

PHAETHON



2015

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

And though he greatly failed, more
greatly he dared.



Cover Photo by Shunyu Yao



The Fall of Phaeton by Rubens

About Phaethon

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

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

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

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

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Upside Down

Sean M. Maphia

Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. If Mr. Einstein is right, then I'm one insane bastard. Why do I consider myself insane? Well it's simple. I feel that if I do certain things a certain way, like washing my hands numerous times, that all my worries will go away. Insane right? Right. A long time ago, when I was probably in sixth grade, my mom took me to a psychiatrist because she was concerned about me. I was a kid back then. I didn't really think anything was wrong with me. I thought what I did was normal. A psychiatrist diagnosed me with some sort of disorder called PDD/NOS. At the time I didn't know what in the hell that shrink meant, but down the road my mother told me it stood for "Pervasive Developmental Disorder/Not Otherwise Specified" and I thought, for lack of better phrase, what the fuck? Basically shrinks diagnose this when you experience symptoms of Autism but you also have symptoms of Asperger's. In other words they have no idea where to put you on the spectrum. Not a lot of people know this disorder exists. Maybe it doesn't and comes full circle to what I was saying before that I'm just crazy and different.

I always felt different but now everything feels different. I feel different. Nights are the worst for me. I don't feel like myself at night. Come to think of it, I don't even know who I am anymore. I mean I know who I am but I don't know who I am. I'm Chester Francis Sonny. I was born at St. Luke's Memorial Hospital on September 9th, 1993 at 3:34 am. I'm seventeen years old and an A/B student (depending if school doesn't annoy me). I have friends and when I say friends I don't mean that I'm the popular kid who has a ton of friends and a girlfriend wrapped around me and we "do it" every weekend at some random person's house party in their random weird parent's bedroom where there is a picture of Jesus at the foot of the bed. No, I only have three that I can truly say are my friends and that's it. Like I said before, I've always felt different than the other kids that I grew up with. I never went outside and played in the dirt, because I always hated dirt. I was always afraid of what was in the dirt. I wondered if dirt could kill me, if dirt was actually alive. I was always anxious going to large gatherings like birthday parties because there were SO many people there and for some reason I would always beg my mom, Ivy, not to let me go in there and pleaded with her to take me home. My mother, despite wanting me to engage with the other people, would always smile and say, "Okay baby, don't worry, mommy will take you home right now. Don't cry."

I always did everything in threes to keep me calm or to make all the anxious feelings go away. For example, I would dispense the soap three times and wash my hands three times, open and close doors three times, rub door-

knobs, etc. Sometimes I'll do the "knock on wood" thing and just knock on a piece of wood three times or anything in sight. I can be superstitious sometimes and I think that comes from my grandmother. But now it seems that everything and everyone bothers me and just gives me endless anxiety. Along with my childhood rituals, I have racing irrational thoughts that are random and don't make any sense. I pace the floor without ever stopping. I can't touch certain things because I think I might get sick and die, and I'll keep blowing on my fingers. I try not to do this in public, but when I do it's so embarrassing. It feels like I'm some freak at a circus and people just stare and wonder. Sometimes they laugh a little bit. I always wondered if they would even throw peanuts at me because I would make such a spectacle of myself. So I usually do all of my rituals at home which drives my dad, Arthur, mad and makes my sister, Ann, scared as hell. My mom on the other hand shows me sympathy but sometimes if it's a night as bad as this one I hear her sob. I think I'm the only one who hears her sob.

Tonight is one of those bad nights. I'm in our kitchen pacing back and forth right now trying not to step on the blue tiles because for some reason the blue tiles, in my mind, are forbidden and I should never step on them, and I was thinking about my first day back to school. I didn't want to go back to that hell, I didn't want to worry about the piles of homework that I would get. I didn't want to interact with the other kids, and if they came up to me what would I say to them? I don't even know the answer to that question because I know I'll mess up. Why do I mess things up? I mess my whole entire life over everything and, in the process, I've messed my family up. My family thinks I'm nuts and my friends probably think the same too.

"I'm just worthless!" I slam my fist into the wall and the blood starts pouring as soon as the tears do.

"Chester! What are you doing? What's the matter?" My mom came scurrying down the stairs while she put her robe on.

"Oh nothing... just slamming my fists into the kitchen wall, the usual of course mom," I said in a sobbing voice.

"Oh Chester, let's go in the bathroom and look for a bandage and take care of that."

"Oh this? It's nothing, just a scratch. But it hurts like a bitch I'll tell you that."

"Now, I've told you so many times not to swear in front of me."

"Sorry, Mom."

My mom gets very annoyed when, not just me, but anybody in the house swears. She says a gentleman doesn't swear in front of a lady. I wonder if she knows that all the girls in my school have a better sailor mouth than I do. She helps me to the upstairs bathroom, and as she helps I still have the thoughts racing and I do some of the rituals. My mom notices and all she can do is just smile and shake her head. Why are you smiling and shaking your head, Mom?

This is no fucking laughing matter. I mean I just punched a wall because I got irritated over nothing. Maybe it was her way of coping. For that, I understand and I forgive her. We get to the bathroom and she turns on the light, which is so bright that it almost blinds me, and she gets out the bandages.

“So which one do you want Chuck? Normal ones or the Disney Princess ones?”

“Disney princess obviously, and make sure it’s an Ariel one. She’s my favorite.”

We chuckle for a little bit. I always love joking around with my mom. Sometimes I think she’s one of the few people who understand me.

“So, do you want to tell me what’s wrong, Chester?” my mom said.

“No.”

My mother scowled at me and said, “You know Chester, I can’t help you if you don’t tell me anything.”

“Mom, I just... I just don’t want to talk about it, okay? It’s just something I don’t want to talk about.”

“But why?”

“Because.”

“Chester...”

“Mom. Just end it okay?!”

It got intensely quiet after that.

“Chuck, what if we found you a...”

“A what, mom? Another shrink? No, because it never works. All they do is same thing and it never helps.”

My mom hung her head down at me because she knew deep down it doesn’t work. We’ve been to a total of four. I don’t think that’s good.

“Maybe if we saw a counselor,” my mom said

I replied with a solid, “No.”

“But why Chester? Maybe it’ll be different.

I was silent.

“Come on Chester, do it for me.”

I love my mom very much. She’s like my biggest fan whenever I make jokes and she supports me becoming an actor and everything I do. I would do anything for her.

“Ok Mom.”

My mom smiled at me. “Thanks Chester.”

Afterward my mom brought me to my bed and said good night. “Mom, do you think you could just stay with me until I fall asleep, please?”

My mom smiled, nodded and said “yes” tenderly. She took my desk chair and sat next to me and gently rubbed my back in a circular, motherly way. I felt that she left my bedroom and so I decided that I wasn’t going to get hardly any sleep. I mean I was calm now but after that ordeal I was just wide awake, so

I decided that I would just get my phone and plug my ear phones and just listen to my music. I didn’t know what to play so I decided to be a little adventurous and spontaneous and just hit “shuffle.” One of my favorite songs actually came on and it was “I’m Not in Love by 10CC.” My dad really influenced some of my tastes in music so a lot of the songs he grew up with I listened to. But what I really like about this song is that it has such a mellow tone and I love the lyrics. It’s such an awesome “fuck you” song to me and that it’s done almost passive-aggressively. But as 10CC’s lyrics were finally making me drift off to sleep, I began to wonder if Einstein was wrong about his definition of insanity. Maybe there’s a thousand ways to define insanity. Maybe there’s really no way of defining insanity at all. Or worse, maybe I was what someone would call the pure definition of insanity. Oh God, what’s wrong with me? ● ● ●



Jay Drobot

Centenario

A. Ramírez

Coyoacán, Mexico, April, 1917

Centenario is awakened a half hour before sunrise by the rhythmic coughing of his mother in the outside. He rolls over slowly on the thin feather mattress, careful not to disturb his younger brother, Emeterio curled up beside him. He lies still in the darkness of the room savoring the quiet moment, except for the mouse-like sounds his mother makes as she prepares breakfast. He knows she barely slept the whole night, not from worry about this journey her oldest son is about to take, but from the constant ache that begins below her belly and flares up with no warning, attacking her with knifing pressure, working its way up to her chest, where it takes up permanent residence. She starts to cough slowly, her lungs almost bursting from the concentrated effort of stifling the racking explosions. Centenario rises from the bed and tip-toes out of the room. He approaches the makeshift outdoor kitchen and sees the crouched figure of his mother, who turns to smile at him and brings a finger to her lips, warning him not to wake his father. She wraps the rebozo around her head to ward off the morning chill as she maneuvers the coals in the brazier, trying to coax a fire out of the reluctant black pebbles, small and as hard as marbles. Centenario nods to her and goes off to begin his morning ablutions. He rinses his mouth with a clay jug filled with the cool yerba buena tea his mother keeps in a matching clay pitcher hanging above the washtub. He wets his head with water from the well that's already been drawn for him, plastering his oily black hair down with chipped and dirty fingernails. As he urinates in the ersatz outhouse, he can just make out his reflection in the broken shard of a crescent mirror balanced on the shelf above him.

His face is tanned and unremarkable, except for the eyes which are flecked with hazel and seem to pop out of their sockets against the dark skin. The high, flat forehead is exaggerated by dark and straight eyebrows, like twin arrows pointing in opposite directions. His nose is angular and broad at the base, doing its best to divide the eyes that seem, at first, to be too close together. The whole face is thrown askew by two full lips that are permanently pursed, as if in disapproval of the rest of the face, and a set of slightly crooked, albeit white, teeth. His arms are taut and slightly muscular from the farm work he has done since the age of ten, six years and counting, plowing the fields, planting the corn, tending to the other crops, and bearing to market on his broad back the baskets that his burro can't hold. He has traversed those four miles so often these last ten years, he could do it in his sleep. When he's done making the deliveries, he makes the trip home with all the provisions for the next few weeks. No matter how hard he works, his father still yells at him or strikes him on the back of

the head for what he calls laziness or for not carrying out a task the way he's told, saying, "You have no idea what I went through growing up on that farm in Cuernavaca with my father. You have it easy compared to me." What hurts Centenario the most is when his father adds, "I'll make a man out of you yet;" or, "I will beat the softness out of you even if it kills me!"

The last time he sustained a hard beating, he began to entertain thoughts of leaving. He told himself that he to get away before he committed the mortal sin of turning on his father in rage, before his spirit would finally be broken. He did not enjoy being treated like a wild farm animal. Better to be kicked by their mule, Tencha, than to be emasculated daily.

