia, before Sasha. Although I’m surprised a woman of her age would remember where it’s at.

“Marie,” Michael says before he stands up and attempts to engulf her in

a hug. She extends her hand out to him for a shake instead and they both sit down. Typical Marie. I pour out the coffee imported from Italy and give her a muffin imported from next door.

“So, Dall what do you plan on doing now?” She wasted no time cutting to the chase.

“Well, I recently signed a contract with Markle distribution company, so I plan on mailing out my cards and letting my days go by,” I replied.

“And what about Sasha?” She asked.

“What about Sasha?” I replied.

“How are you going to go to her funeral?” The room goes silent. Michael looks uncomfortable in his seat.

“Marie, that’s-” Michael tries to speak up.

“Nonsense Michael. It’s a valid question.” She interrupts him. “Dall you’ve trapped yourself in your home for 12 years. Your wife’s funeral is next week.” I feel my temperature start to rise as I’m unable to control myself for much longer.

“You don’t think I know my wife’s funeral is next week Marie? You don’t think I know I’ve been trapped in my OWN DAMN HOUSE FOR 12 YEARS!” I shout, but Marie doesn’t back down.

“SO DO SOMETHING DALLAS! YOUR WIFE HAS TO BE ENOUGH! YOU HAVE TO GO OUTSIDE! YOU CAN’T SIT HERE AND KEEP LOSING IT!” Her voice begins to break. The silence that once filled the room returns. All of our plates and cups are empty by now, the air is so tense Michael doesn’t know how to leave, and Marie doesn’t want to. Her answer is more important than my solace.

“It was a regular Tuesday afternoon, and I was driving home from the park.

Sasha and I had our 5-year-old twin boys Houston and Austin, in the backseat buckled up. She had just cleaned up the ice cream that dripped onto her 26-week stomach. My little girl. It was summer, we had the

radio blasting One Love, and the A/C turned all the way up. When we arrived at the hospital, they told us we lost Houston and my little girl. A drunk driver. Isn't that funny. Three pm on a Tuesday and a drunk driver." I stand up and start to clear the table. Michael takes the plates from me and returns me to my seat. He places his hand over mine and I sigh. "We were driving home from the funeral. It had started to pour. One hell of a sendoff to give right. Well, it got so bad I had to pull over. Guess the 16-wheeler behind me got the same idea because it came crashing into the backseat. I swear he never slowed down once. My family of five went back to being a family of two after that. Two weeks later I had to quit my job because every time I would get in a car, I would break out into panic attacks. Then eventually I couldn't even leave my home. So, I am doing something Marie. I'm trying my hardest not to set my house on fire with myself inside. My kids are dead, my wife just passed. I'm trying to take it one step at a time. Physically and mentally." A look runs across her face I've never seen before. One that's too stunned and embarrassed to speak. She gathers herself and mutters a goodbye as she leaves hopefully never to come back. Michael helps clean the dishes, then makes some excuse about having a work meeting to attend and I'm left alone again.

I try my hardest to write some greeting cards, but everything sounds so morbid now I don't know what's worse "Thank you for not dying yet" or "Get better soon or die trying." I can't get anything right. I can't write, I can't walk, I can't survive! I throw all the papers on the floor in frustration. The "Sasha Hall loves Dallas Peters" carving is revealed underneath the mess. I have had this desk since high school. My dad had built it for me in the 11th grade. The first time she came over she carved those letters and told me it was set in wood, so it had to be good. We were together for only 3 months at that time. We didn't have an easy marriage; we had the one we both deserved. On Saturdays she would get up at five am, put on jazz, and dance in the backyard until the sun came out to join her. Some days she'd get me to join, most days I just enjoyed watching her from the window. Then the boys came, and I couldn't just watch. I made the breakfast every morning and she made the lunches. We had this parent thing cracked down to a science. Everything was perfect, I think as I doze off.

"Dallas just close your eyes and take one extra step a day." I'm awoken by her voice. My eyes race open as if I'll see her again when they do.

Enough is enough. I make my way to the front door. Past the yellow dining room and the painting of the Eiffel tower. I close my eyes and hear her once again "Dallas just close your eyes and take one extra step a day." Grabbing a hold of the knob I raced out into the street. One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven. I haven't been this far in years. I can feel the sun rays on my face directly for once. I can feel the grass brush against my jeans. A smile spreads across my face and I slowly open my eyes. So, this is what I've been missing.



Into the Next Life by Jack Barkett

Untitled Poem #9

By Frank Tubman

Sometimes there are no paper towels in the men's room.

Downstairs CA building.

Herkimer College.

But I still wave my hands beneath the motion sensor

Hoping it's a mechanical issue

And not one of supply.

Afterwards, I hit the metallic square on the blow dryer

And wait for the hot gust that never comes

Before wiping my hands on my pant legs

And carrying on with my day.



Take Care, Baby by miss heather

Untitled

Anthony Michael Hector

Everyone thinks they are somebody

While in reality they are nobody

Egos ruin lives

Cut and slice like knives

Be stoic and humble

For you will never stumble

Not words from somebody

Just words from nobody

Digital Photography Spring 2023 + Fall 2023



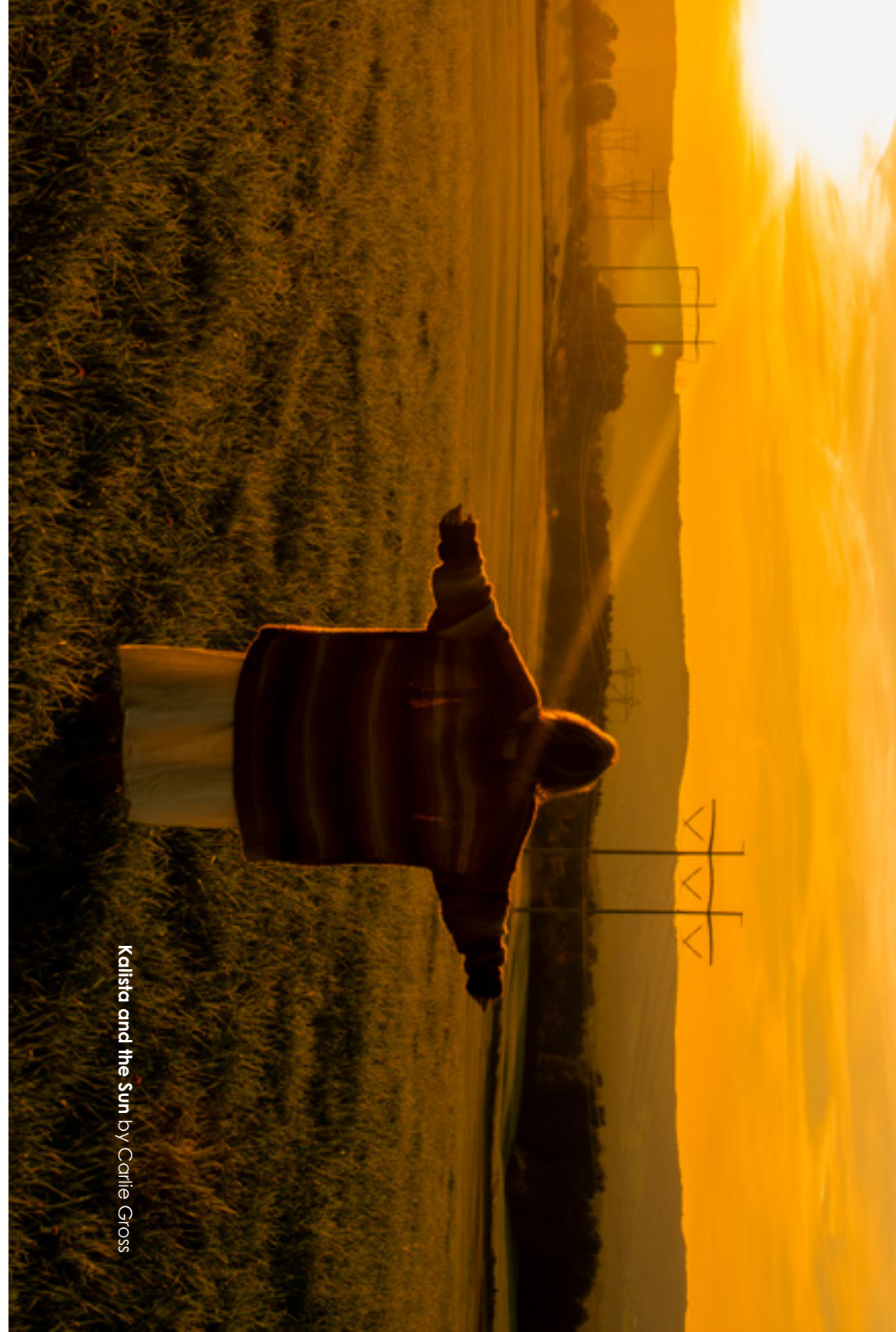
Orange Truck by Lidiya Norkina



In the Breeze- Kalista by Carlie Gross



North Creek by Carlie Gross



Kalista and the sun by Carlie Gross



Through Studio Windows by Bailey Harrer



Pas De Deux by Bailey Harrer



On the Shelf by Bailey Harrer



Dad's Portrait by Grace Kelly
Left Page: Backroads by Grace Kelly



Merry Pear by Christian Andreev



Predator by Christian Andreev



Skater Boy by Christian Andreev



Untitled by Christian Andreev



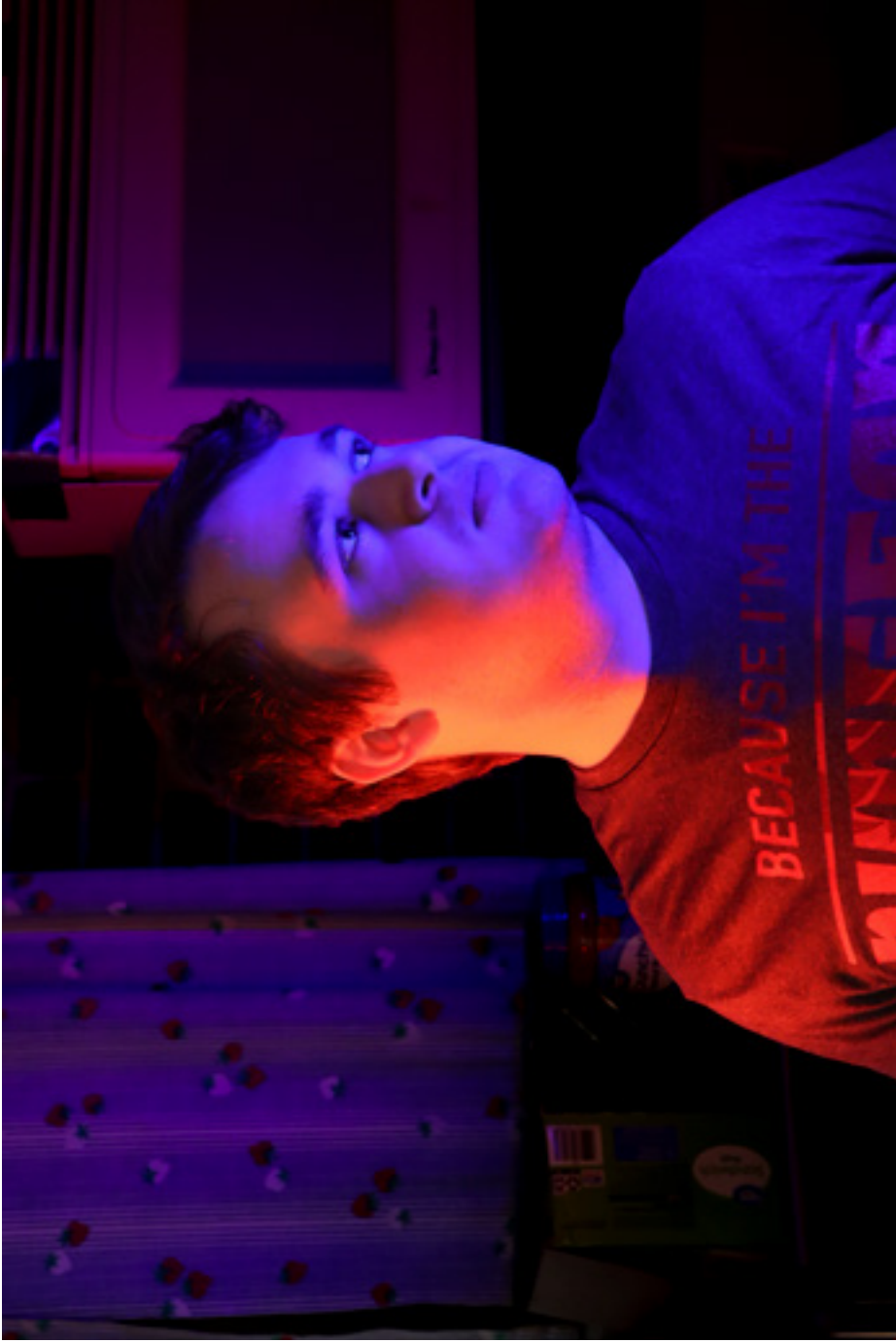
For the Love of Self by Lindsay Crowley



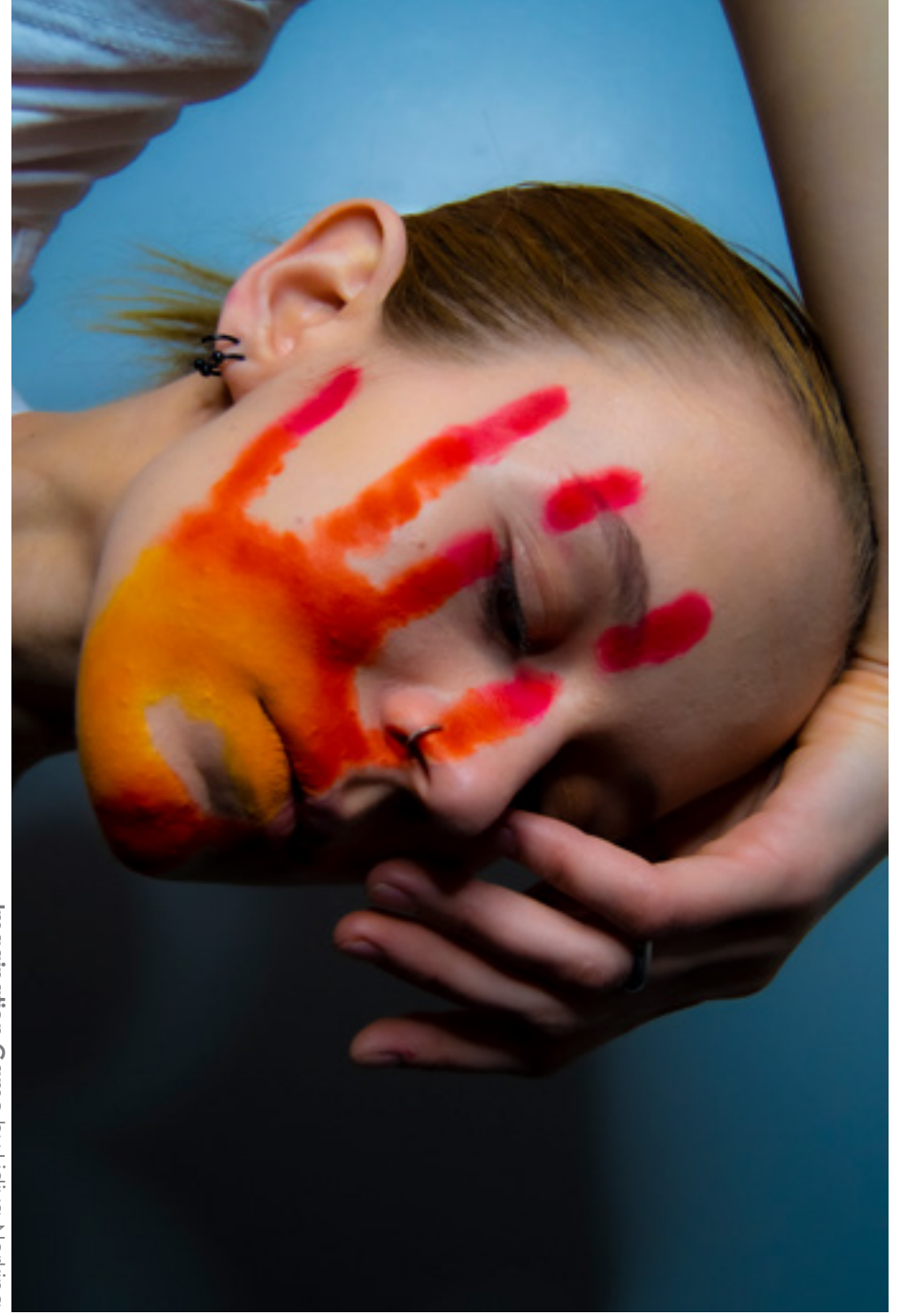
For the Love of Self 2 by Lindsay Crowley