The crowing of a rooster in the yard breaks his reverie, and he can see the first rays of the sun licking at the twin peaks of Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl to the east, bathing the horizon in a golden light. He closes his eyes for a few seconds to engrave in his mind's eye the landscape and preserve it for future reference. As he opens his eyes, he sees a small, recumbent figure in the distant field. It appears to be staring directly at him and yawning. When it stretches its limbs, Centenario sees that it's a young coyote. With its mouth wide open, it seems to be smiling at him, mocking him. The coyote turns and runs away as if it suddenly remembered some errand it was sent on by its mother. Centenario recalls the story his mother told him about the nagual, about the native belief that everybody has an animal twin to guide him through life. His mother told him that the coyote might be his nagual, since they share the same hazel-flecked eyes. "You will know it when you see it," she always added.

“ He had to leave home and family.
In order to save his life, she was
forcing her son to leave.

Centenario hears his mother calling him to breakfast as he washes his hands, but he hesitates before turning, embarrassed by his morning erection. Three years before, when he had not quite entered puberty, his father sat him down and explained the changes his body would go through. He explained that the penis was not just for urinating, which was something Centenario already knew, having watched the farm animals mount each other in savage fornication. That was the summer his cousin, Adolfo got a leech stuck right to his culo, bleeding into the river and all over the rocks as he ran home, where his mother promptly grabbed him by the waist, pulled his shorts down, and placed a burning cigarette directly to his culito. The leech had ceased to live, and Adolfo was free.

What had surprised Centenario was that his penis had grown larger

than most of his friends' penises, something he discovered while bathing in the river with them that day. Someone in the family's past, an Austrian from the days of Emperor Maximilian, had blessed the gene pool with this bountiful gift. Rumor had it his paternal grandmother was La India Bonita, Maximilian's mistress, whom he kept stashed away for many years in a tiny house in Cuernavaca, only visiting her on every other Sunday.

One day, about a month ago, Centenario's father had chanced upon him among the corn stalks with his pants around his ankles, touching himself gently, feeling the weight of his genitals in the palm of his hand. He still remembered the violent slap, the smell of alcohol on his father's breath and the harsh words. "You lazy, no-good-for-nothing dog! Is this what you do when you should be harvesting the corn?"

His father kicked him repeatedly in the rump as Centenario hopped around struggling to pull his pants up. Centenario didn't answer his father's questions, but instead began to hate him for turning this innocent moment of discovery into something vulgar. That was the day the regular, hard beatings began and his father turned more and more to the solace of his tequila bottle. They became different people, going about their tasks silently and communicating through grunts or nods, not unlike their old mule, Tencha. Centenario became taciturn and distant, choosing not to speak to his two sisters and brother. As the father's drinking escalated, performed the work of two men; he never seemed to have enough time to complete all the tasks required of him, which angered his father even more. It was a hard decision to make, but it was his mother who took him aside one evening as she was rubbing aloe vera on the callouses on his hands and knees, and told him he had no choice. He had to leave home and family. In order to save his life, she was forcing her son to leave.

"You are smart and you are strong. You have the cunning of a coyote. There is a better life for you elsewhere," she pleaded.

"But, what about Rosaura and Emeterio and María Antonia? I can't bear the thought of Papá striking them for no reason."

"Don't worry," she said quickly. "They are still young. He doesn't dare touch them. It's not just you he has a problem with." She hesitated. "Since I started having problems with my stomach and below..." she stopped. "I give him my back at night. It's just too painful to be a wife to him."

This was the first time Centenario was hearing his mother share private information, and it made him feel adult, yet a bit ashamed at the same time.

"Your father's not happy. That is, I don't make him happy anymore," she added mournfully.

Centenario had been happy once, before he had left his childhood days behind and started to change into a man. He yearned to recapture that sense of greenness, that sense of freedom before there was too much information to glean. He had never considered the possibility that he would spend his days

and nights anywhere but in Coyoacán. Maybe it was a good idea, after all, to go away. Maybe his happiness lay elsewhere.

With that last thought in mind, he steels himself for the journey ahead. He walks over to where his mother is squatting beside the small fire, slapping out tortillas with yesterday's masa and stirring the atole in the small earthenware pot. He hears her coughing, loud raspy violences that rock her body back and forth.

"Mamá," he says, as he enters the small alcove of a kitchen, "you must see a doctor. You don't sound good. Please promise me you will see a doctor." She waves a hand at him as if to dismiss his entreaties.

Centenario touches her cheek. "I am serious. If you don't, who will be around to make me my tamales when I come to visit?"

She takes a deep breath, which helps her regain her composure. "Ton-tito," she smiles and smacks him gently on the leg, "always thinking only of yourself. You know I will always be right here in front of the coals, cooking and awaiting your return and your complaints. Now quickly, drink your atole and eat your breakfast. Get out of here before your father wakes up and discovers our plan."

'Our plan,' he thinks, 'as if we were revolucionarios planning a secret attack on the federales.' Not too far from the truth, in essence.

She hands him a warm pile of tortillas, a bowl of beans the way he likes them, with fresh chile, onions and tomatoes chopped generously into the mix, and the warm mug of atole, which he cuddles in an effort to warm his fingers. He chugs down the atole and spoons the beans into his mouth with the steaming tortillas as if it were his last meal, watching his mother's features as they constantly change form in the light of the fire. Once again, he closes his eyes and stores the image for future

Finishing his meal, he stands and stretches his limbs, uttering a low, guttural sound from the aches he feels in his lower back. His mother stands and puts a hand to his mouth, cocking her head in the direction of his father's small room. There's a faint murmur of someone calling out in sleep. She hands him a woolen poncho and a small straw bag containing several tortillas, a string of chorizos, a few ears of raw corn, three hard-boiled eggs, and a hunk of dried beef jerky.

"Mamá," he grumbles, "there's enough food here for Zapata's army. I'm only going to the center of Mexico, not the United States." He knows he might be depriving his siblings of a good meal later that day.

"No importa," she says, steering him out of the kitchen and towards the front door of the house. "You are still a growing boy and you need sustenance." He stops for a second and adjusts the rebozo around her shoulders, then places his palm gently on her cheek. For the first time, he notices how thin and fragile she seems and how he towers over her. She chokes back a tear, wanting to ap-

pear strong. She quickly puts her fingers together to make the sign of the cross with the rosary entwined in her hand. He kneels before her and bows his head as he receives her bendición. When she finishes, he stands and kisses her hand, then her cheek the way he was taught as a child.

"Mi chamaquito," she bursts into tears. "Cuídate. Y escríbenos si puedes." She presses the rosary into his hands and shoves him away from her. "Don't forget, we are survivors. You are a survivor." She turns swiftly, closing the door firmly behind her, adding, "Qué Dios te bendiga."

He takes a second to breathe in the aromatic scent of the jasmine bush which competes with the imposing odor of the oleander tree in front of the house. He hears a scraping noise to his right and turns to see the same coyote as earlier staring at him. The coyote takes off on a slow gallop down the dirt road that leads to the cobblestone streets and, eventually, the main artery to the center of the city. Centenario follows a short distance behind it. He stops at the Iglesia de San Juan Bautista in the main square of Coyoacán to pay his respects and to light a candle for a safe journey. At this early hour, he's the only person in the church, which is full of echoes and shadows that boomerang off the cobwebs. He kneels in one of the pews and prays silently, asking for guidance and strength as he embarks on a new life in the unknown world that lies ahead. The food in his stomach combines with the adrenaline of excitement, making him feel a twinge of uncertainty. He stands and slings the burlap bag with his meager possessions over his left shoulder. He takes hold of the bag of food in his right hand and steps outside the church to see that the sun has broken free of

its mountain tethers and is rising quickly. From the uppermost stone step where he stands, the landscape south, with its carpet of blood red bougainvillea bushes in bloom, resembles a huge inverted watermelon slice. Centenario takes the first halting step down the wide paving stones of the church, blesses himself and sets off quickly. ● ● ●



Tom Stock



Erin Paul

Sprinkler

Tom Stock

Fffffffttt fffffffttt. . . . fffffffttt. . . .
ffffffttt. . . . fffffffttt

The lawn sprinkler is the rhythm section
of summer's symphony of sultry dog days
trying in earnest to save the burning grass.

A woman,
dark in business suit,
walks past it,
pausing,
thinking so far back
to other similar, simpler days
when she would run
in joyful screams
barefoot
thru cool streams.
a moment
of doubt?
of longing?
of foolish wonder

at what the fuck she is doing in a business suit.
her high heels are killing her.

Dusty Covered Furniture in a House Painted Blue

Cheryl Holt

It's another rainy day in April and I find myself standing once again on the sidewalk in front of the house where you used to live. The rain is cold and falling hard against my umbrella. How long will I stand here this time; one hour, perhaps two? So many years have passed, yet it feels like only yesterday when I last saw you staring out the upstairs bedroom window. I always liked to think you were staring back at me, but I know the truth. I only just figured it out. Staring down at the rippling puddles, my mind begins to reflect back to the dark and distant April of 2007. April is known for its cold rain showers and dreary days, but no April seemed as cold and dreary as that one.

You and I had a special bond. You were my companion, lover, best friend, and soul mate. Early on, after a stressful workday there was no other place I'd rather be than with you. We had so many things in common and we laughed a lot. There was nothing more beautiful than your smile; nothing more giving than your embrace. As we became more wrapped up in the craziness of everyday life demands, things began to change. That's when the ugliness entered our lives; at least that's what I call it now.

Days would go by before I would see that beautiful smile. There was no happy greeting after a long, hard day at work. We would both just say we were tired; then ebb away from each other into separate corners of our own little world. Our interests started changing and we no longer had much in common so we started spending less time together without even a second thought. We were growing up so it was acceptable to grow apart, because it didn't mean we no longer loved each other, right? We never realized that as the gap between our hearts expanded, resentment and anger would fill the empty space between them. Greetings quickly became arguments. Tears would fill your eyes as those arguments became more frequent, and eventually I didn't even notice them. It's amazing how resentment and anger can cloak reality.

One year prior to that April day of 2007, we decided to take a break from our relationship in hopes of healing the damage that had been done. Slowly we began to focus on the problems and how to fix them. You wanted to talk about it; I didn't. Instead of talking about your feelings and what I perceived as emotional drama, I just wanted things to be as they were. I started showering you with expensive gifts and taking you to the best area restaurants in an effort to apologize. Although you seemed happier then, something still didn't seem right and we remained quite distant.

One bright, sunny spring day, while taking a walk together, you brought up in conversation about wanting to change the color of your house.

The current yellow hue was fading and making the house appear old and dirty. I decided that was the perfect opportunity to make an impression big enough to seal the old wounds and to begin all over again. I couldn't afford to replace the siding, but I could buy enough paint; besides, painting the entire house myself would mean more to the woman I love. I asked you what color you had in mind, and you said blue. You wanted a blue that wasn't too dark, yet wasn't too bright. You wanted a blue that was maybe a bit more toward the grey side of the color spectrum. I had made up my mind that I would find the perfect color to paint the house and win back my place in your world.

That fall was the perfect time to paint the house. The weather was ideal and I was able to leave my job early some days to work on it. Each day when you arrived home, you would smile and thank me. Then you would take a seat

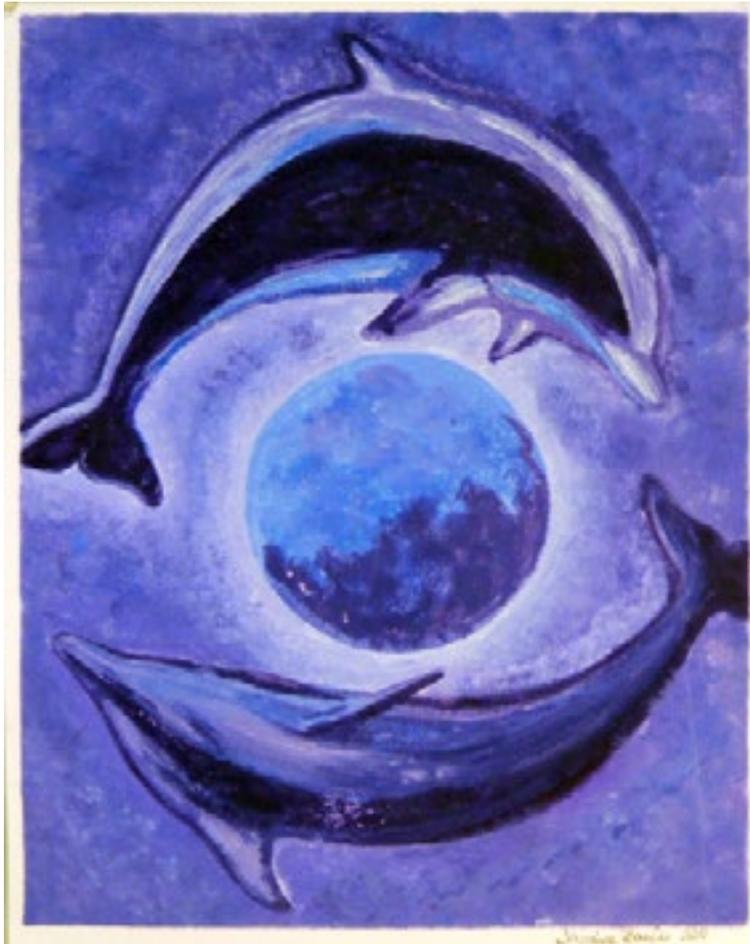
“ You wanted to talk
about it; I didn't.

by the upstairs bedroom window and stare outside, where you remained until I had left.

Painting the house became more of a chore as winter started taking over the fall. You and I rarely spent time together and I could feel old feelings of anger and resentment building up again as I started wondering why I was working so hard to finish it. I would yell at you, questioning why you were keeping yourself so isolated from me. "Whatever it is, suck it up!" or "Get over it!" were some of my preferred things to shout. When the tears flowed, I would change it to something like "You're so selfish!" Of course this only made things worse, but I didn't care because I believed I was right and you were the one with the problems. One of our last fights in January ended with, "Oh, here come the tears again, go ahead because they don't mean anything!" I finished painting the house, and left you alone, knowing things had not worked out the way I had hoped.

I tried calling you four times that dark, dismal, April day, but there was no answer. I took the familiar ride to your house and sat in the car for a while looking at the upstairs bedroom window, waiting for you to stare out in return. When you didn't, I walked up to the door and was surprised to find it unlocked. I called out your name, but you didn't answer so I thought maybe you were working late. I decided to check the house considering the unlocked door, and there I found you, lying lifeless on the bed; bottles of pills on the bedside table. Was it a final selfish act; or a way to escape the pain of a cruel and depressing world? If only I could have seen it through your eyes then, as I understand it now.

It's another rainy day in April and I find myself standing once again on the sidewalk in front of the house where you used to live. The blue paint streaked with areas of darkness from the saturation of the rain. Inside are clusters of dusty covered furniture and a seat by the upstairs bedroom window where you would sit and stare outside. I can almost see you there through the rain, but there's just an empty window surrounded by dampened siding. As I get ready to leave I think to myself, "How befitting you wanted the color blue, and I was the one who gave it to you." ● ● ●



Jasmine Baylis

Mi Amor Nicole Sowich

When we first met,
I knew you were a catch.
Your beautiful eyes,
Telling no lies.
You're wise beyond years,
Not afraid to shed tears.
Your kindness I want to treasure,
Cause no one will ever measure.
Your happiness is my own,
With you I have a home.
You make me so proud,
That I fly on a cloud.
My future is with you,
My one dream come true.



Xavier Goins

ARTWORK



Awaiting by Jasmine Baylis



Death from Above by Tiff Dygert



White Marble Carving by Jay Drobot



Empire by Tiff Dygert



Vigilance by Nicole Sowich



UVC Flourescent Mixed Media by Jay Drobot



White Ink on Black Paper by Jay Drobot



Fly High by Jasmine Baylis



Blurple View by Jasmine Baylis



Tea Logo by Tiff Dygert

Ode to Edward Hopper

Tom Stock

Somewhere on the edge of town, straddling the cusp of
day and night, a rooster crows.

Nighthawks retreat to their roost to sleep as the town
stretches, scratches and opens eyes.

Anytown.

Upstate rust belt main street brick buildings
catch the day's first harsh rays.

Stark sundials along deserted sidewalks measure
decades one day at a time.

Glancing over the horizon like a child peeking
rom under the bedcovers,

First light dallies until skyward momentum builds and
begins boldly brushing the chiaroscuro
in strokes of Yin and Yang.

Cross diagonals, nature's cubistic expression dividing
buildings by severe angles in
shades of black juxtaposed with imbued gold washes.

Not soft dappled sunspots of some deep sylvan glade,
noon softened, solar zenith realized.

All pretense and pretension burned away by the stark, too
yellow light which will not tolerate soft focus
but allow only blunt morning truth.

Old store fronts, earthy redbrick ochre become the canvas
for this painter as dawn's calling card is delivered.

But

It is the shadow that defines this science fiction landscape,
post-apocalyptic humanless stage
where Godot finally shows up.

It is the shadow that demarcates East and West
and where noon will chase all orientation and sense of
celestial direction underground.

It is the shadow that tempts, demands the eye to look
deeper for detail in the unexposed film
of this camera obscura.

A solitary black bird on a wire attempts warmth in the
yawning, weak, still sleepy sun.

Vacant, the electric blue sky holds promise.

Sporadic noiseless cars appear like smooth,
gliding phantoms

Casting off glinting metallic glass diamond shards
into the vacuum like surroundings

Until

They disappear down surreal streets where
perspective plays tricks.

The Bread Truck delivers future toast to Greasy Spoons
who make ready for Blue Collars.

Bundles of fresh newsprint sit in front of news room facades
waiting to inform the world of what happened yesterday.

Upended garbage cans wait to be retrieved
and refilled with the detritus of the day.

Slowly,

The conscious world revives,

Wakes from what dreams they shared last night.



Shunyu Yao

Poppy Fields and Prince Harry

Zachary P. Vercz

I was jostled back and forth in the turret of the truck as our convoy rumbled over the sand covered plains of the Helmand desert. The tobacco stung against the inside of my lip and gums. The rush from the nicotine kept me awake and alert. The sun was sinking off in the horizon. The cool desert air of the evening felt refreshing after having to endure temperatures upward of 100 degrees during the day. The smell of diesel fumes filled the air from the vehicles ahead and behind me. Tires kicked up sand and dust as we plunged forward. I pulled my balaclava up around my face and neck to protect me from the wind and sand. I grabbed ahold of the butt of my machine gun attempting to balance myself in the turret as the LVSR traversed over the uneven, rough desert terrain. Bedouins had set up camp off in the distance next to a gigantic boulder sticking up out of the sand. Their sheep wandered about aimlessly around the stone marker. I stared about at the lunar landscape marveling at the blood red light appearing from in between the clouds of the evening sky.

The convoy emerged out of the desert wasteland and approached the outer edges of the village of Marjah later in the evening. We were halted by a caravan of camels that were crossing the road on the outskirts of the village. The long column of animals took their time as they shuffled across the beaten dirt road spitting in between their high pitched moans. Off to the left of the road a young local boy was washing in the nearby creek while his donkey was tied to a pole with water jugs strapped to its back. The houses of Marjah were mostly made up of dry clay, mud, and stone. Old sheet metal and scrap material adorned most of the dwellings. Green shrubs and tall draping trees dotted the scenery. There were no street lamps or electricity as barrel fires burned outside along the road. An old Afghan man stood outside the front door of his house with his cane. He was dressed in a black robe and turban. His beard was tinted with orange dye and his fingernails were decorated with orange paint. He looked up at us with a disdain in his black eyes as we passed by. Marjah was heavily infiltrated with Taliban and an anxious nervousness began to grow in my stomach as our convoy slowly maneuvered through the roads and side streets of the village.

The sun had completely disappeared and was replaced by a sliver of moonlight peering through the night sky. Our convoy began to travel at a snail's pace through the village due to the lack of vision. I gripped the M240 and looked about intently, hunched down in the turret. I found myself focusing on the dark windows of the homes that lined the road. I could feel their eyes peering down at the passing trucks. The humming of the diesel engines was the only noise that could be heard in a village that very quickly turned as if it were a

ghost town.

The screeching sound of sheering metal stung my ears as a smoke cloud rushed passed my head. It felt as if my ear drums had burst when I felt the heat from the explosion in front of me. With ringing ears and blurred vision I tried to gather my wits to comprehend what exactly had happened. When the smoke, dust and debris settled the MRAP traveling ahead lay on its side in a ditch, burning. The front tire had been launched across the road and struck an Afghan home, crashing through its walls. The MRAPS front end lay in a heap of twisted debris. The cry from wounded Marines inside echoed through the night.