Night Life by Lindsay Crowley



Blue and Red by Sara Warner



Imagination Game by Lidiya Norkina



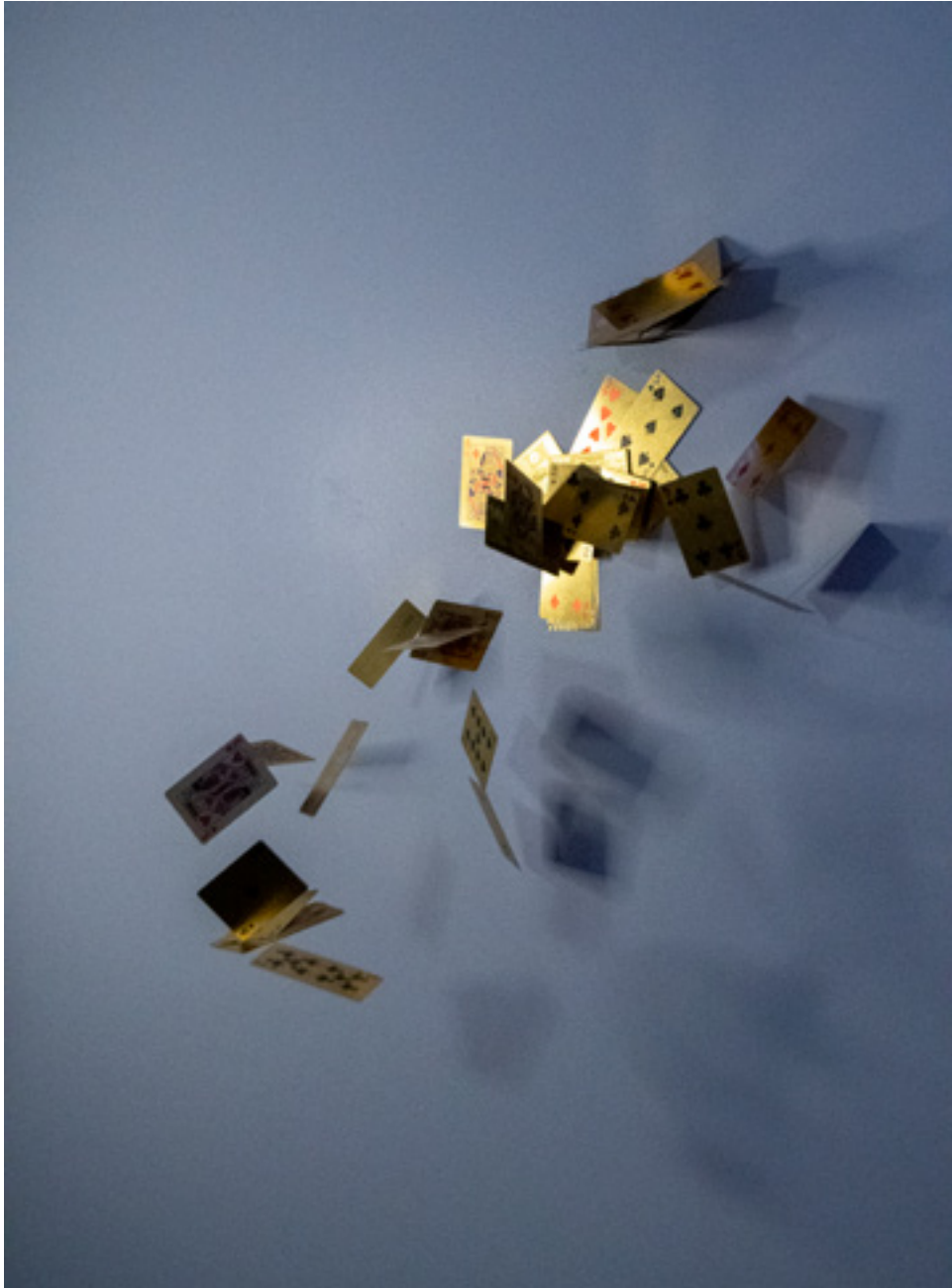
Frozen Elegance by Youwon Uhm



Night of the Living Plastic by Michael DeMars



Night of the Living Plastic 2 by Michael DeMars



Card Flight by Lidiya Norkina



Passing of Time by Sara Warner



The End of a Path by Lidiya Norkina



Horsing Around by Jack Barkett



A Horse with No Name... Haha, just kidding. His name is Armani by Jack Barkett



Sunset Pond by Shuta Nishimura



Late Night Vibes by Mark



Golden Fields by Bailey Harrer



Hills and Hay by Bailey Harrer



In Pursuit by Bailey Harrer



Street Art by Lindsay Crowley



A Monochromatic Ode to Gordon Parks by Youwon Uhm



Uncle Ray and Livers by Grace Kelly



Summer in Virginia by Hannah Carrright



Light Dance by Hannah Carrright



Maddie by Hannah Carrright



Sunset Minibike by Sara Warner



A Lost Window by Rees Trenholm



New Hampshire State House by Sara Warner



Magic Baseball
by Wilman Miranda



National Championship Celebration by Avion Harris



Flag Pole by Riley Hajczewski



Beautiful Night by Riley Hajczewski



Turbine Turbulence by Rees Trenholm



Winter Sunny Day by Lidiya Norkina

Lit Up by Rees Trenholm



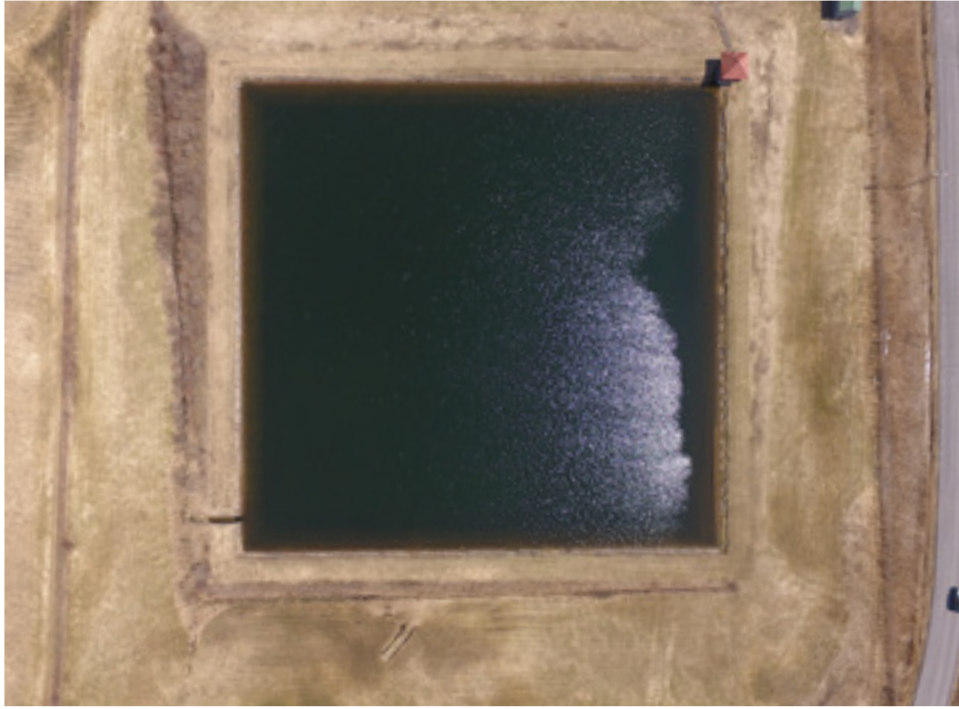
Campus Barn by Carlie Gross



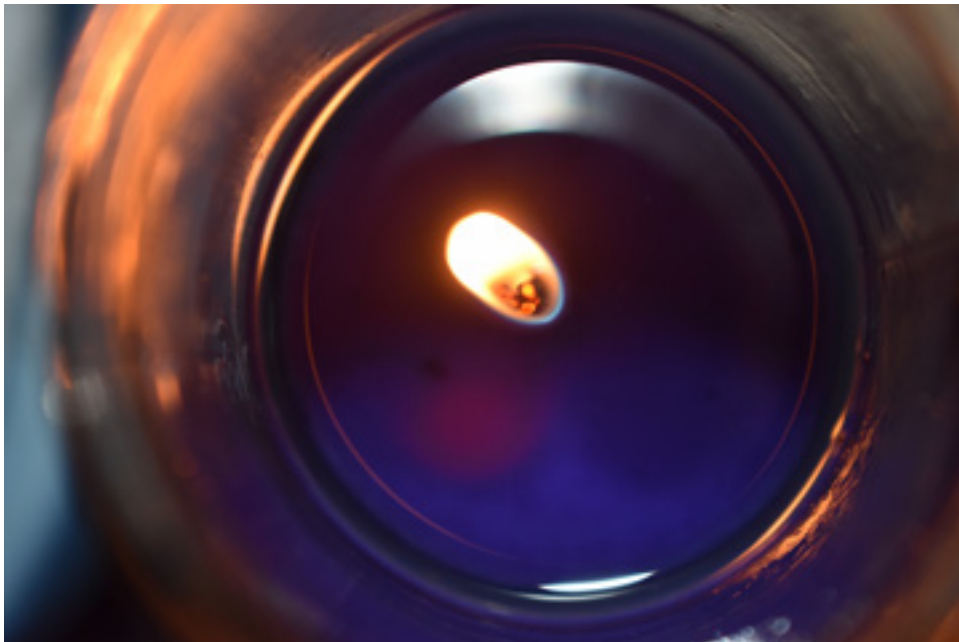
A Barn with Snow by Shuta Nishimura



Fixin' the Ole John Deere by Hannah Cornright



Square by Sara Warner



Avion Harris



Red Room by Lindsay Crowley

Milk Memento

Ethan Hanmer



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, A sketch of missing boy that is drawn on a milk carton on a front porch. The milk company is Wisconsin Twenty Farms, 2% milk, the boy is Angelo Johnson. He has short blonde hair.

The newspaper boy slowly biked down the cold leaf filled street as his bike creaked and squeaked. He panted as the last newspaper was thrown landing pathetically at the end of the Johnson residence soaking up the water underneath. At the same hour, the milkman went door to door setting out the new batches of milk.

“Wisconsin twenty farms, 2%, missing child, 10 years old, short blonde hair, Angelo Johnson, Est 1925.”

Mrs. Johnson never had any pictures of him. They had to resort to putting a police sketch of Angelo onto the bottles. It was roughly drawn, and barely held any resemblance of him.

Hours passed since the milk had come, Mr. Johnson had gone off to work on his boss’s command and had to leave his broken wife behind. Until his time at the factory (or as he describes it “Hell that pays” with a big dad grin) was over she would be completely alone with her thoughts, sounds, and feelings.

Mrs. Johnson didn’t bring the milk in, she left it on the damp wooden porch. Her husband on his way out grabbed one to drink while at the factory. Only five bottles remained on the porch. The whole day she would look out the window to see if the bottles were there and every single time her heart was overflowed with disappointment. She was filled with denial; she was grieving.

During that week he was searched for but was not found. Milk day came around again, and Angelo’s face was again on the milk containers. Mr. Johnson took another bottle and left his wife again. Mrs. Angelo this time took the bottles inside and put them on the kitchen counter and stared at them for a little while. Her face became blush, and her ears were hot.

“ANGELO WHY DID YOU HAVE TO GO OUT SO LATE, YOU KNEW ABOUT THE KIDNAPPINGS I WARNED YOU ABOUT,” she howled out as she whipped one of the milk bottles through the air leaving glass shards and milk flying everywhere. It soaked everything around and left a dent in the living room wall. Mrs. Johnson knelt in the thick moist rug and punched the ground while weeping till she fell asleep from exhaustion. Mr. Johnson came home to see her sleeping body on the rug

covered in milk along with blood on her knuckles. She had cuts from the glass shards on her arms and legs. He lifted her onto the couch and slept next to her, comforting her through the night while trying to hold back tears of his own.

The third week of Angelo being missing came around and snow started falling after the cold fall season. Mrs. Johnson was struggling to take the trash out as the milk man came to do his weekly delivery.

“Hey Mrs. Johnson... do you need some help with that?” The plump faced milk man said.

She grunted, still insistent on doing it herself, but after a few seconds she gave up and looked at him, “Sure, while you’re at it could you maybe see if they could send us milk containers without my son’s face on them.”

“S..Sure I’ll try and talk with them about it, but I mean why wouldn’t you want to see him any longer.”

“I don’t know, I mean...” she says as she stands and stares off into space. Her mouth may be quiet, but her mind is rampant and loud. “What would have happened if he didn’t leave, would he still have gotten abducted? Could I have done something? What would have happened if he didn’t get abducted?”

“Mrs. Johnson?”

“AHH sorry I was just thinking... this is really tough for me, and my husband is always out at work which makes it even harder.”

“Shhhhh just let me take care of the garbage for you.” The milk man brought the large black bag up the driveway and sat it next to today’s paper. He looked down and let out a big puff as he saw the weekly newspaper tightly wrapped in string with the headline “Lead Found on The Disappearance of Young Boy.”

Not wanting to stress Mrs. Johnson any more than she already was, he stuffed the newspaper in his coat to read later and drove off after delivering the milk.

Not getting the newspaper was just delaying the news though because

Mr. Johnson came home from work that evening and sat down on the couch after stripping his uniform off.

“Honey did you hear?”

“No, but I talked with the milk man today and he helped me with the trash.”

“Well, I would have expected you to of read the paper. It’s about Angelo.”

“Oh, Jesus what did you hear?” she says in delight.

“Well, I’m not sure if its good or bad news to be honest with you but they found his pair of shoes not too far outside the property.”

During the next few weeks Mrs. Johnson stayed in her room, the sounds of the outside world just made her sadness grow. She sunk into a depression which consumed her to the point where she wouldn’t even leave her bed. “Oh, my Angelo, where did I go wrong in all of this? I remember just a few months ago when I could touch your face with my hands. Your face is a blur now, why didn’t I give you more attention... maybe that’s where I went wrong in all of this,” she thought before the bedroom door flung opened.

Her husband slugged his way into the room and threw himself down next to her. “Still not feeling all too well huh.”

“I don’t even know what I feel, there’s so much going on in my head to the point where I feel like there’s nothing happening at all. It’s so overwhelming, I don’t want to even get out of bed.”

“Honey, you need to calm down and stop thinking about him for a little while. Hey why don’t we go out for a walk to the park and back to take your mind off him.”

“Sure, that sounds like an alright idea.”

Her first step outside in over a few weeks was met by the face of her son on a milk container. She was forgetting it, or rather she was trying to forget it, but he was just starring right back at her once again like he had before he went missing.

Instead of breaking down in tears, she broke a soft yet still sad smile. "I love you my sweet Angelo," she murmured as she clutched onto her husband's arm and walked off down the sidewalk.



Everything and Nothing All at Once

Bayleigh Bangson



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, A sad college girl she looks so sad is sitting class wearing a hoodie. A very handsome male classmate with piercing brown eyes he is the most handsome man ever he is chiseled looks like a male model with a sharp jawline is sitting next her looking at her super concerned.

I sit down in my bland class with boring walls and an even more boring professor just barely on time, my hair is a mess from my jacket hood, on top of myself already looking like I crawled out of bed and came straight here. I don't even care after what happened last week. My heart aches, at times I feel like I can't breathe, suffocated by the pathetic sound that would be my life after my whole future was torn from me.

"Does someone sit here?"

Who even asks that in the second week of class? I look up to see the most beautiful man I think I have ever seen standing in front of me, his blonde hair falls onto his forehead in a not too messy kind of way. He's tall wearing jeans and a tee shirt that fits so well with steal toed boots, he definitely looks like he doesn't belong in a classroom, more like down the road fixing the pavement or doing some other kind of trade. I told him I didn't know, and he sat next to me. Of course, on this day when I look like this, I would rather be anywhere else right now, but attendance is my grade and the only thing that has completely taken up my every thought has been my future and how I am doing this alone now, so I have dedicated myself to that, to being alone.

I see him every day now that I saw him once, almost every time we have that class, he says at least one thing to me I just reply by nodding my head or replying with a simple "yeah." Even though he is extremely beautiful I'm sticking to what I promised myself, plus I am still in love with someone else. Someone else that absolutely crushed me, left me, and took everything I ever wanted away from me. I have had a lot of free time since getting broken up with, so I fill my time with treating myself by eating whatever I want and not caring if I gain weight. I don't have anyone seeing what is under my clothes besides me anyways, what's the matter if I put on a few pounds? I do a face mask twice a week and just little things that make myself feel better. One upside is I can get all my work done, read my books that I haven't had time to read, anything I want now basically.

All of a sudden, I heard knocking on my door, I shot out of bed and looked out the peep hole, it's him, how does he know what dorm room I'm in.

“I know you’re in there, I heard you walk up to the door.”

Dammit. “What do you need?” I ask.

“Can I come in?”

“No, why would you? I watch forensic files -- you could kill me.”

“Come on are you serious?”

He’s looking at the peep hole like he can see me, and his eyes look so deep, the dark brown that has a million stories to tell. What I really want to do is open this door with the hopes he grabs me wrapping his arms around me and holds me tight. That’s what I need right now, a hug.