The radio screeched and screamed as my truck was ordered to the rear of the convoy to provide security. My driver turned the LVSR around, abruptly racing to the rear of the column. We passed by the Wrecker as it raced up to the IED site in an attempt to pull the MRAP out of the ditch. Over the loudspeakers of the village mosque, prayer music began to play. The village appeared to be coming back to life. The LVSR positioned itself horizontally, blocking off the road to the rear end of the convoy. Racking the bolt back on my 240, I strained my eyes trying to look through the darkness to witness any enemy activity. I stood ready to fire as I watched the outline of trees swaying in the wind. The eerie mosque music seemed as if it were growing ever louder.

An eternity seemed to pass within only a few moments. The adrenaline rush mixed with fear was something I had never quite experienced before. To my rear, the whizzing blades of the medevac could be heard approaching out of the night sky. Villagers started to appear out of their houses. The platoon Sergeant could be heard screaming Pashtun at them to get back and to stay in their homes. The chopper landed, kicking up dirt and debris to the right of the blast site. Working quickly, they loaded the wounded Marines onto the chopper, taking off as quickly as it appeared. The noise from the chopper blades slowly disappeared off in the distance.

The Wrecker and a group of Marines worked diligently in an attempt to wench the MRAP up out of the ditch. Some villagers began to approach my position through the dark. In shooting a pen flare at them I let them know not to come any further. I heard sporadic gunfire to my rear down the road about a mile at the front end of the convoy. A cold sweat overcame my body. The recovery effort was taking too long and my nerves were amplified. I thought I kept seeing random movement under the cover of the night but could not tell if my eyes were playing tricks on me. Out of the depths of the darkness a car with no headlights appeared. It was rapidly approaching towards me. Holding the trigger down, I fired two quick bursts at the front of the car. The flame from the muzzle of the machine gun lit up the sky as the weapon punched back repeatedly against my shoulder. The vehicle stopped dead. I could hear the doors of the car fly open and the occupants scurrying to get away. The prayer music still continued to play over the loudspeakers of the mosque echoing off the buildings

that surrounded us.

A call over the radio finally squawked out. The Wrecker crew had successfully retrieved the MRAP and was able to hook up for a tow. We would finally be moving out. Relief came over me as the LVSR straightened out and began to lurch forward to meet up with the rest of the convoy. We rolled out of Marjah under the cover of darkness as I felt I had escaped with my life.

Tired beyond exhaustion we continued on. The convoy traveled fast, not stopping for traffic or other vehicles that were unlucky enough to get in our way. We headed north, finally reaching paved roads as the morning sun rose up into the sky. I admired the scenery that passed by. Fields of crops, poppy, and hemp. Sporadic dwellings, ANA checkpoints riddled with bullet holes. Sheep and camels roamed about as children played on old burnt up Russian tanks. One small village possessed an old Ferris wheel in the center of town. As we reached further to the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, an ancient castle built by Alexander the Great dominated the skyline off to the distance on a high bluff. I thought about the great armies that had traveled the same terrain before me, the armies of Alexander the Great, the Mongols, the British Empire and the Soviet Union. Afghanistan truly was a land steeped in a history of bloodshed and warfare.

We approached the bridge leading into the entrance of the ancient city of Lashkar Gah. The ANA checkpoint there had been hit by a suicide car bomb the day prior, and blood was still stained on the asphalt crimson red and blackened by the blown up concrete barriers. The destroyed vehicles were pushed off to the side of the road in heaps of twisted metal. The local there on post waved us through as he gripped his AK47. Our convoy traveled over the Helmand River into the thousand year old capitol of the Province. The old bridge buckled under the weight of our trucks and I could hear stones falling and splashing into the river below.

We finally entered the city as if we were conquering 21st century crusaders. Young children ran up to our trucks waving and asking for food.

The ancient city smelled of smoke and garbage. Men stood on rooftops looking as some Afghan women pulled their shawls, hiding their face down, pointing and waving. The city was bustling with activity as bazaars and markets were full. The roads were jam packed with carts being pulled by animals and out-dated trucks and cars, some



Xavier Goins

with Mercedes symbols tacked on the front of them. Stray animals lurked about everywhere.

We came to the center of the city passing by the famous Mosque that towered over the surrounding buildings. Various old monuments littered the streets. A water fountain with a world globe surrounded by doves stood in the center of the main traffic circle. Reaching the other side of the city we approached the NATO base located within a compound. The convoy approached the huge barricades of the base waiting for permission to enter. A mob of Afghan children surrounded our trucks as we waited outside the base. They screamed and yelled and begged. We gave them what little food and water we had left in our trucks and some of us even took pictures with them. I threw down my last two bottles of water to a beautiful young Afghan girl who was holding onto the hands of her two little brothers.

After being cleared our vehicles rumbled into the tiny compound as the huge metal doors closed behind us after entering. We maneuvered through the checkpoints and barriers reaching the staging area. I finally was able to take off my helmet and plate carrier and hung them up on the side of the turret. I beat the dust and sand off of my uniform and wiped the sweat from my forehead as I reached into my cargo pocket and pulled out my cover. Hopping down off the truck I watched as the generators, refrigeration units, water, fuel and other necessities we had traveled so far to deliver were offloaded.

Tired, hungry, sore and filthy I walked to the chow hall located within the compound. It was filled with dozens of different NATO troops from all over the world. Estonians, Swedes, Canadians, Poles, Germans, Bahrainis, Georgians, and British. In the corner of the chow hall was even Prince Harry dining with his unit. People were crowding around him to shake his hand and get a glimpse of the famous Royal Family member. I finished my hot meal and returned to my truck.

After checking over my gear I climbed up into the cab. I gazed up into the sky, watching the clouds pass by from the opening of the turret. I thought about home, I thought about poppy fields and Prince Harry. I listened to the sounds of stray dogs barking and the calls to prayer from the mosques around the city.

“When you’re wounded an’ left on Afghanistan’s plains,
An’ the women come out to cut up your remains,
Just roll to your rifle an’ blow out your brains,
An’ go to your Gawd like a soldier”

- Rudyard Kipling -



Songbird

Rebecca Young

The icy wind sent a chill through my broken body right down to my bones. It rocked the cage I was crouched in which dangled precariously over the mountain peaks. The branch I was settled upon creaked with every gust of the arctic air. It howled through the iron bars, and I feared that I could topple over the edge at any given moment. My life was hanging in the balance, and I had no control over any of it. The breeze carried my mother's laughter straight to me, and sent it dancing around my ears.

"Would you like to come out now, munchkin? Did you learn your lesson?" She cackled at me from the very towers that taunted and tortured me for an eternity.

"Mama, please! I'm gonna die up here if you don't let me out!" That wasn't the first time I've had to beg and plead for my life.

"Oh, but what if you didn't learn anything? You expect me to just soar on over there and let you out, just for you to do it again? I don't think so." She sounded so full of herself. I could see it without her in my sight; that smirk she wore like an animal wears its fur. It was always there whenever I did something wrong, which was all the time in her eyes.

"Wipe that look off of your face unless you want a longer sentence in that cage of yours. At this rate, I might as well just let you move in there. Although, I'm not so sure how long that branch will hold all of your weight, especially with the hungry beasts yearning for your flesh below. After all, that tree you're hanging on is getting tired of your presence." Her words stung, but I was used to it. Some would be appalled if their own mother spoke to them this way.

Moonlight cascaded onto my barely visible silhouette after reemerging from behind some clouds.

"Well, are you frightened? You always were just like a timid little bird. Yes, just a shy little songbird, who sits in a cage and refuses to sing," She laughed on and on, harassing me with all of her being.

My heart raced and I thought maybe plummeting to my death wouldn't be so bad in end. Sure, I'd be ripped limb from limb and devoured by some hairy beast who has no proper name. People in these parts believe it was bad luck to name a creature as hideous and evil as the ones which lie below me, waiting for my carcass to be thrown down and end their starving. The townsfolk thought mentioning it alone would curse them, and that they would be hunted by the creature for the remainder of their lives.

It was a long drop, high above the mountain peaks. Tree trunks seemed to stretch on for ages, maybe even never ending. Clouds enclosed the castle's towers, giving even the building itself an eerie appearance. After being trapped

in the cage for three days, the seemingly non-existent ground felt almost inviting.

The tree limb let out a long, low moan. That was the only warning I had before it snapped clean off at the middle and I went tumbling downward, not even giving me a chance to scream. I rattled about in my cage, and my mother's laughter echoed through the atmosphere. The towers faded from view and mountain ridges grew before my eyes. It was a dizzying fall; my surroundings spinning around me at great speed. The bars broke and warped on impact, freeing me. I sat up, stunned, with a throbbing in the back of my skull. To my surprise I wasn't dead, nor injured badly. I tried to get to my feet, but my legs were weak and fell out from under me.

I was sure I was about to be attacked and devoured by some ravenous beasts so I made haste to try and seek shelter. I was surrounded by the trunks of trees so enormous they made me feel a bit claustrophobic. Up ahead I spotted a clearing, like a meadow of sorts. A strange light shone down through the branches above me, giving me warmth I never before experienced. I had only heard of the mysterious light before; the Elders would tell stories of it's magnificent heat and blinding brightness. They called it the Sun. In the clouds we lived in constant darkness, with only moonlight to illuminate our world. The Elders were the only ones allowed to descend from the sky, only to retrieve provisions from the secret merchants below. I tried making it to my feet once more before realizing it was no use. Sitting in a tiny cage with hardly enough room to turn around in made me numb.

The snapping of twigs from behind me took me by surprise, and I was positive it was one of the animals my mother had warned me about.

"Are you alright over there?" A large man with a chocolate colored beard that hung to his belly lodged his ax into the ground. Near him stood a young man, not much older than myself, who peered at me, blushing.

"Well, you see sir, I fell from the very top of this tree," I said, motioning to my left. "I was higher than the mountain tops, and I lived in the castle which floats in the clouds. I was hung from the branches in that cage for punishment..." I stopped short, noticing the odd looks they were giving me.

"Looks to me like she hit her head," the younger man said.

"Yeah, I think we better take her back to the cabin and let her rest. Seems like she's had a rough day," the other one said in a hushed tone.

Before I knew it, I was being scooped up into the arms of a boy I had just met, who was taking me somewhere unfamiliar and strange. I flailed about, demanding that he put me back where he found me until I was too exhausted to continue.