“Are you going to let me in or what?”

I can’t believe I’m doing this. I open the door.

“Well, hello there.”

He walks in and sits down on the couch. I don’t understand, why is he here?

“Why are you here?” I ask him

“You don’t want to talk to me in class or even look at me when I try so I thought I would stop by and see why you’re too good for me.”

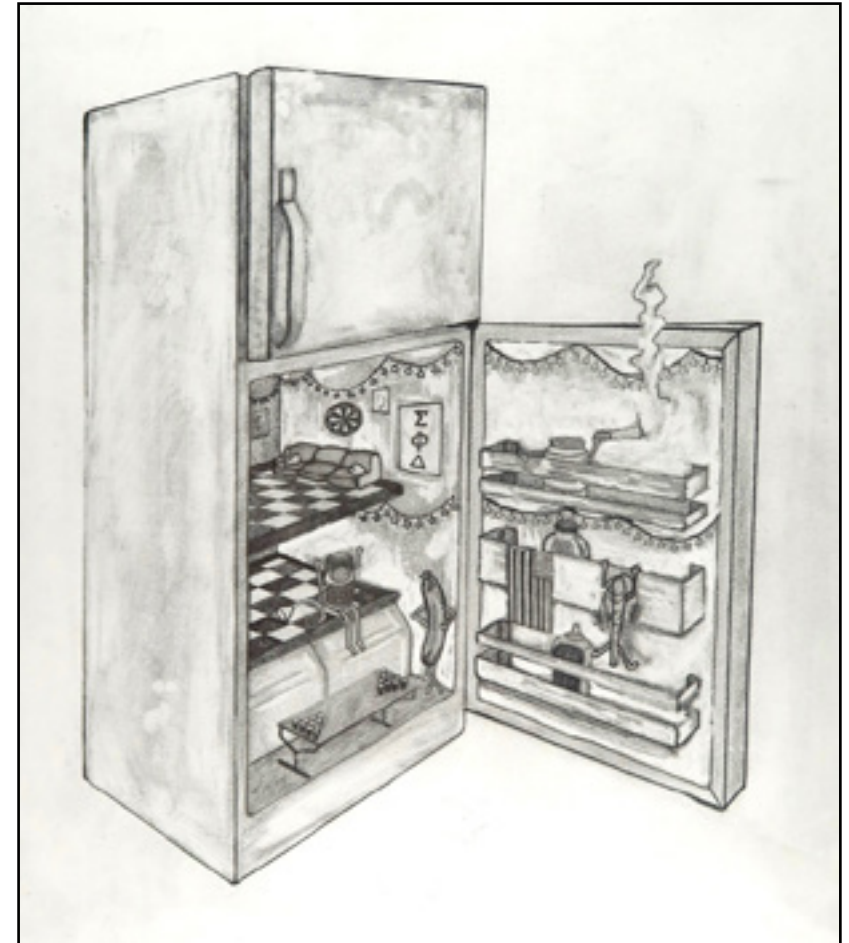
“Too good for you? You think that I think I am too good for you? That’s ridiculous.”

“Then what’s the reason? Why don’t you talk to me?”

I explain that I don’t talk to anyone, and I like to be alone. He asked my why and I explained to him that I am trying to heal myself. We sat and talked for hours. Something about him makes me feel so safe even though it was my first time talking to him.

I never would have imagined that after that night he would continue talking to me. He would come over every day just to talk to me and for the first time hanging out with a guy felt genuine, like he enjoyed spending time with me. Every day I found myself falling deeper for him, he healed

my heart in a way I cannot explain. He healed everything in me by doing almost nothing, all at once.



Madilyn Thomas

Hell in the Somme

Chase Everson



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, An American soldier in the trenches of WWI is wallowing in the mud holding up a dog tag in the rain.

It was raining. Rain, in the trenches meant wet, wet meant mud. Mud, wet, and rain meant Trench Foot, the fungal inflictor of the million dollar wound: lost of limb. Grounds upon which a soldier could get himself sent home and escape any further combat. That was the weather on the day Lance Corporal Jacob Appleton of the 1st East Yorkshire Regiment on the eve of the Battle of the Somme. The food suddenly got slightly better than the usual slop the soldiers were fed, an ominous sign some of the older veterans remarked. For, it usually meant that an attack, “Over the Top,” was in the works, which meant death for many Brits at the hands of machine guns and Mauser rifles, as well as spiked clubs and other improvised weapons when hand-to-hand combat was afoot.

He had risen at sunrise to have the first watch of the day, prior to the eventful day to the Somme. His commanding officer, Captain Joseph McCumber gave them a quick briefing, and told them to get some rest, for the day would be long and hard. That night he went to sleep to the scurrying of rats and other pets, and the relentless pounding of the rain, slowly flooding the duckboards beneath water. His dream that night could be best described as an instance of a black premonition. He was hiding in a shell crater all the buddies who were with him had fallen, his officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were nowhere in sight, the air smelled of death, sweat, rats, wet cloth, and sulfur. When he tried lifting up his boot it was sticking to the mud until he pulled up with all his might. There were rocks in each, and he could feel the water and mud slowly ooze into his boot from the microscopic holes and slight tears on the side. He was deafened from the noise of machine guns, rifles, and artillery. He was shaken uncontrollably amidst the macabre environment.

Then he woke up with a start. A rat had tried climbing up his leg. He took his bayonet out of his belt and stabbed the god damned rodent with it. He was relieved at the eradication of that pest from the face of the Earth. The stench filled his nostrils and little hairs once belonging to the pesky rodent stuck to the sides of his bayonet. Jake looked at his watch, it was 4:30 in the morning, and he knew that with his anxiousness regarding the upcoming action he would never be able to fall asleep again. He let his mind wander to what he left behind, back home. To the family he left, school he left, to the lover he left with the promise to get engaged once he returned home. Why did this bloody war even have to start. Jake

could not find the answer within himself, but was sure the politicians did.

A radical Serbian nationalist assassinated the heir to the Austrian throne. And, from there the powder magazine of Europe blew up right in the face of everyone. Russia, Germany, France, Belgium, Britain, Bulgaria, and many other European nations were drawn right into it. The causes of the war, were too complicated and outside the realm of understanding for your average enlisted soldier. Jacob had only the faintest idea of the entangling alliance systems of Europe.. But, this Lance Corporal in the trenches only knew one thing for certain, he was there, and he was going to survive.

Now, he's thinking of cleaning his bayonet for the little hairs and blood of the rodent. In its dying moments it was squirming, and squealing. He decided not to, the wounds in the bodies of the Germans would fester and get infected due to the toxins within the rat's body, and bloodstream. Awake, he was doing all he could to ease his nerves. He lit a cigarette and started smoking like a chimney. He opened up his metal case of biscuits to chew on and give his mouth something other to do than to swear and curse about the two-faced politicians who drew them into this mess. Finally, he penned a short letter to all who knew him:

To all of whom, I care. Remember my smile, my face, remember my demeanor. Remember my twitch. But most importantly, remember my dear faith in Anglicanism and my love for my family and friends.

Sincerely Yours,

Jacob Appleton, Lance Corporal, 1st Yorkshire

A few of the other guys were stirring, one by one, by one they started waking up. First it was a few privates, then the NCOs, then the Commissioned officers, then the rest of them. Zero hour would come soon and each would want to say what would be regarded as their final prayer as living human being on the Earth. At 7:30 AM the men and boys beside him would going over the top into no man's land. It was raining and the horizon was misty. Gloomy would be the tone of the various memoirs of the soldiers present, if they survived. Everything just felt so surreal. Like something out of a war doomsday novel. Their final moments of Zero

hour looked like this:

"At attention, at attention," his officer said, his prim and fancy uniform splattered with mud and dirt, some holes in his trousers. To be echoed by NCOs and various other enlisted personnel.

The men of the 1st Yorkshire were dirty with torn uniforms and hunger-stricken, as if their comparatively exquisite meal of real meat and potatoes the night before was not filling. Disheveled, scruffy, a few behind on the shaving, some clean-shaven and baby-faced.

The Private beside Jacob had no chevrons on his sleeves which were torn, a dirty face, boots, and hands, looked young with the big brown dark eyes that convey much in terms of emotion, having joined up at 16 just like Jake they were legally underaged but nobody but the politicians and their parents back home cared, to their fellows they were one and the same despite their age. George Alderson, asked "You have a fag, Jake?" He said looking dirty with mud stains up to mid-calves. Brodie helmet askew as if he just woke up, some stubble as if he needed a shave.

"Sure, Georgie." Jake replied, pulling out a cigarette from his tunic pocket and offering Private Alderson a light.

"Thanks Jake," he said blowing out a ring of smoke through his mouth and nose.

"Fix Bayonets!," his Captain said. The order rang down the line being echoed by Lieutenants, Sergeants, Corporals and even privates. Until there was no confusion. Jake reached down, grabbed his bayonet, and locked it onto the barrel of the Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE).

Sergeant Boyer, an older military reservist recalled for active duty walks besides him and says, "That's one filthy, stinking bayonet, what did you do shove it up some French whore's hairy ass."

"No," Jake blushed and scoffed.

"Ok good , the girl at home would not appreciate you visiting those ladies of the night."

“Do you know that from personal experience Sarge,” Alderson asked.

“No, but even if I did I wouldn’t tell you.”

“Ok fair enough.”

And then everything turned quiet again in eager anticipation for 7:30. Sunrise. Thumbs were twiddling, prayers were being said, jokes mumbled to each other. The officers checking their watches eagerly and constantly. At 7:28 the first wave was ordered to step up to the parapet, and to climb the ladders when they heard the whistle blow. George looked over at Jake with his big, brown, eyes conveying the emotions of fear and anxiousness and Jake looked over at the letter George was writing home to his mother, father, and siblings saying that he missed them and wish he could be back in their loving arms, but he had a duty to King and Country, and so he fights for the honor of Britain. “Jake if I die accompany my body home. If I could see the Kaiser, I would shoot him from here. What did you think of that one blonde back in Paris, Jake?”

“She’s a prostitute George, if you don’t want the pox, I suggest you don’t take her services,” Jack said half-jokingly, half-seriously.

Everyone was standing some pale, some still, some shaking, some calm, lots of them smoking, some chewing others twiddling their thumbs with nerves.

“When the whistle blows, clear the trench and go across no-man’s-land at a walk,” his Captain said. What the bloody hell did he just say walk. Oh shite this is going to be a bloodbath.

Then the whistle blew...

Jake, George, Sergeant Boyer, the Captain, and everyone else rushed over the parapet and started across no-man’s-land at a walk, as ordered.

The German Maxim and Mausers tore the British ranks to shreds. Guy after guy fell. First Jake saw this guy, that guy, then the Captain received a Mauser shot from a sniper right in the head. Then Sergeant Boyer received a wound to the left shoulder. “Don’t look at me push forward.” 2nd platoon’s Lieutenant fell, then 5th’s, then 3rd’s. Bloody damn they’re

targeting our officers. German counter-artillery started against the advancing British forces, finally they got the order, from a carrier pigeon:

“Fall back now.”

-Colonel Smith.

The men dropped into shell-craters. And re-grouped into groups of two or three to hightail it back to the British lines. Naturally, Jake grouped with Georgie. “Oy! Jake!,” he called. Jake tuned and looked, “Race you back.” At that word, they both leapt out of their shell crater and started running, back to the British front trench. He wasn’t sure exactly when, but Jake could distinctly hear a shell explode, he dropped down into the nearest crater, and looked around to see if Georgie was alright. He was nowhere to be seen...

...Then he started scanning farther away, he saw a boot, oddly the same sized as Georgie, and a disembodied head...That was Georgie! He was dead, but there was almost no body whatsoever to accompany back home.

Jake made it back to the trench, and started weeping for George Alderson’s death and for the lost of his mother, father, and sisters. Glancing around to see how many of their fellows would be around unscathed. He was shock from how empty the trench felt in the wake of the advance over the top. Feeling the drips of rain going down his neck soaking the collar of his uniform tunic.

Jacob Appleton a Lance Corporal in the 1st Yorkshire in the Battle of the Somme survived the first day, one of his friends and pals since they were young, George Alderson was not so lucky. He was killed running back to British lines by a Howitzer shell. Severing his body into multiple gruesome parts. Now they must embark on a mission retrieve his dog tags and get his remains behind British lines for transport back to Yorkshire.

That was it. In the blink of an eye Jake Appleton lost his best friend in the War to end all wars. He didn’t even make it back to the trench line. Standard protocol called for the retrieval of the dead man’s dog tags. But, the reality of trench warfare led to the end of a daytime retrievals. In order to retrieve the deceased George Alderson’s dog tags, they would be to go in

no-man's land at night and do his best to find what's left of his body and to retrieve his dog tags from his remains. It was the least he could do. In the meantime, Jake let his mind wander to George's family. To his lovely brunette sister a year older than they were, Elizabeth Alderson, who also happened to be Jake's sweetheart. She had similar eyes to Georgie, but she was also gifted with the most noble art of healing the heart. Jacob remembered the one time that she helped dress a that Georgie had inflicted on himself with a kitchen knife.

The news of her brother's death would be Earth-shattering for her. Her this master of healers, learning about her brother's death. This sister who cared deeply for her baby brother. Naturally, she was a nurse, and Jake had seen pictures of her in her uniform, the black and white unable to display the beauty that one beheld seeing her in person. Jake took to penning a letter to her first about her brother's death:

Dearest Elizabeth.

As your friend, as your brother's comrade I regret to write to you regarding your brother's death. He was unfortunately killed on the morning of the first day of the Somme offensive I had the great pleasure and honor of being his friend and comrade. He was a brave soldier and a remarkable friend. An enemy howitzer shell had met its mark, his body is too mangled to behold. I offer you, your other siblings, and your parents my sincere condolences at this time. Remember him as your brother, and as a good man.

Yours Truly, Lance Corporal Jacob Appleton, 1st Yorkshire

Jacob would dash off similar letters to his parents and each of the other siblings, but none holding the same presence in his mind as the exquisite Liz. He cannot get her nurturing nature and pretty face out of his head. Before, he left he saw her in a beautiful blue dress and thought, My bloody god I want to marry my friend's sister. Jake would retrieve his friend's dog tags for him and his lovely sister.

He would gather up two privates to make the trek with him to retrieve the dog tags of Jake, and what was left of his badly disfigured dead body. One of them Charles McCormac, grew up with them and was the same

age.

"Jake I swear to God I will kill every last one of those bloody fucking Huns for what they did to Georgie," Charles said, his voice oozing with anger and a vengeful wish.

"Our mission is not to kill Huns, for now," Jake said flashing his blue eyes at John in his mud-covered uniform, riddled with holes. "For now, we have to provide his family with some solace, grab a stretcher and a bag," he finished.

The other two did as they were told, and Sergeant Boyer said in a whisper "Travel light boys. No rounds in your guns, just attach your bayonets. Or even better yet, just your bayonet or knife, some grenades, and maybe a club. No rifles" He said brandishing a wooden bat with a metal chain wrapped tightly around it.

"Why can't we bring our guns," Charlie asked.

"If it goes off it gives us away and we're taking no chances," Jake replied.

After that Jacob and his band of grunts crawled over the parapet as quietly as possible talking amongst each other seldom, due to the possibility of German infiltrators. They started the crawl across no-man's land as quietly and as flatly as possible, stripped of their guns and all weapons behind their bayonets, entrenching tools, the club that Jake was in possession of. Occasionally, dipping into the shell craters to see if it was one of their lost buddies. McCormac thought he recognized a couple cousins, laying down in the shell craters dead from machine gun and rifle fire.

"Boys," Jake whispered, "We're coming up on the spot where the Krauts blew up Georgie." He said crawling across no-man's-land with the mud smearing the front side of his uniform. His two fellows nodded in affirmation. And then he saw it...Jake's body. His head, torso, legs, and arms bloody from that morning. Jake and McCormac got to work gathering up his remains and gingerly placing it in the body bag. While, Albert Ferguson, started searching for his dog tags.

In the next shell crater over, they heard what sounded like two German voices talking at a low whisper. Jake motioned to the other two to take

out their bayonets and rush them before they could get out a holler. They rushed them with Jake bludgeoning one to death with the club while the other two stabbed them. In their dying breaths they issued the word “Muzzer.” Then Jake raised the club again and hit one of them hard in the skull knocking the German’s brains out.

They then proceeded to collect the rest of George’s remains and started crawling on back to the British lines in the wet mud under the cover of darkness. Getting muddier and muddier. On the way back they spot another dead British soldier, his intestines hanging out of his uniform, he died an agonizing death of blood loss in unbearable pain.

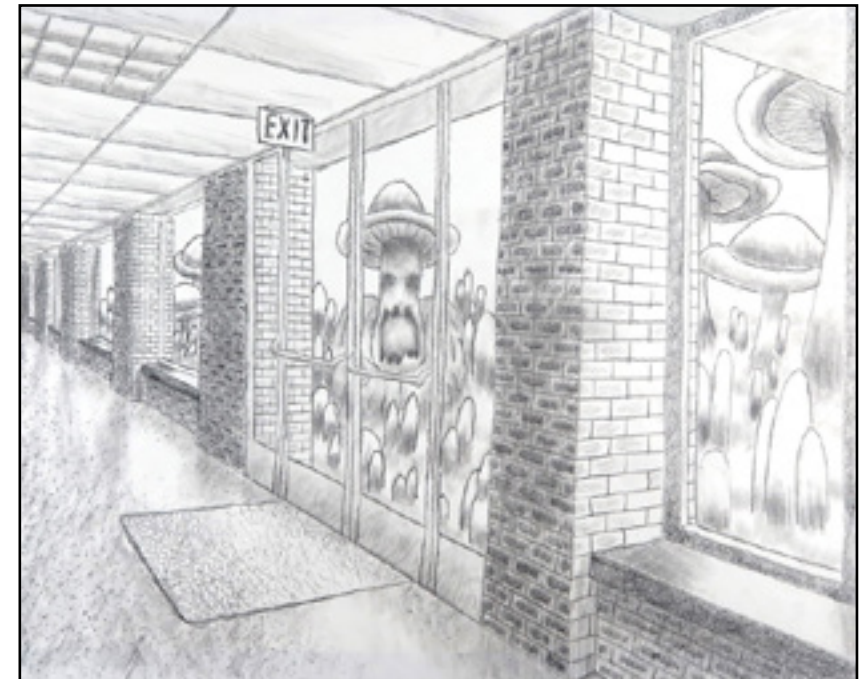
Albert showed Jake Georgie’s dog tags, riddled with shrapnel, a chunk taken out and looking like they could shatter. “Damn his dog tags look destroyed,” Jake said looking mournful. They crawled back into the British trench and used their strength and gravity to ease Georgie’s body down.

“Good work boys,” Sergeant Boyer praised them. “Now get some rest. Jack, command has selected you to accompany the bodies home.” They went to their dugouts and got in a good few hours of sleep. Jack used the communication trenches to get to the rear of the British line with more than a few comrades carrying the bodies of their dead friends, cousins, brothers, and childhood bullies. From there he was transported by various means out of France to home.

In the next few weeks next to nobody Jake knew personally would survive. Albert was one of the few that did, barely. McCormac died after getting a French whore pregnant beforehand. When a plethora of machine gun bullets rattled his chest (he also caught syphilis). Boyer would die leading the troops, leaving behind a widow and children.

Jacob Appleton survived. He told Elizabeth Alderson the news of her brother’s death to her in-person with tears in his eyes, and her whole family started weeping. Something so good was taken so soon from a loving family, without any children as his legacy. She walked right up to him wrapped her arms around him, kissed his cheek, and the younger siblings started tugging and hugging at his legs, with their tears falling down the legs of his trousers.

They cried for the family, for Boyer, for McCormac and for all those who fell in the little town. Most of the young men either never returned at all or came back with battle scars. Battle scars that would never go away. In the next few years, he would marry Liz and work as a coal miner, having 5 children.



Spreading Uncanny by Zechariah Boyer

Mirror, Mirror

David Thomas

What does one see when one looks into their reflection? Well let me show you some of what I saw in mine. So maybe you can see yours better

I used to look into the mirror and I would see a mask dead and full of self-hatred. What I saw was an amalgamation of all that I despised.

I saw a man who killed himself a number of times but was saved by grace.
 I saw a man shattered and alone after being abandoned by all he knew and loved.
 I saw a man brokenhearted after being betrayed by a cruel lover.
 I saw a man trying to save others lives when he couldn't save his own.
 I saw a man who made a mistake he wouldn't forgive.
 I saw a man who fell from his peoples' and country's grace.
 I saw failure...

These were times of great internal turmoil
and external tribulation.

In time this weight of hatred and the hollow lance of loneliness made desperate. So I marched forward assaulting that wore me, this mask was created from all the hate and lies given to me by others. Over time my tormenters didn't have to hurt me anymore, as I did it for them now. Another day another peek at the mirror another stone to throw at the hated image.

Eventually my knees started to buckle to this weight as it grew unabated.
 In time I had no drive left. This mask was diametric to my true self and it was consuming me.

~

I was gifted 8 years of correction and found
 Over time I had been blinded to my reflection,
 In this blind state I did something I never did before
 in my life, I let go.
 In doing so, I cracked the mask I forced myself
 to wear.
 I was scared, but living with that fear was better
 than surrender. So I trudged forward falling often
 but always standing up one more time.
 In time the mask started to slowly crumble and I
 started to see something amazing.
 I saw the man I had hid away and he was
 still alive.

I was still alive!

In time I looked around and I saw men, men
 who walk with a weight I recognized.
 I couldn't see your reflections but I saw your
 pain.
 I saw this and told myself it's time to stand up,
 it's time to fight again this wielding hope as my
 sword.

When I look around I see sons, I see brothers,
 I see fathers and I even see a grandpop or two.

I see men who have lost much on this lonely
 path we walk.

I see men who made mistakes that took them from
 all they love.
 I see men who hide behind jokes and pretend the
 pain they feel is an aberration
 I see men who try their best to destroy themselves,
 to keep themselves from finding happiness in life.

I see me who make excuses to hold themselves down,

I see men wearing a mask, a mask that hates
you as mine did me.

I don't just see pain and mistakes when
I see you though. I see potential.
I see the potential for greatness in subtle
and overt fashion.

I see men,
men who can change their lives by changing
the way they see themselves.
I see me hoping to give the love they so desperately
wish to receive but just don't know how to.

I see men who can dream and achieve those dreams,
but only if you see yourself truly.
I see men who may not understand that mistakes
are the building blocks that lead to perfection.

We must put the mask away to find the
greatness we all run from!
Be brave, embrace fear, let it drive you to heights
untold!
It is time to step out of the shadows of giants
and be seen in the light of today.