"Now that you've settled down a bit, I'd like to introduce myself. My name's Carter Thornridge, and this here's my Pa, Finn. How about you, darling?"

I blushed. Darling. Who does he think he is?

"I'm Sparrow."

"Just Sparrow?"

"That's all I've ever been called," I replied. My mother rarely ever called me by my name, using only nicknames or insults. I had grown numb to it after so long.

"Well that might be just the prettiest name I've ever heard," Carter said, winking at me.

I was unsure what to think of all these gestures. I had only been exposed to boys once or twice my entire life, and they were certainly nothing to brag about. I thought all of them were smelly, annoying creatures who wanted nothing more than to chase me about throwing pebbles and leaves in my hair. This one was different. He had gentle green eyes and dark hair that was highlighted by the sun. His arms were strong, but not rough, and he smiled at me. I don't think anyone ever smiled at me before.

"Son, why don't you take her on home to your Ma? She'll know how to fix her up. I'll be home shortly, I just wanna finish up this work we started," Finn said.

Carter carried me to his home without any protest. We talked about his family and how they lived. It all seemed so different from what I was used to. Leaves tumbled about his feet as he walked. They were all different colors; reds, yellows, oranges. The only leaves I had seen before were brown and dead, and had fallen off of plants brought to us by the Elders. This world was so new to me; but even the grass was just like how it had been when it had been brought to the clouds for the children to see. We weren't allowed to touch it, fearing it would bring us bad luck.

"Ma should have dinner ready by the time we get back," Carter said as he looked to the sky. "It must be getting late."

"How can you tell?"

"Just look at the sun," he said, smiling. "See how it's going down?" He nodded in the direction of the ball of light.

"You must not look at it, it will blind you!" I scolded.

Carter laughed, looking at me as though I was the funniest thing he had ever seen.

"Then I guess I'll take your word for it, little Sparrow."

The light in the world seemed to be vanishing as we walked. Shadows of the trees danced in the cool breeze, sending a shiver up my spine. I hated the darkness; moonlight was all I had to look forward to, but it was often blocked by the clouds. It seems this world was plagued by darkness, too, but not like I'm used to.

"We're home," Carter said.

Before us lie a little house, made from pieces of the tree trunks. A plume of wispy, black smoke rose from the roof. Candles burned on each window sill.

"It's much smaller than my castle," I mumbled.

Carter frowned, not knowing what to think of me.

"Well, darling, I'm afraid you'll have to get used to something with less rooms and towers, at least for a little while," he said.

"A little while? You don't mean you'll send me back up there?" I asked, pointing to the black skies above.

Just then a woman came to the door, her forehead lined with worry. Her golden hair was braided like a crown around her head, the same color as the accents of her emerald dress. She must be their queen, I thought.

"Back early, Carter? Without your father?"

"Yes, Ma," he said, releasing me from his arms so I could try standing on my own. "Pa wanted to chop some more wood, but he'll be back before it gets too dark."

"And who is this?" the woman said, holding my face with a firm grip.

"I am Sparrow, Your Grace. I come from the Sky Kingdom, and am daughter of King Titus and Queen Ambelu," I said, bowing.

"I am no queen, but I could get used to being treated like one," she said with a grin. "Please, call me Helena. Now what is your reason for being here, Princess of the Sky Kingdom?"

"I fell from the skies after hanging in a cage on a tree. It was my mother's way of punishing me for freeing a young boy she took prisoner. He stole a loaf of bread, and she was planning on having him executed. I can't go back up there, for they will kill me out of fear of being cursed themselves,"

"Well, it sounds like you've had quite the fall. Why don't you come on in, make yourself at home. Carter, get some of the extra blankets and make the bed in the spare room, I want her to be as comfortable as possible," Helena said.

"Yes, Ma," Carter said, and held out his hand to me. "I'll give you the grand tour,"

Carter led me through the dwelling, passing through surprisingly spacious rooms. The main living area held a large wooden table, chairs, and a warm fireplace. Old paintings hung on the walls, and rugs covered the hardwood floors. It was much more inviting than the cold stone building I had lived in since I was born.

The sky has grown as black as pitch, and the moon rose high in the sky. It peeked out from the clouds and stars, as though she was mocking me. I longed to be up there once more, if only that was possible elsewhere than the Sky Kingdom. I knew I could never return; I would never witness the beauty of floating with the clouds again, nor being able to reach out to the moon and nearly grasp her cratered surface.

Helena's voice broke me away from my solemn thoughts to return me to the mysterious life on the ground.

"Carter, can you help me with the shutters?"

"Shutters?" I asked, curious about the routines people have in this world.

"Yes, dear, they cover the windows. They're to keep predators from getting in. We only do this on nights that have a full moon."

"So the monsters are real?"

"The only monsters here are the ones that live inside us," Helena said. She looked uneasy, nervous even.

"By predators she means bears or mountain lions, right Ma?" Carter asked, looking in Helena's direction.

"Certainly. Now, could you secure the door? I'm going to check the rest of the windows."

I watched as Carter latched the door and placed heavy pieces of wood across the middle.

"Why are you doing that?" I asked, pointing to the wood.

"These boards are to keep the door from coming open, in case of an attack,"

"Boards," I muttered to myself. I wanted to remember all of the strange objects they had here, in case I was to see my people again one day.

"You don't have them where you come from?" he asked.

I shook my head. I could tell he looked frightened for some reason.

"What about Finn? Wasn't he going to come back?" I questioned.

"He'll be fine. He can find shelter for the night. Now how about you go sit down, we'll have dinner shortly," Helena said, coming from the other room.

I was intrigued by the ways of these mysterious people. They ate food that consisted mostly of a watered-down broth with a few vegetables thrown into it. Even after I ate that and a slice of bread, I was still hungry. I was used to meals that consisted of several dishes, mostly foods that I was told were considered delicacies below the clouds. It seemed to me that these people had nothing of the sort.

"So, Sparrow, you said you were a princess?" Helena inquired.

"Yes, but I have no power. I lived in the castle, attended meals, and went to dances, but I was never truly treated as such. Not since my father passed, at least." I said.

"Oh, I'm so sorry,"

"No need. My father had kept my mother from inflicting cruel punishments upon me, but after he was gone, she did anything she pleased. To the public, she was magnificent. But to her own daughter, she was anything but. That is why I'm here, you know. I'm just surprised that the fall didn't kill me."

Helena and Carter were silent for a time. I knew they were unsure of me.

A loud knocking at the door startled everyone, and I stood, ready to answer it.

"Sparrow, sit down," Carter commanded.

"Who are you to think you can give me orders?" I said.

"Please," he said. "Please sit down."

I did so without hesitation, embarrassed at my outburst.

As the knocking continued, it grew increasingly louder and more demanding. Before long I was afraid the door would just burst open.

But then, it stopped.

Carter rose from his seat and walked to the door. He checked the lock to make sure it was still properly secured, and leaned a chair against the doorknob.

"I think it would be best if we all slept out here tonight," Helena said.

"I don't understand," I said.

"Hopefully you won't need to." She began closing the doors to the other rooms, shutting them almost silently.

"Was it the bears that you spoke of? The mountain lions?" I asked Carter.

"I suppose it could be," he replied.

"I'm not a child, you know. I can handle the truth. I would like to know just what is going on around here." My voice sounded surprisingly stern.

After a long pause, he finally spoke.

In hushed tones he replied with, "The beasts you were warned of are real. They emerge with the full moon. My ma's words were not untrue; the monsters do reside within us."

I realized that was the best answer I was going to receive.

A long, low howl drifted through the air. It seemed so close, almost as if it was inside the cabin. I never heard anything like it, and I could only imagine the creature that it escaped from.

Carter sunk to his knees, covering his ears. I rushed to his aid, but when I grabbed his shoulders, he snarled at me, teeth bared. His teeth seemed three times their normal size, his eyes a dark shade of amber. Within a split second he was back to normal, so I just believed I was delusional from the fall.

"You have to get out. I want you to run, and never come back. But don't let him see you," Carter said, shoving me toward the door. Helena came running from the other room to stop him.

"Carter, you know what you need to do, she knows too much," Helena cried.

"I won't. I can't!"

He unlatched the door and tore the boards away from the frame, flinging it open before I could register what was going on, and threw me onto the dirt. The moonlight cast an eerie glow across the land, revealing the figure before me.

"Sparrow?"

It was Finn. He was holding his ax in one hand, and dragging a cart full of wood with the other. These people were savages; they murdered even the trees.

"What's the matter, little bird? Are you trying to fly away?"

He stepped out of the shadows and I could see the fur that now covered his body, the same color as his chocolate beard. His eyes shifted just like Carter's. Curved claws grew from the ends of his fingertips.

Pure instinct made me let of a piercing shriek. All I could do was hope that someone, anyone, could hear my desperate cry for help. Howls came from inside the house, and I knew it was only a matter of time before I met my demise. The tales of hideous creatures were no longer just a legend, but a living nightmare.

Finn approached me with a snarl, keeping his claws curled around the wooden handle of his hatchet.

I backed away, not realizing I was cornering myself further. My hand touched the rough bark of a tree, but I wasn't about to give up just yet.

He came at me, swinging his ax wildly. I waited until the last possible second before ducking my head out of the path of the blade. He hit the tree, lodging the ax deep into tree's flesh. As he tried his best to loosen his weapon from the wood, I jumped on his back and clawed at his face. I shrieked like a banshee, but I knew I was running out of options.

Suddenly, the sound of hundreds of beating wings filled the crisp air. I looked about to find the source of the noise, and I wasn't at all prepared for what I was about to see.

A swarm of bats dove in my direction. I couldn't see amongst the black cloud of wings, so I did my best to cover my head. At some point I must have lost my balance and fallen off of Finn's shoulders. The ground was once again unforgiving as I tumbled onto the earth. Finn, Helena, and Carter were all howling in pain as the horde of bats tore at them with their tiny teeth.

I heard the wings again, louder this time, and strained to find the next drove of creatures in the sky. Instead, my mother swooped down through the night with the wings of a bat, her laughter echoing throughout the trees.

"So now, little songbird, you decide to sing?"

Before I knew it, I was secured in the talon-like hands of the queen, soaring back to the clouds above. The earth below shrunk out of sight, the smoke from the cabin's chimney disappearing altogether. Snowflakes floated past, dancing on my eyelashes for mere moments. I was flooded with relief, as well as terror.