What's there to lose by seeing ourselves for who
we really are? we've lost so much already.
What if we removed self-hate and applied
appreciation in its place?
It requires a great deal of honesty but by
doing this brave thing can we bring ourselves
into the realm of true happiness.

A freedom few find in this distorted image we
call the world.
You can all be the arbiters of change our people
and world needs.
If you can find yourself in suffering what can hold
you down after that?

I promise you, we can change the world for

the better, all you have to do is be brave and believe!

Believe your suffering had purpose
Believe there are lessons in the pain
Believe your dreams are worth dreaming, believe in change

Believe in self-redemption! There is no cause more worthy.

we have been wounded
we have been broken
we have been scarred
But still we stand!

Gentleman please look at your reflections with
eyes of truth, see the lies you wear and repair
them with honesty.

If no one told you this before I will,
I believe in you because, I don't only see your pain.

Your potential to contribute to this grand
story we call humanity.

So let's take another look at our reflection
and see what's good in it.
Let's find our way to our truth together
one day at a time....united in our cause of
self redemption.

I believe in you being the man your family prays
to see every night.
I believe in you sharing your wisdom to save others
from the lonely path.
I believe in you finding love and happiness and
teaching others to seek it.

I believe in your dreams.
I believe because it's all I have.
but I believe because that is all I need.

Believe, for the greatness we bring!

Just Like My Life

Jessica Wright



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: "In Scandinavian folk art style, a ramshackle country home in the woods with two picture windows, one of which is cracked. It is raining and dismal outside."

The rain hasn't let up in days, it comes in sheets, pouring down. Just like my life. The hits haven't stopped; the roof is leaking from all the rain. The food in the fridge is getting scarce. The baby hasn't stopped crying all day. And to make things worse my husband decided to leave me for his 21-year-old secretary. My tears are just like the rain, won't stop flowing.

We have been in this house for 9 years now, we inherited it from my husband's (soon to be ex now) grandfather. We loved our little shack in the woods. Outside it is so peaceful, it really is as much as I dislike the country. It still needs work, but we have been doing a little bit each year to get it up to date and it was ours free and clear. The wooden siding still needs to be replaced; over the years it has taken a toll on its appearance. In some places the wood is chipped and has missing pieces. The weather and age of the shack has turned a once beautiful 1960's home into looking like a shack, you can see how the deep golden brown has now turned gray from the elements.

At the front of the house there are two beautiful, large picture windows. I have spent many nights at the table waiting for my husband's car to appear coming down the driveway. There is a large crack running straight down the center of the window next to the table, my frustration got the better of me at 11 p.m. when yet again, I waited for him to come home from another "late night meeting." I was beyond livid that he still wasn't home that I literally threw the homemade chicken pot pie that I spent hours preparing for dinner everywhere!

On top of the updates that we did last summer, we completely gutted our bedroom to put in new insulation in the outside walls, I told my husband we needed to replace the shingled roof with a new metal one. We have the money in our savings from my 10 years working as a lawyer in NYC. You can see the spots on the roof where shingles are missing, they constantly fly off during an even light wind. Metal roofing is the way to go in the area we live in, winters can be extremely harsh, and I am sick of climbing on the roof to complete snow removal. On a metal roof the snow would slide right down the roof, whereas the shingles it sticks to, and we must shovel it. Even if I did have to remove some snow with the roof shovel it would be a lot easier from the ground. The height and pitch of the roof is so steep that it isn't safe to be even up there. I am so scared to be that high off the ground. Not to mention the roof hasn't been replaced since the house was originally built. I told him we needed to replace it but what do I know? I've just been the stay-at-home pretty housewife.

"Here comes the heavy rain again Priscilla" I say to my 9-month-old baby, apparently that was the wrong thing to say. Because now she is wailing her lungs off. Believe me Priscilla I want to cry right now, why do bad things happen to good people? For years I have done what he has wanted I quit my job as a very successful Lawyer ten years ago and moved to Ronan, Montana from New York

City. I was the most sought-after divorce lawyer. I made so much money we have been living beyond comfortably and our savings are well over \$50,000. Let me tell you that is a huge demographic change going from a city girl with a full social calendar to a rural area where it takes twenty minutes to get to the closest restaurant. I hate bugs. I miss fancy designer clothes, now I wear flannels and jeans. I hate the country's desolation. I miss the sounds. I miss the smells. The sites, shows, and fine dining in New York City were out of this world. AND did I mention the weather? The rain we get enough of to last a lifetime and again we are back to the rainy season. Great timing for the roof to start leaking. God, I wish I hadn't fallen in love at first site with the handsome farmer from Montana. Love makes you do crazy things.

Do I regret it? Today I do, but I wouldn't have the best thing in my life, that came out of our marriage, our precious daughter Priscilla. She is my absolute pride and joy with the same beautiful piercing blue eyes as her father. I love the daily discoveries with having a 9-month-old; she still wobbles when she stands, her constant babbling. She really is the sweetest when she isn't sick. When she is sick, which is often, she is miserable without any consoling her. She just screams and screams her head off. She has had ear infection after ear infection. This time she has an ear infection and is getting two teeth at the same time.

We have had infertility issues for the past 5 years; I have waited for her so long I don't take a minute for granted. But tonight, it is just so difficult to cope with her screaming, I am sure she is picking up on my foul mood. The news from her father this afternoon has made me a complete mess. Now, I just want to scream myself scream and scream and scream some more! I gave her pain reliever about half an hour ago. The medicine should be kicking in any minute now. I just can't stand it! My heart is broken. I want to pull my hair out, so I set her in her pack and play with a few safe toys. And I do just that, I sprint out the front door into the pouring down rain into the yard where I scream so loud that the birds are startled, and they fly away. The rain pelts my face, and I don't even care, I embrace the physical pain it feels so much better than the pain in my chest. It feels like my heart has been ripped out and run over ten times. I must have sat outside for over 10 minutes with the baby safe in her pack and play not going anywhere. But even out here with the door shut I can hear her screaming and crying. I just want her earache to go away, I want this whole day to go away. So, I sit out there a few minutes longer and she finally falls asleep. While I stand out there my tears flow just like the rain.

He came home early tonight; I thought what a nice surprise. I was so excited, from the day that Priscilla had I needed just a little time to myself to breathe without listening to her scream, I hadn't even showered today. Little did I know my world was about to shatter. He walked in the door with a sour puss on his face, I handed him Priscilla in hopes to get a hot shower and some relaxation

while dinner is baking.

"Baby! I am so excited to see you right now, let me just hop in the shower and I will be right back out."

He pushed me away from him and Priscilla saying "Calm down Theresa, I ain't in the mood for your drama. I am only here to see my daughter give her a kiss goodbye and pack a bag." He says it just like he won the lottery. "I ain't waiting for you to take a shower you've had all day to get yourself presentable for the day. You reek like breast milk. Your hair is so greasy. I am so sick of coming home to this, you."

"What? Why? You just got back from a week out of town business trip" I ask him seriously perplexed; I have no idea where this is coming from. I have been so excited for him to come home that I even made him his favorite dish. It's in the oven now baking. I know that since the baby I no longer look perfect, I don't wear makeup every single day, but what does he expect with a baby who is sick and needs her mother's constant consoling. I still take care of myself when I can, but lately she isn't even napping with the pain she has been in. I am lucky if I can squeeze a ten-minute nap with her while I rock her in his grandmother's old rocking chair in the living room. Every time I have tried setting her down today, she immediately wakes up screaming.

"Theresa if you think that I go on business trips you are dumber than I ever thought. I have been going to stay at Sabrina's house. This past week we spent in the Bahamas. And now tonight I am moving in with her. I am in love with her, not you. She knows how to keep up appearance." He speaks to me like I am stupid. I suspected there was something going on, but I wanted to save my marriage for Priscilla's sake.

"What, Sabrina? Your new secretary that joined the team 3 months ago? The young one, come on Chuck you can't be serious she is fresh out of college; she is barely 21?" I am beyond shocked at this news, but what did I expect with a petite beautiful tanned 21-year-old girl joining his "Sumners' Farm and Trucking" business. She must have seen the money signs. She even came to visit the baby. Boy the joke is on me, I thought she was being friendly to me, I was even excited to have a new friend for girls' night for a pedicure, manicure, dinner, whatever. I don't have a lot of girlfriends here. She held Priscilla and doted on her, she was even so kind (at the time I thought she was kind) brought her a ride on toy for when she got a little older. AND this is the woman he leaves me for. I hate her. I started raging at him, I wanted to swat him, but he was holding Priscilla the entire time until she started screaming so piercingly that it hurt my ears. The joke was on me. How long has this been going on?

“Here” he says, “take the screaming brat. I ain’t dealing with either one of you.” Off to the bedroom he goes haltingly packing whatever will fit in his rolling luggage bag that he would take for weeklong trips. And he doesn’t even stop to kiss or hug Priscilla goodbye. He rushes into his car, starts it, slams it into drive and you see nothing but gravel flying behind me.

I thought I had “life by the balls;” I quit my job for him. We have the perfect baby, Priscilla. I met Chuck one spring evening when I was trying to haul a cab home from a long day at the office. After many attempts at trying to snag a cab, finally one noticed her and pulled to the curb. Just as I was rushing to the car a man came out of nowhere plowing her over! I couldn’t believe it; I landed right onto my ass in a huge puddle of mud. I was beyond livid, the dirty water soaked into my white slacks. As I fell, I twisted my ankle. Chuck was delivering fresh produce to the corner store witnessing the entire event. He ran to my rescue that day, being the perfect gentleman, helping me clean myself and make sure I was okay. After that day every time he came into the city to deliver produce, he always had something special for me. Whether it was flowers, a pie from one of his customers, or even romantic lunches in the middle of the day. He was the perfect gentleman. Always doting on me. I loved that he liked me for me, not because I had money, he didn’t even know about the money! Little did I know, he knew exactly who I was and was waiting for the perfect opportunity to take advantage of me. That she knew now.

Only to have a barely-twenty-one-year-old assistant yank my entire life from out from out underneath me. Leaving me and Priscilla to fend for themselves.

The night that Chuck left, it was almost as if the baby could feel the tension in the house. She nuzzled up to my breast, until her belly was full of breast milk and fell fast asleep into a deep slumber. Carefully and quietly as I could I placed Priscilla into her basinet. Priscilla let out a small “coo” and snuggled into her teddy bear falling fast asleep.

It was nearly 10 pm, but I still could not get rid of this rage and complete restlessness. In the darkness I paced the floors once feeling like a retreat but now I feel like I am living a complete nightmare. I paced and paced the floors so badly that I could literally see the beautiful hardwood floors being stripped to nothing-and that was exactly how I felt. The thoughts running through my mind “how could this have happened? How can I, the most sought-after divorce lawyer in New York City be dupped and left for a twenty-one-year-old assistant?” The more I pace the madder I get. I have seen numerous husbands walk through the doors of my practice full of deceit and dishonesty, I can see locate them coming a mile away. How could someone in my position become so blind? Love. That’s why. Stupid. What am I going to do next? I left my position, maybe I could go back? Start over? That sounds good, thankfully I have my nest egg, and her precious

daughter Priscilla.

That night I barely slept between my tears of shock at Priscilla’s pain in her ears. When I finally fell asleep, sleep does not come peacefully. The nightmares begin. The nightmares of Chuck and Sabrina slowly crept in. Chuck and Sabrina showed up the next morning with Child Protective Services and the entire police force of Ronan, Montana showing up at her doorstep to take her precious child away. I dream of Sabrina grabbing Priscilla, yanking her out of bed to leave me alone.

Just before dawn, I wake up to the loudest bang outside. I thought it was my nightmare, but the sound was too loud and too close. I grabbed my house robe hanging next to the bed and decided to investigate. Still distraught as the nightmare replayed in my mind. I slide my slippers from under the bed, I heard the earie sound again almost like a chair being dragged across the floor. In a flash I grab my 380-pistol out of the nightstand and hustle into the kitchen. Again, I hear the earie sound again. Beyond terrified, I walk into the kitchen peering out the front window with only the full moon to guide me through the house. I can’t turn on the lights, I don’t want the source of the sound to see me walking through the house. As I peer out the window, I see a lone coyote dragging one of my chickens out of the chicken coop. As slow as I can, I unlock the window just enough for the barrel of the pistol to point outside and in one shot, I shoot the coyote dead. As I am doing this all I can picture was Chuck’s stupid face on the coyote. It gave me such satisfaction that the pest was eliminated. Wish I could eliminate him just like that as well.

Now that sleeping was out of the question, I decided to start brewing a pot of coffee and try to do some reading. I barely sat down with my first sip when I heard Priscilla’s cries. I rush to her side trying to soothe my upset baby. I grabbed her out of the bassinet scooping her up into my arms, unhooking my bra so that Priscilla could nurse. Both of us fall fast asleep in the rocking chair and don’t wake up until nearly two hours later.

My stomach growls to wake me of much-needed sleep, I stumble still half asleep to the kitchen in search of breakfast. Only to realize with all the drama of yesterday I never gathered any eggs from the chicken coops. I quickly gathered 4 eggs just enough to make myself some breakfast. As I walked back into the house, I saw the dead coyote on the ground. Just another thing I must do by myself.

Nearly an hour later I finally ate breakfast. Before Chuck, I was a strong independent woman, get that girl back she says to herself! Get a plan together! I made my grocery list. Once we are both ready, I finally get Priscilla into the car buckling her into her car seat. I turned the key to the car only to hear not a single sound and the car would not turn over. I bang on the steering wheel “Seriously,

come on NOT TODAY!!!!” But repeatedly I try to turn over the car to get the ignition to fire. Not a freakin’ thing. My closest neighbor Tobias was over a half a mile walk. Pissed off, another shitty day, I remove Priscilla from her infant carrier, once again strap her to my body and off they went trekking down the road to Tobias’ home.

Thank goodness it was a beautiful sunny day, with mild temperatures. I just couldn’t deal with one more obstacle today. By the time they made it to Tobias’ home, Priscilla was fast asleep. As soon as I step into Tobias’ driveway, Tobias’ dogs run to the end of the driveway. “Well, howdy there neighbor!” Gosh, his friendly demeanor is such a treat. But the shame I feel, I explain to Tobias the situation from the night before. Tobias’ being such a friendly neighbor offered his help. “Come on, I am heading into town anyways” (he wasn’t but, he liked Theresa she always was so nice to him, always being friendly, bring him over desserts she baked just because.)

Arriving in town, Priscilla was napping in the back, so Tobias’ offered to keep the baby napping in the car so that she could shop in peace. To her it felt like a vacation, I always have Priscilla in tow with me. But still I rush through the store just in case Priscilla awoke and not to annoy Tobias’ by keeping him waiting in the car. I grab all the essentials, toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, milk, cheese, meats and fresh produce. I place all my items on the belt for the cashier to scan and finally, finally I feel like I have accomplished something! But that feeling would not last long.

“\$234.26 Ms. Theresa is your total; would you like any help carrying your bags out to the car?” Said the cashier, Jonathan, whom Theresa knew very well from previous visits to the store.

“No Mr. Jonathan, I can manage, Mr. Tobias’ is in the car and can help me unload” as she spoke, she slid her debit card to pay.

Immediately after that is when the bad news broke. “Ummmmmm, Ms. Theresa, I reckon dere’s something a wrong with ya card, it said DENIED?” Said Jonathan.

“Oh Jonathan, today is not a day to tease I have been through the absolute wringer” replied Theresa. Jonathan was well known for being a jokester. But not today.

“Ms Theresa I ain’t teasing y’all today, try it again, maybe der’s somethin’ wrong with dis danged machine” said Jonathan as Theresa slid it again. Again, the same results. Denied. The heat rose to Theresa’s cheek. What in the world was going on with her card?

She slid the card again, until to find the same message: DENIED. Theresa was

absolutely FURIOUS, why is my card not working, I have more than enough money in the account! Unfortunately, as much as he wanted to, Jonathan couldn’t do a single thing to help her. “Mrs. Theresa, I hear recon’ you proly should go to that bank this morning and figure out what is goin’ on around here.”

Beyond upset, furious, embarrassed, and leaving empty handed I raced out of the General Store to my bank next door. Immediately welcomed by Ms. Jenny she blurted out “Ms. Jenny, I need your help Jonathan at the General Store keeps saying my card won’t go through. You know and I know I was just in here last week checking on my investments and my investments have been doing so well! What is going on?”

Ms. Jenny stood there speechless. What was she supposed to say? The truth would kill Theresa! She had just missed Chuck; he had just left the bank with every cent in the account. Even Jenny herself waited on him, he walked into the bank and withdrew everything telling her in small talk “we are finally doing all the renovations Theresa wanted. The guys are coming over this afternoon, I am heading over there now to pay for it all.” He left the bank account completely empty. She called over to Ronald (the bank manager) to take Theresa into a private room and give her the news. “Now Mrs. Theresa, you just go on in with Ronald, he can assist you with your account.” Ronald led Theresa into the back of the bank and told Theresa “Now Mrs. Theresa, Mr. Chuck was in here just a few minutes ago and withdrew money. Now, he told me it was as a surprise to finally get those renovations done, but since y’all here now I have to ruin the surprise for y’all.”

Could life get any worse, I feel like I literally could faint, I just sit staring at Ronald in complete disbelief. “Ronald, Chuck left me last night!” Poor Ronald’s face dropped with this awful news. He felt horrible that he let chuck walk out of the bank with every single penny that Theresa had in the bank.

I walk with my head hanging low, climbing into Tobias’ car and all I say is “take me home” not a single other word muttered.

Tobias’ drove speechless, he could only assume the worst that Chuck had done to Theresa, based on Theresa’s demeanor. Growing up with Chuck, he knew that Chuck was a horrible human being, he never cared for him. He took, took, took and took some more. Leaving everything else in the dust. All Tobias’ could do was pray for Ms. Theresa and Priscilla and hope that things would turn around.

I unbuckle Priscilla from her car seat, I meander into the house in a complete daze. I open the cupboards and refrigerator to figure out what was for supper. All I have left is one single egg left from this morning’s breakfast, a few ham

steaks in the freezer, and a bag of rice. Once again, she thought in her head, "This is my life." This is how my life has turned out. Don't fall in love. Ever.



Ryan Jenkins
Linocut

Dear Heroin

Melissa Champion

Dear Heroin,

You can't fool me! You are no hero. You are a liar, a scam artist, a storyteller, you my Dear heroin, are a fraud! You promised me a life full of bliss, happiness that I have never known, a sense of euphoria. You were my best friend, my lover, my family, you became my everything. I loved you for what you were, a warm blanket on a cold winter night, a false sense of escape from myself, my reality. You desensitized my emotions and made me inferior to guilt, empathy, and shame. You heroin became my mental obsession. You were in my thoughts and in my dreams, I can feel you everywhere, in my heart, on my skin, you consume me. I am breaking up with you heroin, you deceived me. You have taken everything from me, my family, my friends, myself. I can see through you now, your manipulation, gaslighting, and psychological attacks. You heroin are an emotional abuser, a narcissist, you will continue to take with no true reward. You make me question my own sanity; you have become my Consequence. But, no more! I have found a new romance, a true amour! You, heroin were just a flirtation, a courtship, one filled with empty promises and erroneous notions. You have taken too much and given too little. It is time to start a new affair, one that can offer me so much more, a life I no longer have to chase, a feeling of fulfillment, inner peace, and stability. I have found a new love, one that is devoted and unconditional, something that you heroin would not understand, you have never shown me a love without conditions, all you ever did was take, take, take! Don't come looking for me heroin. Let me be. You will do your best to keep me under your control, you will bargain with me, make excuses and promise me perpetual ecstasy. Let's face it, this relationship isn't working, your frequent lying, infidelity, physical, emotional, and mental abuse, and overly controlling behavior has reached its limits. You ask heroin, who is this new love, this new liaison? The one who is offering me more than you could ever give? It's me, heroin. My new love is me! I choose me over you. I can take care of my own needs, I can strive to be the person I want to be, I can give myself mindfulness and acceptance. I will persevere. I will endure.

Yours Truly, Me

Charcoal Portraits



Madilyn Thomas



Amani Santana



Ethan Hanmer



Sydney Kukulech



Zechariah Boyer



Steffan Goulbourne

Anxiety Anonymous

Ryan Thayer



AI Image by Microsoft Image Generator: In Scandinavian folk art style, an average joe dressed in jeans and a baggy jacket stands facing a wall of magazines. A young female clerk watches him from the distance.

"Cowards die many deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once."

"Tommy, what the fuck are you talking about?"

Roy had never been hesitant to call Tommy out before, but this confrontation felt unusually harsh. A faint "Huh?" was all the 18 year old could muster in response.

"You've been nothing but a coward the whole time I've known ya."

Tommy struggled to find a response that he felt would give him the upper hand in this burgeoning war of words. In the absence of a response either witty enough to defuse the tension or devastating enough to humiliate his friend, Tommy opted for the slightly pathetic and self-pitying sympathy approach.

"Real nice way to talk to a friend, man." If he had to "lose" this debate, he'd make sure Roy felt bad about winning it.

"Listen, I'm sorry, but the entire time I've known you you've never done anything... brave."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean you never talk to the girls you like, you never do something without thinking of all the ways it could go wrong first. You're a coward, no offense." Tommy, naturally, did take offense. An awkward and prolonged silence befell the two, before Tommy sheepishly spoke up.

"Dare me to do something. Anything." Roy, seeing this as no more than a gag, took a moment to think of the most outlandish things he could possibly ask Tommy to acquire.

"Hmm I'm gonna need you to get me a nudie mag from the corner store, a fine Cuban cigar, a six pack-"

"What brand?"

"Doesn't matter."

"Okay, what else?"

"A pack of gum. Orange. You got all tha-" Tommy started running off down their school's football field before Roy could even finish his sentence.

Before long, Tommy found himself in front of the corner store. He took deep breaths to calm himself down. Not only was buying smut deplorable on its own, but there was a cute girl, probably no more than a few years his senior, working

the register. Tommy began thinking of all the things she'd think or, heaven forbid, say to him when he went to ring out. Why couldn't it just be some old hag? he thought to himself. It was then that Tommy had an epiphany. Surely he'd be spared from any shame and embarrassment if he were to just steal the magazine instead. This came with its own issues, however. What if someone catches me? He weighed his options. Ultimately, he figured it'd be less shameful to be caught stealing it rather than purchasing it outright like a proud creep.

Upon walking into the store, Tommy was met by some mediocre yacht rock playing over the speakers and the complete indifference of the cashier; the only other living soul in the immediate vicinity. He slowly shuffled to the magazine aisle, making sure to keep her in his peripheral vision. Stuffed among the life-style junk, he found it: a recent issue of Playboy magazine. He quickly flipped through the pages, hoping to not find any of them stuck together, before sheathing it in his back pocket and tucking it under his shirt.