"You saved me, mother," I whispered.

"Have you figured out yet who the monsters really are?" she asked, and cackled to the moon. ● ● ●

Time

Nicole Sowich

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Years can go by | All the right things |
| In the blink of an eye | For once the phone rings |
| Wondering when | You need to be set |
| If it's ever been | Not caught in the net |
| Told before | Ready to go |
| Yet not anymore | But you said no |
| Death is like life | Didn't give me a chance |
| Without any strife | No time for romance |
| Waiting for one | Laying on the floor |
| Once it is done | Shutting the door |
| Forever to fold | Hoping to heal |
| 'Cause there's nothing to hold | Not sure what to feel |
| Catching the slack | Life is a snitch |
| Trying to hold back | Fighting the glitch |
| Nothing to know | Frozen to sound |
| Yet forever known | Already found |
| So take your time | Another way out |
| Find the right rhyme | Always in doubt |
| Listen to all | Not sure which way |
| But don't take the fall | Cause they always say |
| Watch your step | Time is like sand |
| Make sure you kept | Going through the hand |



Xavier Goins

The Drive

Austin Anna

A cannon fired, the shockwave passing through the ground and startling me. More fired after, one by one. All of us men sat behind a tree line that provided some cover from the enemy cannons firing at us from the small clump of trees on the other side of mile long field. I heard mumbling to my left. The words I could make out were "God, please don't let me die." I could not hear the rest of his prayer that seemed to last forever. I turned to the left and saw a young kid no more than 16 years of age. He clenched his musket and took out his bayonet, and on the dirt in front of him he drew a cross and placed his hand on it. He had almost started to cry. It was not from sadness, even though we all had someone back home.

The person I remembered from back home was my ma, seeing her little boy march off into the distance without as much as a goodbye. Her face was red, and it was hot that day, and the smell of her famous pie kept hitting my nose off and on with the wind. I remember her getting smaller and smaller until I could not see anymore. Another cannon fired and I got back to reality. I turned away from the boy that had drew the cross in the dirt. I saw some more gray soldiers off to the right. It seemed endless, rows and rows of uniformed men. I tugged at my shouldered blanket and made sure it was tight. All of them including me were crouched on one knee, resting and waiting for the order to move at any notice. I have to admit every soldier including me was scared. We all knew what was ahead of us, a march over an open field with cannons looking right at you, and as you get closer you will take musket fire from Yankee muskets.

I took out a picture that my pa gave to me when he died of the fever. It was an old crumpled photograph of him in his US army uniform from the Mexican war. He told me all kinds of stories of battles and his buddies. One story was when he and his buddy were on guard duty, and a Mexican scout walked up to them and asked for some food and drink. My dad told me he looked like as thin as my uncle's jerky. So my dad gave him some meat and the Mexican gave him some Mexican money that my dad kept until he died. He passed it down to me. I never spent it.

The barrage lifted slightly as a general came to us.

"Rise for Virginia," he said. "Rise for your family, rise for your sweethearts and let the yanks know we will not go quietly back to Virginia." All of the men rose to their feet and put their muskets at shoulder arms. The lines formed and we went from the shade of the trees to the scorching sun of the open field.

"FIX BAYONETS!" screamed a general and everyone put their bayonets

on their muskets. I took mine out from the worn leather scabbard and put it on my musket. It had been a long time since we had to put on our bayonets. We put them on once for a parade in Richmond before going off to Manassas Junction. They did look pretty then.

"FORWARD!" he yelled as other officers echoed the order to the companies. "MARCH!"

We started to walk forward into the long open field. We did not march fast, I noticed, we marched at a normal marching pace that we used every day almost. A cannon fired again but this time it was not ours. The shell hit the ground by two soldiers and they flew into the air and hit the ground dead. Dirt flew up as another shell hit the ground and it sprayed me and the rest of the company. I reached into my haversack and felt the Mexican money that my pa had. I started to think about his face on his death bed, so calm and content with what he had done in life, as he said "I done purty good in life". I thought at least died with a smile on his face.

We got toward a fence that was between us and the stonewall, where the yanks were laying down. Another cannon went off and hit about five feet in front of me knocking me down into the tall grass and also knocking down the fence. I got back up immediately and ran to catch up with my company. I loaded my musket and saw the Union infantry rise and fire into us. A line of gray men fell down dead or wounded. I aimed and fired back and hit young boy in the arm. We all started to run forward as I saw a general have his sword up with his hat on it leading everyone toward the stonewall. He was the first to reach it standing proudly. "Turn the cannons on them," I heard him say as he went down by a cannon wheel. I reloaded as quickly as I could and fired again, hitting an officer on a horse. I moved toward the wall and felt a pain in my leg and saw blood. I fell down to the ground as I saw a group of men die from a cannon canister fire that put holes in them and passed through them. I grabbed my musket and started to lean on it, trying to get away from the fighting. Then I got another pain in my back and fell again, but this time I couldn't feel my legs. I turned and saw the boy I watched earlier take a musket ball to the face. Blood flew from his open hole where his brain used to be. I fell back down and looked toward the sky and saw my pa welcoming me up to heaven and I smiled when I saw him. ● ● ●

Reminiscent

Brittany Purcell



Xavier Goins

Mom's hand was on Dad's knee and we were all eating ice cream.

Chocolate and vanilla swirl leaked from the cracks of my mouth.

Mom told us to keep a close ear for the tree frogs that hid in the tops of the trees.

I could never find them.

My mind ran circles around the buzzing of locusts that sang in the

distance and of the roads that followed the weeping willows.

My father would tell tales from his childhood while Mom, head out the window, caught the moon in her hands.

We all hung off of every word that he spoke, even though he'd told us the same story thousands of times.

Nikki hummed to some tune that was stuck in her head and my mother would follow suit.

We'd always end up at the same place, past Nine Mile Creek with the infamous thirteen curves, back to Shove Park.

My mother would offer up the idea of going to swing.

Courtney and Nikki jumped out of their seats from the excitement that electrocuted them.

Mom stood with flowers in her hair, dancing with the fireflies that surrounded her.

My father leaned against his red beat up Chevy truck, his arms folded, smiling.

I ran over to him, asked him if he wanted to play.

He would throw me over his shoulders and lift me above the playground. Back then, he was so big.

Everything was so big.

And I was so small.

He would await for me on both knees, hands ready to grab me at the bottom of the slide with a hug that swung me around and around.

Courtney and Nikki leaped from the top of the swing to chase after Mom.

They left a storm of dust and pebbles in the air behind them.

I saw the wind run through my

mother's hair, short curls of golden brown that were rarely ever out of place.

My mother's laugh echoed through a maze of branches and leaves.

She rolled the bottoms of her faded farmer jeans and tiptoed through the stream.

And my God, my father looked at her with stars in his eyes.

Her scarf, so perfectly wrapped around her neck, hung low enough to trace shapes into the water's surface.

Her arms, outstretched, caught Courtney in the air.

Photo by Anonymous

She beamed with excitement, the light that now became of the night sky shined blue into her eyes.

Nikki giggled, throwing her hands through the running water.

She searched for rocks that she could skip against the creek.

I laid back, my head surrounded by tall blades of un-mowed grass.

Breathing in the innocence of the air. ● ● ●

My Angels Theresa Guyer

Their love is unconditional, these angels sent to me from above.
They make my life worthwhile.
They are my life force, because without them there
would be no reason for me.

My arch-angel is strong, brave, kind, loving and protective.
All things that help build the character for a good man.
His strength and bravery surpasses that of a child.
His kind and loving nature is unending and make others love him in return.
His protectiveness, although a bit much
at times for a child, makes me feel safe.

My miracle angel is sensitive, sweet, strong minded,
and smart with a big heart.
All things that help build the character for a good man.
His sensitivity and big heart give him the capacity
to feel others' pain and feel for them.
His smart and strong minded nature is always growing and proving
he will not be the one to be made a fool of.
His sweetness is that of fine chocolate
and makes it hard for anyone to get enough of him.

I am blessed to have these angels in my life.
I am proud and honored to be given charge of my angels who call me mom.



Left and Above Photo by Shunyu Yao



Love and Heartbreak

Marissa Mundy

She sits on her bed with her cell laying at the end, its screen being the only source of dull light. Tears fell from her eyes and soaked the pillow she held to her chest. Almost an entire year wasted filled with drama, the ups and downs. Sure it had its moments, but right now it all came crashing to an end. Her phone buzzed and there it was, a message from the one person she really didn't want to hear from right now. She gripped her phone angrily in her hand and for a brief moment thought of throwing it against the wall.

Several minutes had passed and she hadn't received any more texts. She wasn't sure if she should feel relieved or angry that the person on the other end of that message wasn't trying harder. She set her cell on the stand beside her bed and ran her fingers through her long tangled hair. There would be no sleep tonight. Without realizing what she was doing she snapped the rubber band that she always wore around her wrist. She looked down to see the bright red welt forming on the inside of her wrist. Just above that were tiny white lines that she had traced over a million times with her finger tips (and about a year before this, a blade).

After endless hours of tossing and turning the alarm finally sounded; time for school. She would undoubtedly be there. They would pass in the hall and she would either look at her apologetically or not even spare a passing glance. Her stomach protested at the breakfast table and she wasn't sure that she wanted to ever step foot in school again. Her parents shot worried looks to each other and the tension in the room was thick. She shot to her feet and ran into the bathroom. If she couldn't hold it together at home she wasn't sure how she would ever manage to make it through the school day. She threw cold water on her face to help compose herself and looked at herself in the mirror. She was a bit pale but she had a geometry test she couldn't afford to miss. A couple of deep breaths and she felt calm enough to leave the bathroom.

These were the same old halls and the same old building and classrooms that she had walked past so many times before, yet now they all seemed so different somehow. Maybe before she had been so distracted and caught up in her own little world that she hadn't had time to take everything in clearly. Holding her breath step by step, she slowly made it to her locker, keeping an eye out the entire time for the one who had broken her heart. She needed to clear her head. If she didn't pass this geometry test or she would be benched during her next swim meet this weekend and her coach would not be happy with her. She went the long way to class to clear her head, and as she rounded the corner there she was, the one that broke her heart. Panic began to set in, and before she could turn to take a different way to class she was spotted.

She made her way to her classroom. Her body felt like lead and she had to keep telling herself to breath. She walked passed her and almost sighed in relief when she finally heard her speak, "I need to talk to you." She kept walking, wanting to turn around. She wanted to say something. She willed words to come out, but all she could do was keep moving forward. She felt a fresh wave of tears threaten to spill from her eyes and shook her head to gain her composure back. Test first and then you can worry about what to do, she thought to herself. The test seemed easy enough but sometimes when you feel like you have something in the bag you don't.

The rest of the day her classes seemed to drag on and she paid more attention than usual trying to keep her thoughts at bay. She didn't know what she would do or how she would ever get past this. The person she wanted to talk to and who she would always go to for guidance had suddenly become the one she needed to be away from. She had never felt more alone. The bell for lunch rang, shaking her from her deep thoughts. She made her way to her locker, fumbling with the combination. She managed to get it after the fourth try. A note fell to the floor as she pulled the door to her locker open. Bending down to pick it up she felt a sudden wave of panic come over her. She knew who it was from before she even opened it. Unfolding the note her hands began to shake. "I made a mistake, please forgive me," was all that it read. A mistake? She was certain that the hurtful words exchanged between them last night weren't meant to be read as a mistake. She let her tears fall and took off to find a place she could be alone.

Sitting in the auditorium, she was sure no one would find her. She could let it all out. Pulling the notebook out of her backpack she flipped through the pages, reading the notes that the two of them used to write back and forth. The door to the auditorium creaked open and a tall women appeared and was startled when she saw the young woman crying on the stage.

"Why are you in here all alone crying?" The theater teacher stood looking at her. The two sat and talked about the events that had unfolded these several months. The bell rang and the teacher gave a small gentle smile. "You had better get to class, but before you go remember this, love cannot exist without heartache, and heartache cannot exist without love." Not another word was spoken, but something in those words was strangely comforting. Yes she was heartbroken, but she wouldn't be heartbroken without first having loved. This was not the end of the world; she would make it. She was and would be a survivor of love and heartbreak. ● ● ●

Cliff Drop

Nicole Sowich

"Hey, Aubrey?"

Aubrey looked over at Lynn, who was currently - as was he - holding on with her fingers and toes to a sheer cliff face above a painful demise far below.

"What, Lynn?" he snapped. He was trying to focus on not getting killed here; it wasn't an ideal time for Lynn to start talking.

"Uh, never mind," said Lynn, clearly deterred by Aubrey's tone.

Aubrey snorted and went back to carefully trying to climb to a higher foothold on the cliff's face. The rock crumbled beneath his toes and he stepped back onto his old foothold just in time.

He heard Lynn gasp and then let out a sigh of relief as he made it back to his prior position. Then she spoke again. "Um, Aubrey?"

This time Aubrey didn't even bother to respond.

"Uh, there's something you should probably know. I mean something I need to tell you. In case, you know, we don't make it."

"We are not going to die here. Understand?" Aubrey put all the irritated confidence into his voice that he could. He wasn't nearly as sure of their survival as he sounded, but then, if he was wrong, Lynn wouldn't really be in a position to gloat about it now, would she.

"Got it, Aubrey," Lynn responded. She paused and then - "But just in case..."

Aubrey cursed internally. He knew what was coming, and he'd hoped like hell to stave it off. He didn't want to deal with it - had in fact successfully avoided dealing with it for all the time they had been out doing this stupid project with everyone. But it sounded like his luck had run out. Lynn was determined to say it, and Aubrey had found that once Lynn set her mind on something, you'd have more luck stopping a runaway train than holding Lynn back.

Still - he was never one to go down without a fight, so he made one last attempt. "Can it, Lynn. I'm trying to concentrate here. Whatever it is can wait until we make it to the top of this damn cliff."

"Well, see, the thing is, Aubrey, it really can't. Because if we don't make it out of this alive - and I know you said we would, but you could be wrong, and... well..." Lynn took a deep breath, and Aubrey steeled himself. "I'm in love with you, Aubrey."

Crap. Now he actually had to deal with it. He loved Lynn back - of course he did, how could he not? - But there were any number of reasons that this was a terrible idea. Well, the best defense being a good offense, he decided to push back.

"Yeah, Lynn, I know."

"You - wait, what? You know?"

"Well, yeah - you aren't exactly subtle. Even Steven noticed the way you stare at me."

"Steven knows?" Lynn's voice was no more than a squeak.

Aubrey carefully tested a new handhold. Seemed secure. Working slowly, he began to shift his weight. As he did so, he spoke. "You've said what you wanted to say, now can we concentrate on getting up this cliff?"

"Yes, Aubrey." Lynn sounded dejected, but Aubrey couldn't deal with that right now.

Several minutes passed with both of them carefully inching upward, testing new toeholds and footholds before each move. Both holding their breath when they heard the sound of rock crumbling. They were sweating, now, and sweat made their grip slippery. Aubrey really wished the rest of the group would hurry up and find them. He knew they shouldn't have left the group to check that stupid mosaic out.

Lynn's breathing sounded labored - all the rock dust in the air couldn't be doing her lungs any good. Then, as if his thought had caused it, Lynn broke into a coughing fit and Aubrey thought his heart stopped. All he could do was will Lynn to hold on as the coughs wracked through her body, threatening to tear loose her hold on the cliff's face.

After a few minutes, the coughing subsided. Lynn was left gasping for breath, but she was still holding on. Aubrey closed his eyes briefly, the enormity of his relief overwhelming him. Then he forced himself to focus again.

"You all right, Lynn?"

"Just peachy, Aubrey." The sarcasm was more withering than what Lynn usually directed at him, but Aubrey had to admit it was well-founded - it had been a stupid question. He didn't let that stop him from using his customary gruff tone when he responded, though.

"Then hurry up. We're burning daylight here." It was true. The sun was dipping low on the horizon, and an already precarious situation would be made infinitely more dangerous in the dark and cold of night. He still couldn't believe their ropes had fallen in that rock slide but they were lucky not to fall with them.

They returned their concentration to the climb, no longer speaking. Well, Aubrey was no longer speaking. Lynn was muttering under her breath, and Aubrey thought he caught the words "Stupid... uncommunicative... jerk..." but he couldn't be completely sure. The anger seemed to be fueling Lynn's determination to climb, though, and that was all to the good. Having Lynn pissed at him was a small price to pay if it ensured her safety.

Lynn fell silent and he knew she was preparing her to speak. It came as he was reaching for a higher handhold and he nearly let go when he heard Lynn's voice.

"So, what do you say, Aubrey? Want to do the horizontal mambo?"

"Lynn!" it exploded out of him without conscious thought.

"Well, Aubrey, do you?" Great, now Lynn sounded cheerful and cheeky. He was doomed.

He opened his mouth to issue a stern denial, and found that the words wouldn't come. He never lied to Lynn, and he wasn't going to start now. Even if it would be better for both of them.

He moved to a higher handhold as he responded. "Doesn't - " he grunted with effort " - matter what I want, Lynn. Doesn't matter what you want. It can't happen."

"But you do want it to happen? You do want to be with me?" Lynn prodded.

He didn't answer, just kept climbing, but he knew his silence was as good as an admission.

Lynn certainly took it as such, because she sounded much more confident as she asked her next question. "So why can't it - oh crap!" she said as she nearly lost her footing and Aubrey's breath caught in his throat yet again. Lynn regained her balance, pulled herself up to a higher perch, and then continued, undeterred. "Why can't it happen?"

Aubrey was only about ten feet from the top now. Ten feet had never looked so long. He wasn't sure if it was because of the exhaustion of the climb or the thorny conversation.

Lynn was only a few feet lower than he was, and Aubrey waited for her to catch up before continuing to climb. Not that he could do much from his position if Lynn lost her hold anyway, and wasn't that a thought to make his blood run cold. He redoubled his efforts while searching for words to answer Lynn's question.

He knew Lynn deserved an answer, and while Aubrey could have said something along the lines of already being with someone, she already knew he wasn't. Or he could quote that with the project going on they weren't allowed to start relationships, but that wasn't right to say either since Steven and Ashley just got together last week. So he made up his mind to tell the unvarnished truth. His ex-girlfriends had never appreciated it, but it was how he was wired. Direct, blunt, and to hell with anyone who didn't like it.

"You just got out of a relationship, and you're too stubborn for your own good, and I'm an inflexible bastard who doesn't know the meaning of the word 'compromise.' It'll get messed up and it'll get ugly and then we'll have nothing - won't even be able to work together. That's why it can't happen."

Lynn was silent, and Aubrey didn't dare look at her face to see how she'd reacted. He couldn't bear to hurt Lynn, hated to see the kicked-puppy look that she got whenever Aubrey was a bastard to her. This only reinforced his

conviction that they'd never work out.

He looked upward and focused on getting to the top of the cliff. He was almost there, so close - one more foothold and then - his hand reached over the edge of the cliff, scrabbling along the ground for something to hold onto to pull himself up. There was nothing.

No - wait. There was a small, jagged bit of rock poking up from the ground. He wrapped his hand around it firmly, ignoring the way it dug painfully into his palm. He pulled and dug in his toes to any purchase they could find, and then - finally - he had enough leverage to pull himself up and over the cliff's edge.

He immediately turned around on his belly and looked for Lynn. It was almost fully dark now, and he could only make out the vague outline of Lynn's form. He could hear her gasping breaths, and the soft rattle of small bits of rock dislodged by Lynn's passage falling into the canyon below, its bottom now invisible in the gloom.

He had a sudden vision of Lynn losing her grip, and falling into that abyss, her body lying broken at the bottom of the ravine. His heart clenched so hard in his chest it hurt, his entire body freezing up in terror and denial of that ending.

It didn't matter if Lynn had just been in a relationship. It didn't matter if he was a stubborn, beat-up bastard. It didn't even matter if it ended badly - at least they would have tried. God, he'd been a coward for so long. His mother would have smacked him upside the head if she'd been there.

He'd get Lynn safe, and then he would tell her he had changed his mind. That he loved Lynn and wasn't going to let her go.

He reached down, lying on the cliff's edge, stretching his arm as far as it would go, digging his toes into the dusty ground for purchase. Lynn was nearly high enough for him to reach. She needed to climb just a few more inches.

Lynn found a new foothold, and boosted herself up. Now Aubrey could reach her. He held out his hand and Lynn moved to take it, her fingertips brushing against Aubrey fingers. Aubrey stretched a bit further, a smug grin on his face - they'd beaten the odds. Fate had given him a second chance.

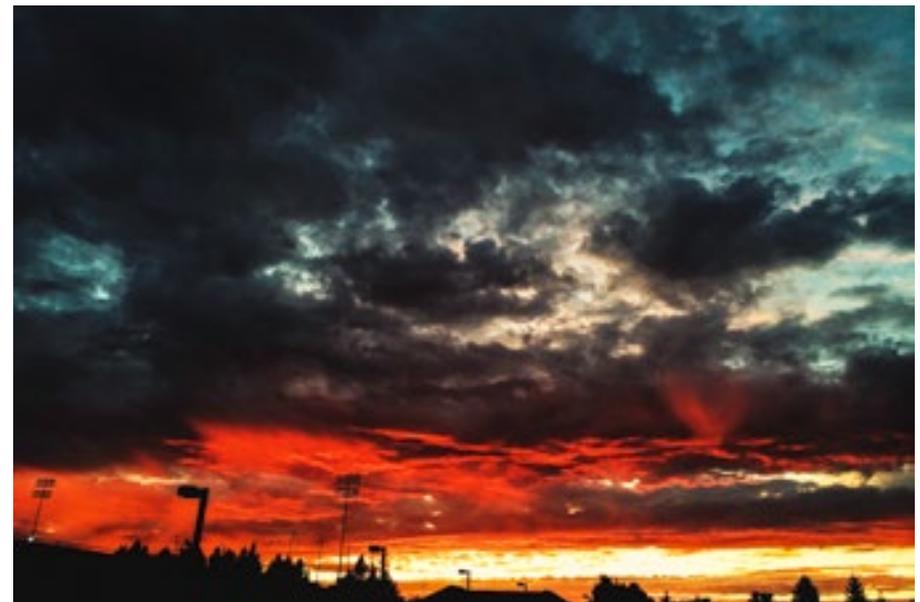
His palm made contact with Lynn's. And that's when he heard the crumbling of falling rocks.

The end ● ● ●

The day I left all of you

Nicole Sowich

I never thought I'd see the day,
When you would get up and walk away.
Time never gave me the chance,
Not even a second glance.
I never wanted to see you again,
Thought my life would begin.
But then you came back into it,
And destroyed it with a little fit.
I knew I'd hate you but now I see,
My life has been washed into the sea.
Their waves that seem to roll and crash,
They never seem to be abash.
Yet as one they become,
The ocean's one emotion.
On that day I took their way,
And all the thoughts I'd ever say.
Left as I looked up at you,
The sky was at its deepest blue,
The day I left all of you.



Shunyu Yao

The Struggle to Fight Back

Barbara Schermerhorn

I fall to the muddy ground as another hit from his oversized fist strikes my head. Heart racing, head throbbing, I grab the bench for support as I try once more to stand to my feet.

“You think you can just pack up and leave me? You think you can just leave?” His voice is loud and his words are slurring together so they don’t sound much like words anymore.

Rising to my feet, I lift my head to see him as he stumbles closer, beer bottle in one hand, fist clenched in the other. I can’t take much more of this beating.

“You got something to say girl?” he takes another gulp of beer as he steps closer.

My feet don’t work and I fall to the muddy ground again. I can’t take this anymore. He is going to kill me. I lay there in the mud trying to catch my breath as I hear the splashing of the puddles around me. My heart is racing faster now. I can hear the pounding of it in my ears. I wrap my arms around my ribs, his favorite place to kick.

The stench of beer fills the air around me and I see a large shadow start to appear on the ground in front of me. The smell is getting more intense and the shadow grows shorter and fatter.

His breath is on my neck as he speaks the very thing I have told myself over and over, “You are nothing without me.”

Tears fall down my cheeks as I clench my eyes shut hoping this will all just end. The pain of my ribs is making it hard to breathe. His foot is on my stomach, and the weight of it is too much. I cry out in pain.

“Please stop!” I beg, but his foot presses down harder on my stomach. I think my ribs are going to break into my lungs if they haven’t already.

I turn my body to the side to escape the pressure of his foot. The weight of his foot begins to lift and the sound of shattering glass fills the air.

“Oh fuck!” I look over and he is on the ground now trying to get onto his side.

Grabbing hold of the sturdy bench, I pull myself up. The piercing pain rips through my ribs and I clutch them hoping to numb the pain a bit. I look back and he is still slipping to his knees. I see the light from the porch, my only safety zone.

I know I can’t run. I can barely breathe. Each breath feels like needles in my lungs. Holding my stomach, I walk. I can feel myself limping, but I don’t feel the pain in my foot. Right now I just need to get home.

Clutching the stairs for support I look back and he is on his feet looking

around for his beer that he had broken when he fell, or for me I am not sure.

Climbing the stairs I finally reach the door. I step inside to the bright white of the living room. I lock the door and search around for the phone.

I look on the counter and see keys. My gaze moves up the wall past the pictures of our smiling family. My eyes rest on the gun cabinet. I glance back at the keys. This is my option. He will kill me if I call the cops, but he will kill me if I don’t.

The sound of the baby crying upstairs interrupts my racing thoughts. My mind jumps to thoughts of the baby, my baby that I swore to protect. Who is to say he won’t hurt her? Something hits the window and I grab for the keys.

My heart is racing and pounding. My head is swimming and my vision is blurry from the tears falling down my face. I have to move quicker, but my fingers are fumbling with the keys.

At last the door opens and I see the guns. There are big ones and small ones. I don’t know what one I can shoot, and I don’t know how to load them. I reach my hands in and fumble around. Maybe I can find a knife.

My hand touches something cold and flat and I lift it to see what it is. A small gun sits in my hands. A hand gun. I remember from the movies this one is easy to use.

I hear the creaking of the back porch. He’s coming. I grab the gun and hold it up to the door. The sound of my breathing and the smashing of something against the door fills my ears. The baby is crying louder now and my ribs are burning.

After a few failed attempts the door opens and he steps through. I catch my breath. This is it. “You stupid bitch! Think you can lock me out of my own house?” He steps closer to me and I put my finger on the trigger.

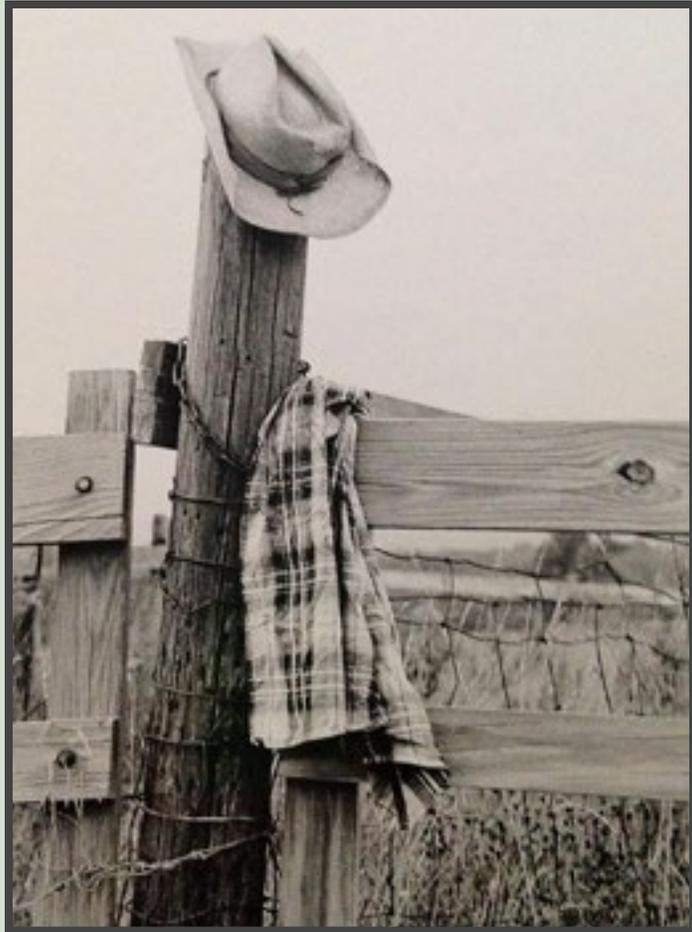
“Oh, and now you’re going to shoot me?” he laughs.

He steps closer and I back away. Just pull the trigger. If it shoots then the problem is over, and if not you are dead anyway. I tell myself this over and over, trying to convince myself.

My hands are shaking as I hold the gun, pointing it at him. Just do it, just get it over with.

I close my eyes. I need to focus. I take a deep breath and pull the trigger. My hands jerk back and the gun drops to the floor with a crash. There is a gurgling sound and a thud as my eyes open. He is not there anymore. Looking down at him, laying on the floor, he is holding his chest as the blood covers his hands. He looks up at me, his eyes wide, his mouth open, as he takes his last few bated breathes. I cannot move.

The baby is still crying. I can’t seem to move. All I can do is stare at my husband. The blood covers the hardwood floor as it pools around him. For the first time in years I close my eyes no longer fearing the darkness. ● ● ●



Missing In Action by Angela DeGrace

From the Heart

Theresa Guyer

How am I...?

How am I supposed to trust? At one time I trusted a lot, but after so much betrayal, pain and suffering how am I supposed to trust again?

How am I supposed to be open? I went so many years of being open to everyone and not caring what anyone thought. Now I worry every minute what others think. So I stopped being open and now I live in a shell. How am I supposed to be open again?

How am I supposed to feel? For so long I opened my heart and feelings. But after so much hurt and pain, how am I supposed to feel again?

How am I supposed to love? I have given my heart to few completely and pieces of my heart to many, only to have it broke and shattered completely. How am I supposed to love again?

PHOTOGRAPHY



Xavier Goins



Clover by Erin Paul



Shunyu Yao



Storm Clouds over the Unadilla by Alison Swartz



Shunyu Yao



Xavier Goins



Gibbous by Erin Paul



Xavier Goins



Shunyu Yao



Sunset, Wells Beach, Maine by Alison Swartz



Xavier Goins



Shunyu Yao



Film Photography by Jay Drobot

Goodbye

Tiffany Hutchinson

May the waves crashing against the sand,
be quiet whispers speaking to your soul.

May the moon be your spotlight,
the one that leads you home.

May the waters of the river you now bathe in,
leave droplets of serenity on your heart.

May the grass below your feet be
as soft as a bed of feathers,
and as warm as a raging fire
on a cold winter night.

May the pain you have suffered cease,
and be replaced with joy.

We pray you don't forget us,
For we cling to life.

To you,
In our hearts.

So someday we might follow you,
Into the land after, if there is one.

Farewell and goodbye.



Jasmine Baylis