On the way out, he made sure to be seen browsing whatever was near him. If I look like I want to buy something, she won't think I've stolen anything. "G'day, miss!" he said as he dipped out.

"Yeah, see y- hey, wait a minute!" Tommy froze. He didn't expect her to say anything in return and he certainly didn't anticipate her confronting him like this. In a huff, she walked out from behind the counter and approached him. As she drew closer, Tommy's eyes got wider. Every step she took, his heart would beat faster.

"What do you have here?" She quickly grabbed at his back pocket.

"Hey, what're you-" he reached for it at the same time. Before either of them knew it, they were playing the world's most pathetic game of tug-of-war.

"You damn thief! Ugh, and a pervert too!"

"Hey, the magazine's not for me! I'm just a thief!"

"Shut up and let go!"

Tommy, realizing that some of the pages were being torn out, decided to cut most of his losses and salvage what he could. With a decisive pull, Tommy managed to take about two-thirds of the magazine with him as he scrambled away.

"Get back here!" Shouted the cashier, before looking at the pages left in her hand and throwing them to the ground in disgust. She marched back into the store and rang up Mr. Brody, her boss and head of the local concerned parents group, "The Peaceholics."

"Mr. Brody, we've got some deviant thief on the loose!"

"Understood. I will not rest until he faces righteous justice!"

With about 66% of the magazine intact and his ego severely bruised, Tommy made his way to the nearest gas station in order to complete his quest. He couldn't very well steal a six-pack of beer unnoticed, nor could he somehow finesse grabbing a cigar from behind the counter, so he simply went in and just bought the gum.

"Will that be all?"

"Yes." Tommy said. No. Tommy thought.

Back outside, Tommy went around to the back of the building and waited. And waited. And waited some more. He waited near the dumpsters for some bum to inevitably approach, looking for dinner. Once there, Tommy would give him some money and ask him to buy the beer and the cigar for him. For now, though, Tommy waited.

Finally, Tommy's knight in shining armor appeared. Only instead of glistening in the sun and arriving by horseback, his pants were held up by rope and he was pushing a shopping cart full of garbage.

"Hey, sir. Can I ask you to do me a favor real quick?" The bum ignored him and started sorting through the trash.

"Sir. Sir?" Tommy didn't know what else to do, but eventually realized that the man likely just possessed an entrepreneurial mindset.

"Sir, I have an offer to make you. I can get you some of that universal lubricant." The bum stopped and looked at Tommy almost in astonishment.

"You're gonna do what with some lubricant?" Tommy turned red. He realized he should have been more forward with his speech.

"I mean, I can pay you." The bum, who Tommy has assigned the name "Terry" to in his head for whatever reason, suddenly calmed down.

"Why didn't you just say that then, you fuckin' creep? What do you want?"

Tommy pulled a \$20 bill out from his wallet. "I need you to go in there and buy me a six-pack and a cigar. Think you can-" Terry grabbed the money without a second thought and headed inside. Tommy crouched down and peeked through the window to watch him. After a few minutes, Terry walked back out with a six-pack and cigar in hand and went about completely ignoring Tommy. Tommy gave chase.

"Hey man, what are you doing? Give me the stuff." Terry continued on his way.

"If you don't give me the beer and the cigar, I'm gonna..." Tommy struggled to think of something Terry would potentially fear losing. Since all he knew about him was that he loved trash, he figured that that'd be the key.

"I'll eat your trash!" Terry stopped and scornfully looked at Tommy.

"Yeah, all that garbage back there? It's all mine!" Terry dropped the cans and the cigar and marched towards Tommy with fury in his heart. Tommy, now realizing that he's made an enemy out of a potentially very dangerous vagabond, started to backpedal.

"I mean, maybe we can share some of it? I just want the beer and the cigar, man." The damage was already done though.

"There's one thing you never threaten to take away from a man; his trash!" Terry swung at Tommy, but on account of his old age and likely drunkenness, he missed completely and fell to the ground. Tommy realized that this was his opportunity to grab the contraband and run and so he did.

Tommy's mind raced as he scampered through alleys and down side streets in a desperate effort to escape Terry the bum. When he decided he'd run far enough, and perhaps too far considering he wasn't exactly trying to outpace an Olympic sprinter, he sat at a bus stop and took inventory of his ill-gotten gains. Approximately 3/5ths of a dirty magazine, some gum, a not-exactly-fine-but-basically-acceptable Cuban cigar and a six-pack of cheap beer. What else could an 18-year old boy want?

It was time to deliver the contraband to Roy back at the school. On the way back, however, Tommy would have to pass by the corner store he had so inelegantly stolen from earlier. He figured that if he merely stayed on the far side of the street and didn't look over at the no doubt dozens of police officers that had to be examining the crime scene, he'd be home free. With that in mind, he got up off the bench and set out on his way back to school. Beyond completing Roy's errand, Tommy looked forward to going home and ridding himself of all the stress he'd accumulated throughout the day.

Before Tommy knew it, the corner store was right up ahead. He put his master plan into action. He crossed the street and put his hand up to his face to avoid potential identification, feigning an intense and prolonged itch. He did peek through his fingers though, and what he saw surprised him. No cops were around to take witness statements or set up numbered cards next to the "evidence" strewn around. Instead, there was just a large bearded man with wild eyes standing in the window. Tommy briefly made eye contact with the man,

nearly jumped out of his skin and immediately went back to itching. A screech emanated from the store. "That's him! That's the pervert I was telling you about!" Tommy recognized the primal screams as coming from the same cashier he scuffled with earlier. He dropped his hand and looked down the street at the store, frozen in fear as the crazy looking man emerged through its doors.

"Hey buddy!" the man shouted. Tommy's eyes widened and he meekly pointed towards himself.

"Me?" Tommy asked, somehow without wetting himself.

"You've got something of mine, don't ya?" Tommy couldn't conjure up anything to say. Silence befell the street. In this moment, Tommy imagined himself as taking part in an Old West shootout. High noon, empty street, two men in a town that just wasn't large enough to accommodate them both simultaneously, all the hallmarks. Instead of grabbing his iron and readying up for the duel, though, Tommy figured it'd be best to tuck tail and run. He ducked down an alley. I've sure spent a lot of my day running through alleys he thought to himself. The crazed man took chase.

Running through the veins of the city, Tommy couldn't help but feel disappointed in himself. I've just been avoiding conflict all day. All my life, really. Would it have been so embarrassing to just buy the magazine? Would it be so bad to confront this guy? And Terry-

"Trash boy!" a hand reached out from behind a dumpster and grabbed Tommy's leg, tripping him.

"What the hell? Terry!" Tommy was shocked. Terry had seemingly been hiding in trash just waiting for Tommy to come by.

"You woke me up! What's your problem, man?"

"My problem? Some bum tried to steal my beer and cigar and is now accosting me in an alley!" Tommy tried to scurry away again, but Terry's resolve and grip strength was admirable. Tommy couldn't exactly find the time to be impressed, though.

"Terry, let go!" Tommy, running out of options and believing that this would be seen as self-defense in a court of law, booted Terry in the face. Terry, much to Tommy's amazement, didn't budge or even loosen his grip.

"I've found you, you little deviant!" a voice boomed in the alley. It was the crazed man from the store. Tommy's heart sank. "I believe you have some of my property. Hand over the magazine, boy." Tommy, surprisingly, didn't.

“What does it matter, man? The magazine got ripped apart when I took it anyway. I’m sorry I stole it, but why do you want it back so bad?” The crazed man seemed baffled.

“I care less that you stole it and more about the content held within. Smut like that will rot a young man’s mind!”

“It’s not for me! It’s for a friend!”

“I don’t care, it’s filth! You should be sipping communion wine, not cheap beer! You should be reading scripture, not this trash!” Tommy was furious by this point, partially due to being lectured and partially due to Terry, but mostly because of the hypocrisy.

“You seem more than happy to peddle said filth!” The crazed man’s face became unscrunched, as though the very nature of his morality had come crashing down upon him.

“What’s all this nonsense about?” Terry said as he clambered out from behind the dumpster. He let go of Tommy, stood up and met the crazed man’s gaze. Tommy looked up at both men with confusion. It looked like they knew each other.

“Terry?”

“Jerry?” The men embraced. Holy shit, Terry was his name. Tommy got up and grabbed his things, hoping to walk out unnoticed.

“Wait!” the crazed man, Jerry, said. “Let me tell you a little bit about Terry and I.” Tommy wore a look of utter befuddlement on his face, but hesitantly granted Jerry his time.

“Terry here used to be just like you. You stole the magazine for a friend, right? Was it a dare?” Tommy nodded. “I used to dare Terry to do wild things all the time, too. He didn’t have the self-esteem to say no, so he’d always go along.”

“That’s right. I didn’t believe in myself, so I looked for validation anywhere I could find it.” Terry said almost tearfully.

“One day, though, I took it too far. I dared Terry to wedgie a police officer—” Jerry started to cry, “just for the H-E double hockey sticks of it.” Tommy felt as though he was experiencing a break in reality, something so surreal that his mind struggled to make sense of it.

“That’s what set me on this path of trash and trouble.” Terry had melted into a teary, blubbing mess by this point. Tommy began to slowly back away as the

two men comforted each other.

“Boy!” Jerry exclaimed, “Do not lose yourself! Do not allow your fear to take you where you ought not be!”

“Okay!” Tommy said as he scurried away. Despite the oddness of it all, this message did resonate with Tommy. All day he’d allowed his anxiety to interfere with his business; he was too embarrassed to buy a nudie mag, too afraid to fight Terry and too fearful of Jerry to even entertain the idea of directly confronting him until he had to.

Tommy found Roy still resting on their school’s football field. “I have acquired all that you asked me to.” Tommy said exasperatedly. Roy looked over and seemed surprised. He eyed Tommy up and down before graciously accepting his beer, cigar, gum and most of a porn magazine.

“I appreciate it Tommy, but you know I was just kidding, right?” Tommy cracked a smile.

“That’s okay.” He seemed to mean it.

“You want some money back or something?”

“It’s quite alright, Roy. Any monetary amount is nothing compared to what I’ve gained in knowledge today.”

“...Okay.”

“For you see, I’ve learned something quite invaluable in my adventures today.”

“Adventures? You were gone for, like, two hours.”

“It’s not merely the time that transforms a man.” Roy wasn’t sure how to respond. “I’m a new man today. I’ve had new life breathed into me. I’ve learned so much.”

“I wish you’d learn to be normal.” They both laughed. Roy offered Tommy a beer and he accepted.

“So, what’s this grand lesson you’ve learned?”

“I’m afraid you wouldn’t understand.” Roy nodded.

“Some bullshit about overcoming your fears?” Tommy stared wide-eyed at him for a moment.

“Something like that, I guess.” They clinked their cans together.

“To Tommy, for conquering his fears or whatever!”

Three Dimensional Design Masks



Natalie Sagatis



Avery West



miss heather



Nataly Portillo Hernandez



Lidiya Norkina



Ryan Jenkins

Dedication

David Thomas

I wrote this for my family, broken as we are as nation I still love you greatly and believe in you. I hope these words help you find strength in your dark times and after. I hope these words help you to find the bravery you need to help another in their dark times.

I hope these words help you to see the beauty and wisdom, our mistakes and scars offer us.

I hope you learn to smile at the person in the mirror, you deserve it.



God's Country by Vicki Brown



Herkimer

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK