

# Salmon Creek Journal



2015

# Staff and Acknowledgements

## 2015 Staff



**Cambri Shanahan-  
Editor-in-Chief**



**Seamus David-  
Prose Editor**



**Anna Swan-  
Marketing Director**



**Lucas Wiseman-Web  
& Layout Manager**



**Jennifer Schwartz-  
Poetry Editor**



**Julia Waters-  
Visual Arts Editor**

The content in journal is the property of the Salmon Creek Journal and its affiliates.

The Salmon Creek Journal created by a collaborative effort by the students, staff, faculty and alumni of Washington State University Vancouver.

Copyright Salmon Creek Journal 2015.

# Letter from the Editor

*by Cambri Shanahan, Editor in Chief*

Since 1997, the Salmon Creek Journal has been passionately representing WSU Vancouver authors and artists. Over the course of 18 years, the Salmon Creek Journal has grown in to a prestigious piece of WSU Vancouver legacy. As you read through these pages and gaze at the images before you, know that each piece was created and fervently shared by a fellow WSU Vancouver student, staff, faculty or alumna member. Because of them, the legacy continues.

Built upon momentum from years past, the Salmon Creek Journal received the largest number of submissions in its history this year. Deciding what would be published in this edition was no easy task for my staff and me. I would like to personally acknowledge all of the authors and artists who submitted their work to the journal this year. Whether published or not, each piece of work is truly appreciated and valued. For the bravery and willingness to share, I sincerely thank you. The Salmon Creek Journal would not be possible without each contributor.

To my incredible staff, I commend them on their dedication this year. They took initiative, worked as a respectable team, and showed our campus the passion they possess for art and literature. Their work ethic speaks to their integrity and diligence, and for them, I am extremely grateful. Because of them we were able to host unique literature events and art showcases for our campus community. I am honored to have worked with a team who truly shared a common vision: to not only bring this quality publication to fruition, but to also grow

a lasting presence of the Salmon Creek Journal on campus.

I would also like to thank some deserving entities who helped beyond measure make this year seamless for us: To Nikki Hinshaw, Michelle McIlvoy and Brenda Ailing for the guidance and support, to Dale Strouse and Bill Bailey for showcasing their work on the SCJ wall in the Firstenburg Student Commons, to Jennifer Shroy, all of OSI, and the Diversity Center for collaborating with us throughout the year, to Christy and Jon Wiseman for letting us use their beach house, to David Romero for the outstanding performance at our launch party, to Facilities and Operations for providing all of our events and tabling needs, to Steve Rigby and the printing staff in Pullman for printing the high-quality printing of these journals, to the Student Media Board, KOUG Radio and VanCougar Newspaper for sharing the entire journey with us, and lastly, to all of the campus community members who made it all worthwhile throughout the year.

Lastly, I would like to thank you for taking the time to pick up the Salmon Creek Journal and join in the legacy. By delving in to this journal you are supporting many laborious hours of thoughtful creation. May it help inspire you, set you free, or simply be a reminder that we are all unique beings capable of beautiful creation.

All the best,



Cambri Shanahan  
Go VanCougs!

# Table of Contents

*Editor's Choice highlighted in red*

## Prose

<b>Campaign</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>by Melissa Boles</i>	
Home	19
<i>by Zaharah Hakim</i>	
Family Memory	20
<i>by Jennifer Lacey Barnes</i>	
Moonlit Constitutional	22
<i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	
Obsessions	24
<i>by Quynh-Anh Darlina Vu</i>	
I Am Real	29
<i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	
Yummy	35
<i>by Jared Smith</i>	
The Perils of Online Dating	41
<i>by Valorie Oldfield</i>	
Cards with Alice	45
<i>by Ginille Forest</i>	
Saint Petersburg	48
<i>by Melissa Boles</i>	
Purpose: A Clone Story	55
<i>by Lucas Wiseman</i>	

## Visual Arts

<b>Wy'East Sunrise</b>	<b>64</b>
<i>by Manuel Mendoza</i>	
Owyhee River	66
<i>by Dale Strouse</i>	
Different Worlds	67
<i>by Faun Scurlock</i>	
Dude What You Love	68
<i>by Anna Swan</i>	

A game with no clock	69
<i>by Kevin Alvarez</i>	
Fluffy Little Fibers	70
<i>by Brittany Wouden</i>	
Confusion	71
<i>by Marrassa Marie Yazdani</i>	
Destitute Redmond	72
<i>by Emily Field</i>	
The Dark Side of the Sun	73
<i>by Navid Saneie</i>	
Ripple and Wake	74
<i>by Samy Reel</i>	
She in the Big Trees	75
<i>by Peter Arlen Collier</i>	
Sing in Me	76
<i>by Gordon Hays</i>	
Simple Lines	77
<i>by Marites Castro</i>	
Wanderlust: Warsaw Old Town	78
<i>by Ariel Mate</i>	
Saints of the Vatican	79
<i>by Emily Field</i>	
Routine	80
<i>by Anna Swan</i>	
Confinement	81
<i>by C.D. Tuttoilmondo-Homes</i>	
Mountains of Ts'ehlanyane National Park	82
<i>by Nicholas Rolig</i>	
A Day's Ending	83
<i>by Warren Marshall</i>	
Dali's Mustache	84
<i>A recreation of Philippe Halsman's photograph</i>	
<i>by Cole Benak</i>	
The Divided Man	85
<i>by Gordon Hays</i>	
Seattle Night	86
<i>by Peter Arlen Collier</i>	
Midnight City Lights	87
<i>by Jordan Byman</i>	

Frosted Salmon <i>by Dale Strause</i>	88
Hydrangeas <i>by Jordan Byman</i>	89
The Nest <i>by Yuriy Kuprikov</i>	90
Sol <i>by Julia Rose Waters</i>	91
Midnight Sorrow <i>by Kory Dollar</i>	92
Pumpkins <i>by Charles Jacob Melara</i>	93
Palmer Snowfield <i>by James Gray</i>	94
Morning by Water <i>by Julia (Harmer) Conrad</i>	95
What doesn't kill you... <i>by Charles Jacob Melara</i>	96
Aurora Borealis <i>by Julia Rose Waters</i>	97
Shahsevan Nomads <i>by Sina Alizadeh Ashrafi</i>	98
Study of Horizon Lines #2 <i>by Alisa Greenwood</i>	99
Octadic <i>by Marrassa Marie Yazdani</i>	100
ChainDeer <i>by Jasmine V. Boothroyd</i>	101
Life and Death on the Ganges <i>by Sina Alizadeh Ashrafi</i>	102
Religious Juxtaposition <i>by Alisa Greenwood</i>	103
Luminescent <i>by Rebecca Hilberg</i>	104
We Accept Plastic <i>by Amil Haddad</i>	105
Blood Moon Rises <i>by Breanna Shores</i>	106

It takes but a single step <i>by Daniil Martyn</i>	107
River Nightlife <i>by Gary Dean Bolen Jr.</i>	108
The Rise <i>by Yuriy Kuprikov</i>	109
Oceanic Travels <i>by Kory Dollar</i>	110
Young Brazillian <i>by Christopher Vicente Pacanins</i>	111

## Poetry

Orangeville <i>by Kathryn Ann Freese</i>	114
Ms. Campbell <i>by D. Venn Penrose</i>	116
Staging Ground <i>by Jerry Goodstein</i>	117
Dandelion <i>by Jared Smith</i>	118
Coming Home <i>by Tabi Chivaugne</i>	119
Locked Out <i>Hailey L. Hanson</i>	120
Drought <i>by Heather Wiedenhoft</i>	121
Imposter <i>by Ginille Forest</i>	122
untitled <i>by Heather Wiedenhoft</i>	123
The Land of Dreams <i>by Jennifer Schwartz</i>	124
the dancing night <i>by Ryan Griffith</i>	125
Proof of Self <i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	126
στοργή <i>by Tabi Chivaugne</i>	128

Five:ZeroZero <i>by Richard Soles</i>	130
Gerudo Valley Theme (American Colossus Version) <i>by Richard Soles</i>	132
Hometown <i>by Zahara Hakim</i>	134
laying on of hands <i>by Ryan Griffith</i>	136
Antidote <i>by Jerry Goodstein</i>	137
The Makers <i>by Lucas Wiseman</i>	138
THE WOLVES <i>by Samy Reel</i>	139
Rainbow Cup <i>by Gordon Hays</i>	140
Ode to the Plot <i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	141

## Performing Arts

Light of Love <i>By Brian Idle</i>	146
---------------------------------------	-----

# PROSE

Campaign	14
<i>by Melissa Boles</i>	
Home	19
<i>by Zaharah Hakim</i>	
Family Memory	20
<i>by Jennifer Lacey Barnes</i>	
Moonlit Constitutional	22
<i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	
Obsessions	24
<i>by Quynh-Anh Darlina Vu</i>	
I Am Real	29
<i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	
Yummy	35
<i>by Jared Smith</i>	
The Perils of Online Dating	41
<i>by Valorie Oldfield</i>	
Cards with Alice	45
<i>by Ginille Forest</i>	
Saint Petersburg	48
<i>by Melissa Boles</i>	
Purpose: A Clone Story	55
<i>by Lucas Wiseman</i>	

# Editor's Choice

## Campaign

*by Melissa Boles*

It is dark, save the desk lamp next to her. Everyone else has gone home. Even the writer of the speech she is skimming has left, shouting “Bill has approved it” as he leaves, though he knows it won’t stop her. She’ll stay, until the wee hours of the morning, sending emails, prepping phone lists, re-working the speech, and drinking lukewarm, thick-as-sludge coffee.

She checks the time on her phone and empties the coffee mug, grimacing. Nearly two a.m. She can hear Bill now: “Sarah, go home. We’re at the end. Get some sleep,” but she can’t. Not when this is it. Not when this is her big break; her chance to show the world (or at least her parents) that her 4-year degree in Political Science and her countless hours of volunteering on campaigns wasn’t a waste.

Sarah cracks open a water bottle, inhaling the quiet around her. She loves campaigns, and the chaos that comes with them, but this is her favorite part of the day; when everyone has gone home and she can sit in the quiet and think. The building creaks around her, the sounds offering a soothing rhythm as she finishes her work.

“Sarah.” The water bottle flies from her hands, water glugging on to the carpet. Tom, the campaign manager for the local race they are sharing the space with, is standing in the doorway. She scrambles for the bottle, more than 2/3 of the water now soaking into the carpet.

“You scared the shit out of me,” she rasps, setting the bottle on her desk. “I didn’t know you were here.”

“Sorry.” He slides through her door and sits in the chair across from her desk. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

She inhales sharply. “What are you still doing here?”

“I think we’re going to lose.”

Sarah shakes her head. “You can’t think that way, Tom. I certainly hope Miriam doesn’t know you think that way.”

“Miriam also thinks we’re going to lose.”

“You’ve had a conversation about it?!” Sarah pinches at the bridge of her nose. “Tom...”

“She called me about an hour ago. She can’t sleep. I told her we’d win. I told her that she had nothing to worry about, that we’ve worked our asses off making phone calls and ringing doorbells and getting endorsements, and that George Miller doesn’t stand a chance against our team, but the truth is, he does. They’ve outspent us 2-to-1, we’re running in a Republican district, and he’s the incumbent. It’s a long shot.”

Sarah can only nod. Both of the races are long-shots. Bill is confident he’ll win, but Sarah can’t be sure of anything. Bill was appointed to the open seat mid-January, but there was already talk of turning the seat red before he got there, before the woman he replaced embezzled thousands of donated dollars from her campaign fund. The Republican party was already working on a game plan to replace her, and now Sarah was running a campaign against a team of over-paid, under-worked, right-wing conservatives who took every shot they could and were probably going to win. The fact that the seat was even currently blue was a miracle, and they weren’t about to let it stay that way.

“Sarah?”

She swallows, glancing over at Tom. He’s newer than she is; spent one year working in the legislature before he graduated and hadn’t worked on a campaign in his life before he got this job, but he’s good. He’s got it in him to win campaigns, once he gets the right attitude. “Tom, you just can’t think that way. It’s a tough race, but Miriam is a good candidate. She’s worked really hard, and so have you. A Democrat has won that seat before, and she can win the seat again.”

“I just don’t have any idea what I’m doing here. What am I even supposed to do if she loses?”



“You sit with Miriam and her husband, you watch the results, and you wait. If she loses you give her a hug, tell her you’re sorry, and you pack up your desk and move on.”

Tom shakes his head. “I don’t know. I feel like I failed.”

Me too, Sarah wants to say. “Everyone feels that way before election day, Tom. Go home, get some rest, and when you wake up tomorrow, you can spend all day making calls reminding people to get out and vote. You won’t feel like a failure when the results come in.”

He nods, though it’s clear he doesn’t believe her. “Don’t stay too long.”

“Yeah,” Sarah smiles. “I won’t.”

When Sarah finally hears Tom lock the front door, it’s nearly three, and too late to drive all the way home. She pulls a pillow and blanket from her closet and fumbles her way out to the couch in the main office, tripping over yard signs in the dark.

It isn’t long before she hears her name again, male hands brushing hair out of her face. Her eyes struggle open, connecting with the blue pools that belong to her speech writer, Mark. “I’m really excited for you to stop sleeping here.” He says, running his thumb across her cheek.

“Me too,” she croaks, sitting up. “What time is it?”

“8:30.” She nods, rubbing her eyes and stretching. Mark rests his forearms on her thighs. “How much did you change the speech?”

She shrugs, “Not much. I was mostly sending emails and making call lists.”

He laughs. “I don’t believe you.”

“It’s still open on my computer.” Sarah takes a slow breath. “Is there coffee?”

“Your usual is on the table for you.” She smiles. “Just so you know, win or lose, you’re coming home with me tonight.”

Sarah laughs. “Wasn’t that always the plan?”

“I just don’t want you forgetting.”

“I haven’t.” He squeezes her knee and stands, going to her office to check his speech. She moves from the couch slowly, pulling the blanket around her shoulders. Slumping in the chair, she peels

the lid off of the coffee cup and inhales slowly before taking a sip, the liquid sending warmth through her body. She watches Mark through her office window, wishing she hadn’t made that rule about not dating staffers. Having him to go home to at night might have actually made her go home.

“Good morning,” Bill’s voice echoes in the mostly empty office, and Sarah grins when he comes in carrying a box of doughnuts and a large to-go container of coffee. “Did you sleep here?”

“I did, but it was the last time I will ever do that.”

“I told you to go home.”

“Yes you did.”

“You stayed anyway.”

“Yes I did,” she laughs, “but when haven’t I?”

He shakes his head, setting the coffee and doughnuts down on the table. “You work too hard, you know.”

“Yes, but I do it for you.”

Bill laughs. “I know you do. How many times did you re-write Mark’s speech?”

“I didn’t re-write it, I just re-worked it a little.”

“Right…”

“She’s telling the truth,” Mark says, coming out of her office. He nods at her. “It looks good.”

She nods, and Bill looks back and forth between the two of them.

“Are you two going to get together now?”

Sarah cocks an eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

“Sarah, I might be old, but I am not dumb.”

She stands and walks towards her office for a change of clothes. “Bill, I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Twelve hours later, Sarah is sitting at her desk, head between her hands. Bill made his final speech at 10:00AM, they called hundreds of voters and handed out thousands of fliers, and now all they can do is wait. Tom is pacing the hallway, driving her nuts.

“Sarah.” she looks up, startled, when Mark flings open her door. “They’re getting ready to call it.” She scrambles out from behind her desk, following him in to the main office, where the campaign workers are gathered around the television. Bill is sitting with his

wife and son and nods at her when she joins them. Mark reaches for her hand, curling his fingers around her palm.

When the news anchor says it, Sarah's knees buckle. Mark wraps her in a hug, saving her from hitting the ground, as the cheers echo around them. They won by 4%. "You did it," Mark whispers. "You did it, Sarah."

She shakes her head. "We did it."

He kisses her then, emitting more cheers from the staffers around them, and Sarah turns red. Bill pats her on the back and she steps away from Mark, hugging her candidate.

"Congratulations," She grins.

He nods. "Congratulations to you as well."

With a percentage that close there will be a recount, but at the end of the night Bill is considered a winner, and Sarah has shut off her computer, turned off her light, and left the building with Mark. On their way out, Tom shouts to her that they won, and she hugs him, congratulating him on his hard work.

Mark drives her to his house, his hand dancing along her inner thigh all the way there, but when the front door is locked and the lights are turned down, all either of them can do is sleep.

# Home

*by Zaharah Hakim*

Home means artesian water. The water that spouts from the pipes in that converted parking lot. The water that imitates the yellows and reds in the tiles that we decorated the well with. The water that resonates off the chitter chatter of the parched children and bicyclists and homeless as they wait to fill their jugs with the community water. This water brings us together. Our artesian water is for everyone to taste. To taste the hint of salmon and dew laden grass. To escape the taste of the city. To reflect the forest into our bodies.

Home means excited water. It means the fern and the alders melodically echoing the sound of the rain. The rain, which I miss so much isn't the weak pitter patter of this dry city. It's the kind of thing that brings the forest to life. The kind that doesn't obey the slow stream ahead. The kind that invites itself to create rivers of roads. The rain that floods the forest floor without consideration for the creatures below. The rain who is too innocent to understand why the animals run from it. The rain that crawls back to the stream beds after a week of recklessness. And begs the creatures to return.

Home means the creatures do return. The rain tapers off in some natural compromise with the animals of the forest. The drips slow as they fall off the forgotten little ladder that rests against the dilapidated tree fort. The rain now only comes out in the night when the animals are away. The water slaps against the rocks and roads now, but it is kinder. It does not invade the forest floor anymore. It knocks on my window to make sure I'm safe in bed. The rain always welcomes me home.

# Family Memory

*by Jennifer Lacey Barnes*

It's always the same old tired crap every year or so when you come down to visit. You mince around acting all Jesusy and holy and righteous, God blessing everyone like we are all beneath you.

I don't go to church, I don't subscribe to that fanatical nonsense: I'm below you. You, in your cloak of religious virtue, you shake your head when I talk about my education or my job. I'm what you call living above my station, meaning I'm not a stay-at-home wife like you, like God and Jesus want me to be. All that education is dangerous, look at her, she doesn't believe in God anymore, oh no. You are lily white, a fresh baked loaf of Jesus bread, a wafer of purity, wreathed in all your breastfeeding, organic, home-birthing glory. I'm not wreathed in anything but the lingering odor of my last cigarette and some patchouli oil.

I wish I had the courage to argue with you about why you think you have the right to look down on me just because you believe every word of a book written 3,500 years ago by a bunch of old men who were probably eating ergot on rye and hallucinating seven-headed goats. You believe everything you are told; you don't question. You gibber in tongues with the rest of the sheep. Solorabamos, you say loudly. Papa-popo-keekee-nananana, you proclaim. How holy you must feel, spouting "in the spirit" like that in my kitchen. You grandstanding asshole.

I hear "solorabamos" come out of your mouth again, reverently, like the Spanish word for a casserole containing wild rabbit, perhaps. The sound of it makes me want to scream.

I keep my composure by remembering how you stole from me when we were kids. You were over at my house visiting. I was so excited. You asked me to get you a can of pop from the kitchen, so I did. While I was gone, you stole my three coolest pieces of jewelry off my nightstand. When I noticed that they were missing and said something, you helped me look for them for fifteen minutes. We

moved the fucking nightstand to look behind it, and you had my stuff in your pocket the whole time.

After you left, I cried. I told my mom I couldn't understand how the jewelry had disappeared; it had been there minutes earlier. It never even occurred to me that you might have stolen from me. Mom called Grandma and said she thought you had taken something of mine. You had, and your mom brought you back to return my stuff. Your mom said it was no big deal. You never said "sorry" because you weren't. You were only sorry you got caught.

What burns me is that you never acknowledged this, not as an adult, not as a Christian, not as the righteous, clean-living holy wife you claim to be. When I got clean ten years ago, I learned that the best thing to do is always to own up to your wrongdoing and apologize as needed, whenever possible. Doing this has gotten me far in life. Without the truth, what exists? Words without truth are as words written in water: nothing.

"Jesus loves you," you simper sweetly to me, air kisses lingering in the atmosphere near my cheeks.

I'm still waiting for you to apologize.

# Moonlit Constitutional

*by Brandon Jaymes Condon*

Black shirt. Black pants. No shoes. The weather is lovely tonight; not a cloud in the starry sky. Two hours past Cinderella's curfew, I set out for my regular constitutional. I depart through my bedroom window, my parents none the wiser. Just as the portal to Narnia, its sliding glass is as mine to a world all my own. I walk as the world sleeps, wrapped in the cool embrace of shadow. I am invisible, undetectable... certainly, I must look a sight when I walk beneath the lamp post and it flickers upon my passing. The wolfman best be wary of this prey.

Around me, suburban houses, not a stirring among them. All lights are dark, all that speaks mute. There is a reason this is called the graveyard shift. Each night, dying another death; each morning, a resurrection. It would be so easy. The atrocities I could commit, the blasphemy I could cry, the unspeakable thoughts and impulses I could indulge... but I don't. Even with none alive to stop me, I am content to enjoy the peace and the still. Even the crickets are asleep at this hour.

There is no one at the intersection. Just four traffic lights, lazily chatting and buzzing among themselves, wishing they, too, could retire this evening. They seem so lonely, dutifully changing their shifts between one another, trading red and green glances, all without a single customer. What hard workers they are.

And now, I arrive at the churches, the schools—a complex without light. They are as abandoned as the unspeakable one, himself freezing in the deepest circle of Hell... luckily, these summer nights are quite warm. Summer is my favorite season. No better time could I ask for to spend some time with my ethereal friends. Off in the distance, some shadows dance in the flickering glow of street lights... these shadows, here, are more my type. Calm, pleasant; the type of shadows one could sit down to a lovely cup of tea with. Perhaps next time I ought bring some.

I prefer warm pavement to hot sand. I needn't worry about stubborn grains between my toes, or the relentless scorn of the summer sun. The moon and I are much more alike, anyhow. Perhaps that's why the wolfman has yet to mount his attack. Or perhaps it was the aforementioned street lamp's eerie flickering. Perhaps even he has died—at least until morning.

And so I come to the commercial district, the part of town meant never to sleep, and yet, there I see its own lonely but dutiful traffic lights. Truly, this is a very different world. Even so, I prefer not to traverse this area, with its bright lights, billboard ads, and the lonely mini mart across the corner, desperately wishing for a companion that speaks languages beyond red and green. Alas, I must, lest I be forced to take the same route back. Even the dark, oft glass-ridden walk of the abandoned highway is preferable to the stagnancy of a return trip identical.

Thus, cloaked in Nótt's embrace, I walk, serenely, across the Safeway parking lot. But... what's this? Smoke, from the entrance? It seems I am not alone this night—two fellow members of the walking dead sit idly in front of the store. I pass, uninhibited, cloaked, but notice, as I do, glances of confusion, disorientation, and disbelief. And then it comes. From behind me, a voice:

“Dude, did you see that head?”

# Obsessions

by Quynh-Anh Darlina Vu

Everybody keeps staring. Why are you all staring? Go away. You're not real. You're not real. You're not real. I'm not real? Are you talking about me? Or about everyone else? Stop talking to yourself. It's okay, just breathe. Count. Count. Count. 3...2...1...No.

I can't breathe. Look up. Look around. Still standing. But the room is spinning. Run. Just run. Get out of here. Push door? Push door? For god's sake, be a push door. Wince. I didn't mean for it to slam. Look down. Look down. Don't draw attention. Find a room. Any room. No one's here? Good. Lock the door. Sit down. No chairs. Sit down. Floor. Cross your legs. There you go. Sit on your hands. Wait. No. Don't wring them. Stop it. You're shaking.

It's the caffeine. Don't worry. It's just the caffeine. I'm fine. You're fine. It happens to everyone. Hands shaking? Yes. Pupils dilated? Yes. But don't feel strange. I don't feel strange.

But I'm scared. I'm really scared. Why am I scared? I'm not sure. You're going to cry. But I can't cry. No one can see me cry. No one's here. But I am. I can see you. No you can't.

I'm not crazy. Say it out loud. Slowly. "You're...not...crazy..."

"Then why are you talking to yourself?"

"I'm not."

"Holy shit, I am."

"I can't stop."

"You're lonely. It's because you're lonely."

"But I'm not. I have friends."

"Not real ones."

"Granted."

Walk briskly to my room. Avoid eye contact with everything – even furniture. Shut the door. Throw down books. Throw up. Nothing comes out. My jaw aches. Why is there so much saliva? My arms drape around the bowl limply. I lay my burning left cheek onto the cool porcelain. Fuck. My hair was in the garbage. Get up.

Just get up now. No one has to see you like this. Roommate walks in. Run to the sink. Stare at the mirror. Straighten shirt. Fix hair.

"What are you doing?"

"Just looking at myself."

There is hesitation. But she's in a rush. Thank god. Just keep pretending to smear nonexistent lipstick from the corners of your mouth. No one will notice the white knuckles and sweaty palms gripping the edges of the counter.

"Are you going to work today?"

"No."

"But you haven't gone in all week."

"I don't feel well."

She shrugs, "Alright."

She leaves. The door falls heavy against its frame. Exhale. I stare at my hands, like they are to blame. And for what? For everything. Crouch in front of the full length mirror. I rub my hands rhythmically against my bare thighs – staining my skin red with blood and guilt. Don't worry. It's not your fault. You didn't do anything wrong. Nothing is wrong. I look down at the color rushing to the surface of my legs, and then back up into my reflection. There's floss in my hair. I tilt my head 45 degrees to the left, letting the curly white string dangle freely from my long black tresses. There's floss in my hair. I furl my eyebrows in confusion. What just happened? The last ten minutes didn't happen. How did a piece of floss get lost in my hair? I start to laugh uncontrollably. As my shoulders shake and sides ache, my right hand gently cradles my face in embarrassment. I pick the floss out of my hair and examine it. It certainly is not mine. I only use cinnamon-flavored, red-waxed floss. I can't tell what they ate so I throw it away apathetically. There's nothing more to see here. Stop laughing.

I shake my head compulsively. At first in disbelief, but then the motion becomes soothing. I can feel the fluids pour from one side to the other. I can hear the ocean. But I can't. I'm here. In my room. Alone. And my mind is full. There's no space for free-flowing particles and plasma to run. The shaking slows to swaying. My head is heavy and my neck is tired. Stop. I ease myself off of the cheap,

tile floor and into my stiff, wooden chair. Both hands flat on the desk. I try to catch my balance. Then I fold my sore legs underneath me, let the weight of my head stretch the muscles in my shoulder blades, and wrap my arms around myself. I'm safe now.

Hours pass and I haven't left my chair. It's 5 o'clock. You need to eat. I'm not hungry. When was your last meal? Don't remember. Roommate comes in. Look up from the desk.

"Did you study?"

"Yes."

"Wanna get dinner?"

"I already ate."

"Fine. I'm going out."

"When are you coming back?"

"I'm not."

"Emily?"

"What?"

"Nothing."

Door swings open. Fluorescent light rushes in. Door crashes closed. She's gone. I pace about my room. Too small. Everything is too small. But I can't leave. Can't leave. Closet. Desk. Desk. Bed. Bed. Closet. No corners. There are no corners. Nowhere to hide. I can't hide in a corner that doesn't exist. But I can hide in my subconscious.

Sleep. Sleep. Everything will disappear if you just close your eyes. I'm closing my eyes. I can still hear. Girls in the hallway – obnoxious and stupid. They twitter like birds in the spring. But they won't have sex, will they? I'm not entirely sure. This culture frightens me. Pull the covers over my head. It's dark. My hot breath dampens the sheet and the cotton clings to my face as I inhale. I'm suffocating. I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'm dying. But it's the peaceful sort. There's no thrashing or panic. I'll just lie here. And breathe in and out until I stop all together. The moisture in my sighs will dissolve the sheets. The pink fabric will melt onto my skin and then I will be beautiful. And no one will ever find me. They can't ever find me...But who will come looking? Does anyone care enough – Stop it...Just drift...

I wake up to the backbeat of a trashy techno song. They're drinking upstairs again. It's a Wednesday. My lofted bed is so close to the ceiling that I can feel the pulsating bass echo through my chest. The ping pong ball falls from the wet table and hits the ground, rattling inside my ribcage...Roll my eyes. I pound on the rough ceiling with the side of my fist in vain. The jagged plaster punctures my skin. Study my hand. I can hardly see two feet in front of my face. Grope around for my phone underneath my pillow. Frustrated, I shove the crumpled mass of down onto the floor. The heel of my hand hits plastic and the white light blinds me momentarily. I stare blankly at the digital numbers through streaks of blood on the screen. 1:37 A.M. I blink and remember to feel pain.

## Trigger warning

The following story contains elements of sexual violence and abuse.

Reader discretion is advised.

## I Am Real

*by Brandon Jaymes Condon*

I don't remember when the nightmares began. It feels like they've been plaguing me for so long, I've forgotten what it feels like to get a restful night's sleep. Every night, I relive the same horrible ordeals—it's gotten to the point that I dread going to sleep every night, but I just can't seem to stop myself. I just can't stay awake...

My name is Anna. I'm a pretty typical high school girl... scratch that, I'm completely typical. Normal house, normal neighborhood, normal family, normal friends, normal education. Nice and normal, just the way I like it. The only thing that's really abnormal about me is these dreams I've been having lately. When I first told my friends about them, they laughed and said I was worrying over nothing. Dreams can't hurt you—put your mind on some happier thoughts and eventually the nightmares will go away. Since then, I've tried to follow their advice. Really, I have. I've been nothing but cheerful at school, led my normal family home life... now that I think about it, nothing in my life has changed recently. Nothing in my life has really changed, ever. I've been living just the way I have for as long as I can remember. Why did I suddenly start getting these nightmares now? None of it makes any sense. There's no reason for me to be having dreams like these.

I still remember last night's. Luckily it was one of the tamer ones, comparatively speaking, but it still robbed me of a perfectly good night's sleep. I was chained up in a dark, stone room with no windows and one iron door. My dream self must have been kept there for days, because it smelled of my own... leavings. Eventually, a dark-skinned man came into the room and dropped a bowl of foul-smelling food in front of me. It was covered in mold, and consisted mainly of what looked like scraps of what his master must have thrown out... but my dream self didn't care. I ate the food eagerly on all fours, like I had done before. I didn't feel hungry—it was just a dream. I couldn't even taste the mold. Maybe my

dream self was just desensitized to these sensations, or maybe I'm just overthinking things. I usually can't taste or feel acute bodily functions when I'm dreaming. My friends find it weird that I can smell things, though. I wonder if that's not normal. I hear most people don't even dream in color, so maybe there's something at least a little special about me after all.

It's been almost a week since I took their advice of having a positive outlook, and I've finally decided that it isn't working. I need to talk to someone about it—I mean really talk—and I don't really feel comfortable talking to my parents about the kinds of dreams I'm having. I haven't told my friends any details about what actually happens in the dreams yet, either, but today I'm going to talk to them about it. I just need someone to listen, to know what I'm going through.

—

I told my friends about the dreams, leaving out some of the messier details. They just started making fun of how weird and twisted I was inside, calling me a masochist and pervert, bondage queen... they were just joking, of course. I knew that, and they knew I knew it, but still. I wish they had listened to me more seriously. I guess part of having such normal friends is that they don't really know how to deal with abnormal things like what I'm going through. Maybe they're right, though. Maybe I am just a pervert, with some weird, suppressed desires or fetishes or something that I don't know about and are manifesting themselves in my dreams. But then I recall the awful, terrible things I've gone through some nights—there was no way that I wanted any part of that; not me and not any part of me, no matter how deep down it was. There was a word for these dreams, and that word was “nightmare.” There was nothing glamorous about them. If the nightmares continue, I'll try talking to them one more time. Maybe this time they'll actually listen.

—

Last night I was in the same room again. This time, I was chained upright, hanging from the ceiling, with a ball gag in my mouth. Once again, I was naked, like an animal. My body felt weak... you

know, like when you try to punch in a dream, and it feels like you're punching through water, and your muscles just don't react and move like they're supposed to? My whole body was like that, totally unable to kick or struggle or put up any kind of fight. Then, the dark-skinned man came in. This time he was accompanied by his master—a man in a white stage mask who I'd dreamt about once or twice before. Those were always the worst dreams, and when I saw him walk through that door, my heart sank, as I knew that this was not going to be a pleasant night. It was easy to tell what he wanted. As the dark-skinned man lowered me just so on my chains, the masked man began to violate me, just as he had in the past. I couldn't resist at all. I knew it was pointless to fight a nightmare. The affair must have lasted for several hours, in dream time, but fortunately, it felt to me only like minutes. I submit myself to the inevitable, and just like that, it was over, and again I lay, weak and naked on the cold, stone floor. The two men left the room with an amused banter, and in my weakened haze, I gradually woke up to reality.

The first thing I thought after waking up was, “What the hell is wrong with me?” The whole “depraved masochist” argument might start to actually hold water if I keep having dreams like this. I knew I couldn't tell my friends about this one. They would just hold it over my head, with an onslaught of “I told you so”s and joking insults until I finally dropped the subject and we inevitably started talking about something more mundane, like the new guys at school or that falafel stand that just opened up nearby. For now, I just had to grit my teeth and bear it. The day passed like any other boring, normal day, and before I knew it, I once again found myself lying in my bed, dreading what was to come but knowing that there was nothing I could do to prevent it. After all, it's not as if I can just never sleep again, right? I hear that supposedly a person will die if she goes more than 10 days without sleep. Or maybe that was water... could be both, maybe. Whatever. I'm too tired to think about anything like that right now. Just too tired...

—

Last night's dream was even worse than the one before it. I



was strung up again, but this time I was whipped; beaten, by the dark man. Apparently I had done something to offend his master, and even though I had no idea what it was, I apologized, and I apologized, over and over again, I apologized. My efforts were wasted, though. It was plain to see in his eyes that he was enjoying striking me, and the only way it would end was when he had had his fill and finally felt satisfied. Each strike of his whip stung in that weird sort of dream-pain that you sometimes feel in really, really realistic dreams. It wasn't one of those things where you don't actually feel anything and just suddenly jump in your sleep because your body flinches in reaction to what it thinks is coming, but an actual sensation of pain. Or, not really regular pain, but more of a sort of stinging, numbing sensation... Is it weird that I can feel things like that in my dreams, but not feel hungry? I'm also able to go to the bathroom in my dreams without having any "accidents" in real life. People tell me that's weird, too. Maybe I'm not as normal as I thought I was. But I suppose that's been made pretty obvious by these messed up dreams I'm having, hasn't it? When the dark man finished his gleeful onslaught, he dropped me very suddenly and violently to the floor, then kicked me and walked out of the room. It looked like my dream self wasn't getting any moldy supper tonight. As I lay on the ground, weakly rolling in my own self-pity, I hazily awoke once again.

This has to stop. I'm going to tell my friends the whole story today, without censoring myself, and I'm going to make sure they understand how distraught I am by all of this. I really need someone to listen and be there for me right now; I just need to know that someone cares, so I won't feel like God himself has abandoned me anymore. I'm going to meet them in a private place after school today. Maybe the third floor landing—no one ever goes up there for anything. I'm going to spill my guts and tell them everything, and if they still don't take this seriously, I'll make them, no matter how long we all have to stay there and discuss it.

...

I had the weirdest daydream in class today. I really must not be getting enough sleep if I'm conking out at my desk. At least this

time it wasn't one of the nightmares I've been plagued with for so long. Seems I only have those at night (hence the name, I guess, huh?). Still, it did feel like it might have something to do with them. It was a hazier, more surreal sort of dream than the hard, easily-recollectable sort that I've grown accustomed to having of late. I remember being on an island... a very seedy, run-down island, like Somalia or something. Not that Somalia's an island, but you know what I mean. I was bound and gagged (seems to be a common theme) and surrounded by men wearing bandanas for face masks. In front of me was a small rowboat, and offshore there was a much larger vessel stalled atop the waves. I don't remember how I supposedly got there, but I think I remember being on a vacation, or something. You know, there's always that sort of dream-omniscience that lets you know things that you shouldn't know because you didn't actually dream about them. One of the masked men poked me in the back with a rifle, prodding me onto the boat. Another man, this one taller and darker than the rest and wearing a different kind of mask, got in the boat with me and started rowing me offshore towards the anchored ship. There was something kind of familiar about him, but I woke up before anything else happened. I was a little shaken up by my dream, but I still determined to talk to my friends and get them to understand what I was going through.

I managed to get them all up to the third floor landing of the school's stairwell and corner them there. I told them that I really needed to talk, and that this time, I really needed them to listen. They looked at me curiously, and I started telling them everything. All of the horrible details of what I'd been going through night after night after night—the abuse, the rape, the beatings, the vile conditions, and even some really gross stuff I haven't mentioned up to this point, like when I dreamt that the masked man made me clean the whole floor of my cell with my tongue. That was probably the worst one. All three of them stood in awe by what I was describing to them, and when I finished, they just stared at me, like I was crazy or something. Who knows? Maybe I was crazy. Maybe I just needed them to support me so that I could STOP being crazy. But life is never that easy. Their eyes lowered in a sarcastic sort

of glare, as all three of them looked at each other, and then at me. They told me that there was just no helping me. They said that they had tried to be supportive, and to hear me out as I talked about all these crazy dreams and “perverted crap,” but that they had just had enough, and that they didn’t want to be involved with this anymore. They told me I just wasn’t worth it. My heart sank when they said this. My friends... or, these people I thought were my friends, anyway, had abandoned me. They were my only support, and now they were gone. They walked back downstairs, telling me to just leave them alone from now on, and there was nothing else I could do. I was now alone in the world. No friends, no parents...

...no parents?

It never occurred to me until just now, but I just realized something. I can’t remember my parents’ faces. I must see them at least daily, every morning at the breakfast table, and every night at dinner... but... I can’t remember any of that, either. I can’t remember ever getting up, getting ready for school. I can’t remember eating breakfast, saying goodbye to my parents, or coming home to see them after school. All I can remember is being here, at school, with my so-called friends. That, and lying in bed, either having just woken up from another night’s terrible ordeal, or anxiously awaiting the one to come. Where did all the rest of the time go?

And just like that, I awake.

Now, here I lay, on my cold, stone prison floor, unable to feel the hunger that eats at me, or the pain of my scars left from yesterday. I can smell the horrible stench of the room that surrounds me, and it is here that I realize that I have been abandoned, left to the mercy of my cruel captors. I don’t remember when the dreams began. For a while, it felt like I would be able to find escape in them forever. But now, as I lie, weak and forlorn, the only comfort I am able to provide myself is found in three empty little words:

“I am real.”

# Yummy

*by Jared Smith*

The checkout line hadn’t moved for nearly fifteen minutes. Edgar looked down at his watch, glancing at the second hand twitching like a dying bug. Sixteen minutes now. He stared over at the front of the line, past Mr. Clean and his waxy pate. Past the lady cloaked in mink with a brick dust beehive and sprawling gray roots. Past the teenager and his squeeze, sucking on each other like their heads were tootsie pops—a little shit baking in her oven, Edgar guessed her at about five months or so. The clerk looked like a seagull caught in a soda ring as the elderly woman who had been yelling at him for the last seventeen minutes over a coupon discrepancy proceeded to pay entirely in change. Edgar wiped the length of his face with his palm. It was slick and the handcart in his other hand made his shoulder ache. He glared at his watch again, catching his reflection in the marred surface. Thin brown comb-over, knob nose, and a walnut sized lump in his gawky throat. It was all there, it was all him.

Two minutes later, the old hag had finished her checkout, toting off towards the doors with her cat food and hair color with a walk far too sensual for her age. After she left, the line went relatively quickly. The lovebirds were done, a pack of condoms and boxed wine and some cigarettes. The furry chimney on legs got some clearance meat and a candle that smelled like lilac and loneliness. Then, Mr. Clean threw some cash at the young man behind the register as he whisked out the door with a chattering case of cheap beer. Finally, it was Edgar Benson’s turn to pay. He laid down a slab of discount ham and a six-pack of chocolate pudding. The checker gave him an odd look, but after thirty-seven years of odd looks, Edgar didn’t notice much. That’s a lie, he noticed, he was just too tired to care anymore.

Beep. Beep.

“9.79,” the young man said. He was more of a heartthrob than

Edgar had previously thought—this was the one his wife had said was yummy the last time they went shopping together. Edgar despised it when she did that. He dug around his pants pocket, feeling the money evade his fingers as he tried to pinch it between them.

“Hold on,” he said. He had a soft voice, and even softer spine. The only place Edgar was ever on top was in his imagination. In his head, he was king. He was capable and fearless, and free. Oh so free. “Got it,” he whispered, sliding out a rumpled ten. The checker proceeded to finish his order.

“You’re not cooking this together are you?”

“Huh? What?” Edgar’s eyelids twitched as he was sucked out of his fantasy of the bee-hived woman’s hair ablaze.

“Ham... pudding... things people don’t typically mix together, you know?”

“Oh... uh... yeah. Sorry, it’s been a long day. My wife is pregnant, ham and pudding is her craving.”

“That’s one of the weirder ones I have heard of.” The checker chuckled. Dammit he was yummy, especially when he smiled. Edgar hated that.

“Yeah...”

“Well, have a great night, sir. Stay strong.” The young man gave him a wink, and handed him his change and a bag full of pudding and discount pork. At least he was a shitty bagger. Edgar liked that.

The street outside was cold and the wet cement shimmered in the hot white lamplight. A halo of mist wafted around its bulb. He propped up the collar of his jacket and walked down the sidewalk through the intervals of dark and light. The grocery bag crunched ever time it patted his leg, making a sort of melody that accompanied the wet patter of his footsteps. His breath clouded the air, dense, gray, and full of moist loathing.

He turned right down 1st, then another right down Perkins, walking with rigid, cold-soaked muscles to the cul-de-sac where his house sat at the middle. The lamps were yellow here, like some beast’s dim hunting eyes. Edgar shivered—but not from the cold. Making his journey up the walkway, he could see the flickering

blue hue of the T.V. saturating the window curtains. She was still up. Edgar clenched his jaw and wrapped his slick palm around the doorknob. After shuffling his feet along the daisy-laden doormat, he gave the little brass bulb a turn. It creaked, and she heard.

“Edgar, is that you?”

“Yes, dear,” he said, just like he had been rehearsing it for the last three and a half years of their five years of marriage.

“Good! It’s about time. I’m starving. Did Mr. Hedenberg keep you late again? I swear, Ed, it’s like you don’t have a bold bone in your body. Why can’t you stand up to him?” The little pink curlers in her black hair jostled as she shook her head.

He pinned his eyes at his toes, looking like a dog that was caught after having rooted through the trash.

“For Christ sake, Ed, you have a pregnant wife at home and you’re putting your job before me because you’re too much of a coward to tell that bastard you can’t stay late.”

“Yes, dear. I’m sorry, dear,” he muttered through quaking vocal chords. He shot his eyes around the room evasively. The sink was full of dishes and cobwebs spanned every dusty corner.

“I’m sorry, dear? Is that all you got for me? I’m sorry? You know, my mother was right. I should have married Todd. At least he’s a real man—mmm he was so yummy.” A look of arousal filled her chubby face as she pictured the other man in her head. “Do you know what Todd does now, Ed?” She rested her hand on her one of her bulging love handles—it laid on it as if it were a shelf. She always did that when she was angry. Edgar hated that.

“No, dear.”

“He’s a photographer... for the goddamn National Geographic! Do you know what I would be doing right now if I had married him?”

“No, dear.” He had finally mustered enough courage to rest his eyes on her chest. Her breasts were so big. Edgar liked that.

“I’d probably be in some jungle, taking pictures of some goddamn tiger or something. Life would be interesting... I would be happy. Instead I’m stuck with a mouse for a husband.” The momentary courage that Edgar had felt evaporated into mist. Loathing settled

on him like an iron shawl. “Did you at least get my shit?” she said, a bit louder than was pleasant.

He nodded and handed over the bag, his eyes once again glued to the floral print linoleum that desperately needed a sweeping. His wife deplored cleaning, though not as much as she deplored being married to Edgar.

Without another word, Mrs. Benson ripped the bag from his hand and stormed off to her bedroom to feast and fill herself with ham and pudding. After all, she was eating for two—even though it looked more like four.

Edgar, after damning back the tears that so desired to flow, made his way to the living room and flopped on the couch. The television was still on, filling the dark room with fleeting blasts of bluish white light. He could see all his wife’s knick-knacks, porcelain junk, and doilies crammed on every surface the room had to offer. The T.V. set murmured and flickered, spreading a soft static hum that was caused by it being just slightly out of tune. Edgar fixed the rabbit ears and spread out on the couch again. His eyes were heavy. He strained to watch as the scientist testing specialized bullets on the television shared about how similar pig flesh was to human flesh.

“It’s the closest thing to human flesh without actually being human flesh,” the guy in the lab coat said. He was so smart, and probably rich too. Edgar hated that.

Soon, he was asleep. Snoring through show after show and on past the cheesy infomercials that plague the early morning slots. He had been sleeping on the couch now for about two years. It was better than being with her, however. Edgar liked that.

The rest of that week was about the same for Edgar Benson—his boss “asking” him to work late, his wife chewing him out for not being on time with her dinner. It was the same old cycle of sorrow. Day in and day out, Edgar suffered. He felt like a strand of hay caught between the grinding teeth of some bovine monstrosity. He wanted nothing more of what was currently known as his life, and for the first time in a very long time, Edgar got angry—really angry.

It was Thursday, and Mrs. Benson wanted her ham and pudding. Being the dutiful husband that he was, Edgar swung by

the grocery market again. The handsome piece of shit checked him out just like the last time, pretending to be his friend as he once again mentioned the oddness of his purchase. Edgar said next to nothing, as he stared down at the discount pork that was being shoved into a bag. It’s the closest thing to human flesh without actually being human flesh. The scientist’s voice bounced around in his skull like a fly caught in a jar. He’s so yummy. The remnants of Mrs. Benson’s words cinched themselves around his brain.

“Sir, are you alright?” asked the young man.

Edgar’s dark-circled eyes slowly crawled up the checker’s body. He gave a weak, quivering smile—and for the first time in a very long time—he looked another person in the eye. “I’m... good,” he whispered. His lips wriggled into like pair of melting gummy worms. Just then, a tall man that looked an awful lot like a hawk stood behind the young man.

“Break time after this one, Cory,” he said. He paid no heed of Edgar.

The young man nodded. “Good, I need to go out back for a smoke.” He turned to Edgar, “9.79.”

Edgar smiled wanly. “Can you take the ham off? I won’t be needing it after all.”

“Um yeah, sure. Just hold on a moment.” After a few beeps and some boops, the ham was voided and Edgar was sauntering out the doors with a bag of chocolate pudding and an idea that just couldn’t and wouldn’t go away. It’s the closest thing to human flesh without actually being human flesh. He’s so yummy. The thoughts darted around between his ears. All the while he could feel the chewing of life’s teeth, crushing and grinding him—until there was a crunch. Circumstance had taken its last bite. Amidst the self-deprecation, poor self-esteem, and immense sense of sorrow, life had finally gnawed enough of Edgar Benson away to find a backbone. He stood on the sidewalk outside the store and scanned the lot. There were only a few cars parked in it. They sat like sleeping steel ducks on a cold black pond. He spotted the ugliest one, the most promising one. It sat over the line separating two parking spots and its hood stole half the spot in front of it. Someone

that negligent in their park job may have been just as negligent with locking its doors. Edgar approached the metal heap. His eyes gleamed in the reflection of the glass and the walnut in his throat throbbed with the quickening pace of his heart. He was smiling, why was he smiling?

He tried the door and was welcomed with a pleasant pop, as it swung open with a frigid moan. The lamp a few spaces down filled the car with enough light for him to find the trunk release. Edgar pulled it with shaking fingers. Another satisfying pop. He rounded the length of the car to the trunk and lifted it open like a coffin. His smile split to bear his crooked teeth. The tire iron sat like Excalibur ready for the plucking. It was nestled rusty and freezing atop a saggy spare tire. Edgar took it, its coldness burned his hand, but he barely noticed that, the blood in his veins ran too hot.

With a crazed look in his eyes, Edgar rounded the brick corner of the grocery store, making his way to the back. His breath chugged from his lungs like a locomotive as he release a hiss-like chuckle. The air burned in his chest like a furnace. Edgar hated that.

He rounded the last corner. There he was, the yummy hunk of pork. Would his wife be able to tell the difference? The lone lamp made the young man blind to what approached him through the darkness. He took a long, lung-singeing drag in, and then exhaled it.

The metal came cold, came fast, and hard as hell. Yummy. There was a lot less sound than Edgar was expecting, though much more blood. It steamed as it pooled around his feet in the lamplight. Edgar liked that.

## The Perils of Online Dating

*by Valorie Oldfield*

I twirled my hair for what felt like the thousandth time tonight. “So what is it that you do again, Elliot?” I smiled. I was much more excited for the conclusion of our date than his response. We sat in a dimly lit Italian restaurant in one of the worst parts of the city. Of course, I purposely failed to mention the recent homicides in the neighborhood to the tall brunette currently sitting across from me when I’d suggested this location.

I met Elliot online, on some corny dating website that had yet to provide me with a long lasting match. He and I had exchanged numbers, and later, numerous flirtations texts, and although I found his personality quite appealing I wasn’t sure that this would be the ‘one’ either. Then again I did have very... particular tastes.

He rested his hands on the table in front of us, food long forgotten. It wasn’t that good anyway. “I’m a salesman for a local cleaning company. Boring stuff, I assure you.” He cocked his head and smiled back. “Remind me again what you do Liz.” not many mundane details had passed between us. I knew he had an aquarium of salt water fish and a severe aversion to seafood but no other info came to mind immediately.

I smoothed down the folds of my cobalt blue dress. To be honest, it was much too cold outside to be wearing such thin fabric, but my coat was hung up on the rack by the door to make up for it. “I work for the city morgue. I just kind of landed there and ended up enjoying it.” He eyed me cautiously.

It was hard to hear over the din of the string quartet in the opposite corner. “That hardly something I can imagine someone falling into, let alone enjoying it.” I shrugged and set my hands on the table. After fidgeting with the gold bangle on my left wrist, he set his hand on mine. “Shall we get out of here? Maybe go somewhere a bit quieter?” I nodded and allowed him to pay the bill

before we stepped out into the winter air.

Half of the street lamps in this part of town didn't work, but that was perfect for what I had intended on doing tonight. We strode down the street, walking close to one another for warmth. I stopped abruptly, as if a rock had made its way into my shoe. Bending at the waist served well to hide my hand as I reached in my coat to pull out the revolver stuffed in the inside pocket. How the poor sap didn't see this coming, I didn't know. He had been so sweet. I almost felt bad. Almost.

Elliot hovered over me, presumably to see what I was doing but that made it all the better when I finally stood up. With the barrel pressed to his chest I pushed him back into the alley that I had been sure to conveniently stop at. Elliot looked like a deer in the headlights. When his back finally hit the wall I spoke again. "Betcha didn't think you would die tonight, did you?"

A sudden calm washed over him. He almost looked smug. "Had you walked another block I'd be saying the same to you, Scarlet Witch. Nice to meet you. I've heard a lot about you. The tabloids call me Pistol Whip."

I blanched. "The Pistol Whip? 27 unsolved murders?" He nodded proudly. I wasn't sure that I wanted to keep the gun to his chest or pull it back to have a halfway decent conversation. I really had no inclination to become number 28 today so I left the barrel where it was.

"11 isn't a bad record either. Say, do you maybe want to actually get to know each other? Like psychopath to psychopath?" He had a charming smile plastered on his face and the feminine side of me wanted to take him up on that. Though knowing what I would have done in his situation, I was forced to believe that it was just a ploy so that he could turn the tables on me.

"Sorry darlin', but I want to make it twelve." I gave him the sexiest grin I could manage before moving the gun over his heart.

Elliot began to look a bit concerned. "You know that may not kill me right? It least not immediately. It's too high and-" he started to bring his hand up. I tensed. Oh shit. was I actually scared?

A light flashed in my eyes so I turned my head. A cop? Full blown

panic erupted in my head. I composed myself, plastered on a grin, and sweetened up my voice. "Hello officer. What can we do for you?" I pulled my body away from Elliot's and slipped the gun into my coat as quickly and as smoothly as I could.

The cop wanted to be tough but he was a rather portly fellow. He didn't seem so sure of himself either. "You two weren't planning on, uh, copulating in this here alleyway were you? And what's that in your pocket? I'll have you know there are murderers running loose around here."

I glanced over at my dinner date and smirked, my confidence quickly returning. "Oh yes, officer, I know. We weren't going to do anything illegal, I swear. Tell you what, if you bring that flashlight over here I'll show you what's in here." I patted the pocket.

Elliot had such a pained look on his face that I had to look again to see if I had shot him in my panicked haze. "No, Liz!" he hissed.

The cop looked at him and then back to me before coming any closer. "It's okay," I cooed. "He's just not good at sharing things. Are you, honey?" His face softened in defeat. he already knew what I was about to do.

When Officer Thompson got close enough that I could read his name tag, I swiped my foot under his, reached my hand in my pocket, pulled out the gun, and pulled the trigger. It was safe to say that I'd made it to 12. "What the fuck are you thinking?" Elliot seethed. He kept his voice low but surely someone had heard the gunshot. "You just killed a cop. That's game over." He ran a hand through his hair. "We need to get out of here."

"Relax," I cooed. "We're going to be fine. Besides, what are you worried about? I'm the one with the gun." I casually slipped it back in my pocket.

He looked at me like I was a child. "Cops normally travel in pairs. It's just what they do. One will probably be here soon." Elliot grabbed my hand and drug me further into the alley. "How many bullets do you have left?"

"Two." I guess I maybe should have brought extra. I heard him mumble 'good' before we emerged onto the other street. "Where are we going?"

“We’re leaving the state.”

I stopped and yanked my hand back. “We? What do you mean ‘we?’ We’ve been on one bullshit date. There is no ‘we.’”

He smiled. “Where else are you going to meet a mass murderer besides prison?”

I sighed and took his hand. So much for those particular tastes.

# Cards with Alice

*by Ginille Forest*

The sound of the shuffling cards calls the ladies to the table. I wait for them all, trying to ignore the familiar smell of death hanging in the air. Death smells like soup.

Lottie sits first. Lottie is always first. At eighty two, she’s the most able of the group; physically. Alice is next, pulling out the chair to my left, struggling to scoot the tennis ball legs back under the table. She’s wearing red again. Alice hates red. Beverly’s the last, not because she’s slow, but because she never wants to play. For over a year now, I’ve played cards at Brook Haven at three-thirty every Friday. And every Friday, Beverly complains that the cards are too small, my cologne too strong and the music too loud. The caretaker guides her to the chair across from me, next to Lottie. This should be interesting.

The cards are sticky. Still sticky from last Friday when Lottie spilled her orange juice. I deal them out anyway, making small piles until they’re all divided. Beverly picks up hers first, her permanent scowl eyeing her hand. Once upon a time she was a show girl at the Golden Nugget in Vegas. I’ve heard she had spunk, could control men with the bat of an eye and hustle sharks with the best of them. Now she eats soup.

“You’re trespassing,” Beverly growls from behind her cards.

“I know,” I smile back.

“No men allowed after hours,” she adds.

It’s three-thirty eight in the afternoon. Beverly said the same thing to her son, Ben just before she ran him off with the pointy end of one of her decorative spoons. She said he tried to cop a feel. He hasn’t been back since. That was six months ago.

Beverly grabs a handful of gumdrops from the candy dish and drops them into the center of the table, “I’m all in.”

“Shhh. This is the best part,” Lottie says, tapping her feet and waving her hands to the music.

There is no music. Lottie's been here the longest. Longer than the workers even. She's never had visitors; no one's really sure where she came from. I wonder about her sometimes, who she was before she found her home here. Is her family out there somewhere, already surrendered to the fact that Lottie's gone? Does she cross their minds?

Lottie looks to Alice. "Do you have any two's?"

No Lottie, not Go Fish.

Alice ignores her, putting her glasses on and off like she's discovering them for the first time. Alice, the matriarch of the group, is my grandmother. Her claw like hands, riddled with arthritis, struggle to grip the cards. She was once an accomplished seamstress in World War II. She was once a lot of things: a doting preschool teacher, a mother of five, a grandmother to twelve and a great-grandmother to sixteen. Now she's a permanent resident of Brook Haven, home for women with dementia.

Alice's hands shake as she pulls apart the cards. Her own mother died of dementia when I was four. I don't remember her, which I don't feel too bad about since she never remembered me. But my whole life, Alice made it clear she was never to end up like her mother. "Never put me in a home," she'd say. It wasn't a big speech, more in passing, like over brunch or holidays. We went on a road trip to Yellowstone when I was fifteen. Alice took one look at those woods and said, "It's beautiful. If I ever get as bad as my mother, bring me back to these woods and shoot me."

There's no woods at Brook Haven. Just floral printed couches and pine potpourri.

"I need three," Lottie says, setting three cards down on the table.

No Lottie, not Poker.

It's Beverly's turn. The chair to my left is empty. Rose used to sit there. She insisted on sitting next to me, calling me Billy, after her dead son. Now she sits in the living room watching I Love Lucy reruns. One day she just stopped talking. Every once in a while a giggle escapes her, but it's almost always followed by a sob.

Lottie grabs a gumdrop and tries to put it in her mouth. Alice slaps her hand. "You'll spoil your appetite. I'm making soup."

She hasn't cooked a meal in three years.

The new girl, Helen, is in her room, visiting with family. In the beginning, everyone has family. Visitors flood the place with smiles and hugs; an ease to their guilt, I suppose. But after a while, they all stop coming. I don't think it's intentional. I think it's rational. A byproduct of a lingering death. Because somewhere between the repetitive sentences and the violent insults, a person convinces themselves that their loved one is gone. That they won't remember the visit anyway. They let themselves off the hook. But not me. I'm here every Friday. Because I broke a promise.

"You shouldn't encourage them, Jim. It's almost their nap time," Alice says.

That's me; Jim. But that's also my father and grandfather. I never know which one of us she thinks I am. Alice rubs her hand on my inner thigh. Today I'm my grandfather.

But he's not here. Gone three years now. And he took Alice with him.

I look around at the ladies; former wives and sisters, friends and mothers; lives long forgotten. They'll fade away slowly, like dying flames, their bodies lingering on. But I'm not here for them. I'm here for Alice. Here, searching for any sign of life. Pretending that behind her confused and weathered eyes there's still a person hiding there, waiting to be found.

But this is Brook Haven. And this is where memories come to die.

"Gin!" Lottie yells, setting her cards on the table, the Old Maid smiling atop them.

Yes, Lottie. Gin.



# Saint Petersburg

by *Melissa Boles*

She meets him in Saint Petersburg, where she pit-stops on her post-college tour of Europe. Wandering the Kuznechny Market, she rounds the corner to find a dark man holding a child by his shirt, tears streaming down the boy's face. She crosses the market and whispers to the boy in broken Russian, wiping the tears from his face before sending him running down the alley.

"He stole from me." The man says in English nearly as broken as her Russian, "I was just getting money."

"I'll pay for his fruit." She says. "He looked homeless, and scared."

The man appears taken aback, but nods. "Okay. You pay."

She hands him 150 Rubles and crosses her arms over her chest. "You didn't need to scare him like that, you know."

"He stole." He punctuates each word, staring down at her. "I wanted money."

"Well you got your money," She sighs. "Find another way to get your money next time."

"And if I do not? What will you do?" He looks down at her. He is well built, nearly twice her size both in height and muscle mass. "Are you strong, tiny American?"

"Don't call me a tiny American."

"Do not tell me what to do."

"You were terrifying a child."

"In Armenia, that is how you get money," He nods, as if to confirm his statement. "Here in Russia, too. You Americans - too sensitive." He waves her off and turns around, pressing her Rubles into his back pocket.

"You're Armenian?" A smirk crosses her face, "You have your papers to be selling here?"

"What, do you think I am toopoy?" He turns back to her and invades her space, smells of cinnamon, cumin, and something she

can't identify filling her nose. "I am not illegal."

"I don't think you are stupid, and I never said you were illegal." She steps back, his smell intoxicating. "I was just asking."

"Mmm." He shakes his head, moving back around behind his fruit stand. "You think you are smart."

"I am smart."

He laughs. "You think you are more smart than me." A grin crosses his face. "No one is more smart than Sanos."

"Oh, you think you're smarter than me?" He nods. His grin seems to rest in her stomach, and suddenly she's not angry with him anymore. "Why don't you prove it?" She smirks when he looks confused. "Meet me at Probka Bar tonight and we'll play a little Durak."

"I will beat you." She shakes her head, though he probably has much more experience with the local card game than she, and he nods, smiling. "What is your name, American Girl?"

"Reagan." She stretches her hand out to shake his and he kisses her palm. "See you at 7?"

He nods, letting go of her hand. "7 o'clock."

§

Three hours, several bottles of Sangiovese, and four lost games of Durak past 7 o'clock, Reagan is hanging on Sanos' arm as he escorts her back to her apartment. At some point she tells him that he smells like a rich Armenian dish, and Sanos sets her down on a bench in the park, letting her lean against his chest.

"Why aren't we walking?" Her words slur together slightly.

"I am not sure you can," He brushes her auburn hair out of her face. "We will sit."

"Okay." She takes a deep breath and her eyes open wide. "I might be sick."

"Just do not get any on my..." Reagan vomits all over his feet, and he sighs, one hand resting on her back and the other holding her hair out of her face, "Shoes."

§

He arrives at her apartment several days after the shoe incident, a bag of fruits and vegetables in his arms. She is sitting on her

balcony, feet dangling between the iron rods that are supposed to keep her safe, reading Anna Karenina.

“Privet,” He says, standing two stories beneath her. “Do you like fruit?”

She folds over the corner of her page, smiling. “I never thought I would see you again.”

“Vomit is not scary.”

She laughs, turning red. “Sorry again about your shoes.”

“They were very old, it is no matter.” He lifts the bag. “I have harvest.”

She nods. “Wait there; I’ll come let you in.” She scampers down the steps, throwing open the building door. “Come up.”

He follows her inside and up the stairs to her apartment, setting the bag of produce on her counter. “How are you?”

“Good.” She gestures towards the balcony. “Come outside.”

He follows her, standing in the doorway. “You are reading Anna Karenina.”

“It’s one of my favorites.” She leans against the balcony. “Have you read it?”

“Many times.” He clears his throat. “Ya ne khochu obidet’ , no ya khochu , chtoby spasti sebya , i ne znayu, kak.”

Reagan shakes her head. “I don’t...”

“I do not want to offend but I want to save myself, and do not know how.” He whispers, stepping towards her. He watches her piece together the quote from the book, and as a smile forms on her face, he kisses her, tangling his fingers in her hair. Her gasp escapes into his mouth and he smiles against her lips, pressing their foreheads together. “I am thinking about you since that night.”

Her eyes seem to sparkle. “Me too.”

“Ya khochu byt’ tam, gde vy nakhodites’ , ya ne mogu s soboi podelat’.”

Reagan smiles knowingly. “I’m going to be where you are, I cannot help it.”

§

He tries to teach her Armenian, though she constantly reminds him that she is still learning Russian.

“Barev dzez,” he says, tossing a grape into her mouth.

“Barev dzez,” she repeats. “Hello.”

“Inch’pes yek”

She shakes her head. “Inch’pes yek’. How are you?”

“Dzez dur e khaghogh.”

Reagan frowns. “Dzez dur e kha...eh?” He laughs and she kicks her feet against his leg. “What does that mean?”

“It is ‘Do you like grapes?’.” He tosses another one at her mouth, but she catches it instead, throwing it back at him and pegging him on the nose. “Armenian is easy.”

“No, English is easy.”

Sanos shakes his head, moving the bowl of grapes to the floor and crawling across the disheveled bed. He rests one arm on the pillow next to Reagan, propping his head up. “Too many informal.”

Reagan purses her lips, thinking. “You mean slang?”

“See? Too many words.”

“Oh and you don’t.” Reagan slides down the pillow. “Barev dzez, Sanos. Three syllables to say hello.”

“Barev dzez is for customer. Barev for family. Privet for lover.”

Reagan laughs, shaking her head. “You have just as many words as we do.”

“Our words mean things. You have awesome, cool, sweet.” Sanos wrinkles his nose. “What do those mean?”

“They mean...” She crosses her arms over her chest. “I don’t know what they mean, they’re slang!”

He laughs, “My point,” and presses his pointer finger to her nose in emphasis. She wrinkles her face, laughing. “Try Russian.”

“No, Sanos...”

“Try.” She sighs, and nods. “Kak pozhivaesh’?”

“Kak pozhivaesh’?” She turns towards him, tangling their feet together. “How are you?”

“Otkuda vy?”

“Otkuda vy? Where are you from?” She laughs. “America.”

He shakes his head. “Da. Very obvious.” He throws an arm around her waist, pulling her closer to him. “Ya tebya lyublyu.”

“Ya tebya lyublyu.” She shrugs. “I don’t know what that means.”

He smiles, pressing a kiss to her forehead. "It is 'I love you.'"

"Ya tebya lyu....oh." He laughs when she stumbles over the words, his thumb rubbing across the bare skin between her shirt and pajama shorts. "I love you too."

He kisses her, his palm splaying across her hip. "Correct answer."

§

They argue. He wants her to give up her apartment and move in to his studio; she refuses to live in one room and says he can move in with her.

"Men do not move in with women," He snaps, shoving an empty beer bottle off of the counter in frustration. It shatters on his wood floor. "You will move in here, or we will not move in at all, ponimat'?"

"Yeah, I understand." She snaps. "I do everything you say, right? You are the man, so you are the smartest one, and the one that makes the money, and I do what you say, right?"

"Reagan..." He shakes his head. "It is my culture. You live in my home."

"I'm not Anna Karenina, Sanos," She says. "I will not submit to your will."

He shakes his head. "Anna did not submit. She loved Vronsky."

"Anna went crazy. Is that what you want?" Reagan doesn't wait for his answer, leaving in a rage and letting his door slam behind her.

The shattered beer bottle is still on the floor when she arrives a week later.

§

They don't speak about a move again, but she knows that it bothers him. He won't stay more than one night in a row at her apartment, so one night she comes home from her job and throws the classified section at him.

"What is this?" He asks, the aroma of his Armenian coffee filling her apartment.

"I don't like your place, and you won't live here, so find us a place we can live together."

He opens the newspaper slowly and then looks back at her. "You

will live with me?"

"Only if we can find a place that is ours, not yours or mine," She walks away from him and barely makes it to her bedroom door before he scoops her into his arms and presses her against the wall. "I take it that is a yes?"

He grins. "Da."

They end up in bed together, skimming through the classifieds. He reads them out loud to her, first in Russian, and then translated as best as he can. She gets up to use the restroom and laughs into the mirror when she finds her hair in disarray and newspaper remnants on her cheeks.

"I found it!" He yells from the bedroom as she is trying to get the newspaper ink off of her face. "Reagan!"

"Okay," she pads back into the bedroom, climbing into bed. "What is it?"

"On Dvortsovaya Embankment. 29,000 rubles. 2 room flat." He smiles. "I think this is perfect."

She laughs. "Let's look at it, first, but that could be it."

He throws the newspaper off the side of the bed. "It is perfect!" He grins, pulling her into his grasp.

Reagan laughs. "Being in St. Petersburg was supposed to be temporary."

Sanos kisses her neck, wrapping his arms tighter around her. "Looks like forever to me."

§

He is gone from her life as quickly as he came into it; she comes home to their apartment one day and finds his belongings gone. She goes to the market but finds his fruit stand closed, the bright sunlight breaking through the cloth roof as if to mock her. She slowly makes her way back home, finding a letter from him in the mailbox when she arrives. Inside she finds an explanation of a sick mother, an incapable brother and their need for him at home.

I'm sorry, the letter reads, I would take you but my mother would say no. She is traditional. You are American.

She should have known it was coming.

I love you, American Girl, he scrawled at the bottom, and if I ever

return to St. Petersburg, I will find you.

§

He comes back to St. Petersburg nearly six months later, and when he arrives at their apartment, he wonders why he thought she would be there. The landlord tells him that the American woman left more than five months before, leaving behind only a box with his name written on the top.

Sanos carries the box out to his car and sets it on the hood, ripping through the tape and pulling aside the cardboard flaps. Expecting a letter, he finds only his own belongings, left behind in the rush. Underneath her favorite sweater of his, nestled in the middle of everything, is her copy of Anna Karenina.

## Purpose: A Clone Story

*by Lucas Wiseman*

I'm being watched by a tiny man with a mustache and a clip board, who keeps muttering to his assistant as I perform the exercise for the sixth time.

"Again!" he squeaks, when my answer flashes red on the screen.

I can tell he is frustrated because his squeaks have become much more high-pitched. For the life of me I cannot understand the problem before me. The numbers and letters jumble together and look like Ancient Greek, and that's one language they never taught me. I sigh and put the stylus on the table. This isn't going anywhere. I need a break.

The tiny mustache shakes in anger as the man squeaks at me to get back and finish the exercise. I breeze by him, and wink at his assistant. Her cheeks flush, which makes me grin. She'll have trouble taking notes the rest of the day, much to the tiny man's chagrin. Perfect.

The squeaks fade as I pass through the door and out into the hall. The bare, grey walls and peach colored floor tiles are supposed to convey a sense of calm and serenity. To me, they look like dead fish, sickly and rotten on the inside.

I continue walking, making my way to the common area. This place cost millions of dollars to build, but nobody thought to make it look like a place you'd want to spend any length of time. I'd been here for four years. Most of us spend our free hours in the common area; it has the least uncomfortable couches in the entire facility. Plus, a quaint little machine in the back that creates any snack you can think of, as long as it has the raw materials for it. It usually didn't, though.

Stu was reclining on the least-uncomfortable couch playing a holo-game. I could see his half-closed eyes behind the goggles flicker back and forth; probably playing one of those tactical battle simulators that he loved. Stu was one of the military brats who had

been groomed from day one to lead armies. I lost interest in him when I noticed that the fridge had been re-stocked. Filling my arms with snacks, I turned and almost tripped over the tiny man.

“You haven’t completed your test, clone T1-31,” he squeaked.

I sighed. He knew my name, and I hated when he didn’t use it.

“Look, man. I need a break. I don’t understand why I even need to know this stuff. Can’t computers do most of the high level predictions anyway?”

His face got very red and his mustache began to tremble.

“You need to know “this stuff” because we tell you to know it, and because it is the foundation of the modern economy,” he said with a sigh.

I opened my mouth to protest, but he squeaked and raised a finger at me.

“No more questions. Finish the exercise and you may be done for the day.”

Well, it could be worse.

I followed him to the test room, nearly dropping my bag of cheese squares on the way. His assistant didn’t meet my eye, probably afraid of another wink. I landed heavily in my chair and spent the next twenty minutes trying to figure out the primary reason continental Europe’s economy collapsed after the invention of the replicator.

The tiny man’s mustache began to droop as he watched me struggle through the exercise. I hated his disappointment far more than his anger. When I finally worked out the right answer, I glanced at him to see his eyes glazed over with exasperation. Twenty minutes too late, apparently. I left hurriedly, not looking at him or his assistant. I abandoned my snacks in the test room, uneaten. This is the third test this month I’ve been given, and it is sure to be graded ‘unsatisfactory’ as well. Seeing the tiny man with his mustache drooping in disappointment makes me so angry I almost can’t think. Which, since that’s the whole point of me being here, is incredibly annoying.

The secret the tiny man knows but won’t say, the secret that has been following me around for the last year, is that I’m

underperforming. Unlike the rest of my class, I’ve not been given a job or specialty. I’m not being trained to command armies, or discover ancient civilizations, invent hovercraft or design cities. I’m still being put through the general education everybody else left years ago. The people in charge know what I ought to be able to do, how I ought to be thinking. The unasked question that is hovering over me like a guillotine blade is “Why isn’t Sam good at what his donor was?”

The whole reason I am alive is to continue the work of some genius whose life was tragically cut short. I’m not supposed to know, but it was a freak accident; a meteorite punched a two-inch hole through my donor’s chest on a morning walk. Luckily, the brain was perfectly intact, or I wouldn’t be here. The ReRez corporation made a killing off of resurrecting dead celebrities, scientists and athletes. Only one or two at a time of course, to cut costs down.

I continue moving along the dead-fish halls towards my living quarters. I say “my living quarters” like I own them, or like I’m not forced to move into new ones every six months. When the only reason you exist is because the corporation’s president, Mel Thusala, decreed that your donor was worth the cost of a second life, you don’t really own anything. Even my body isn’t really mine. My creativity, my mind, anything I ever make, all of it belongs to the ReRez corporation.

I finally get to my room and notice that the door is slightly ajar, a sliver of yellow light leaking through the crack. Jonas is back, then. Probably with another ridiculous story and a handful of ancient sticks, like always. Archaeologists make the tamest roommates, or so I’ve heard. I think they paired me with him because they thought his “stable” nature would help me settle down and find a strength. Funny, everyone else seemed to be told their strength, their purpose for being made. All I got was drooping mustaches and angry squeaks.

I heave the door open and sigh as I walk through, but stop just after the threshold. Instead of Jonas lounging on his bed, there’s a woman I’ve only ever seen on television, sitting razor-straight and

calmly looking at me.

“Sit down,” she says, and I listen. When the president of ReRez shows up in your bedroom, you don’t ask questions like “why” or “how did you get in here?”

I sink onto my bed, across from her and we sit quietly for a moment. I know why she’s here.

“Sam, I have something very important to discuss with you,” Mel Thusala said quietly. Her voice was softer than I expected, more gentle. It was strange to hear that coming out of a woman who cloned dead people for a living.

She smoothed her drab grey skirt and folded her hands neatly in her lap, while I continued to lounge on my uncomfortable mattress in silence. I will let her do the talking. Nothing I say at this point matters.

“Sam, we’ve been noticing a very large degradation in your performance in the last year,” she said.

I knew that.

“You’re obviously aware of that as well, and despite everything we’ve tried you don’t seem to be able to match the requirements set before you by the board of trustees.”

Yep, I knew that too. Her voice took a harder edge now.

“What I cannot fathom is why you consistently choose to underperform. We know for a fact that you’re smart enough, you have the best instructors in the world teaching you everything they know, so why won’t you do the work?”

That question surprised me. I sat up.

“Are you saying I’m failing on purpose?” I couldn’t believe they thought I wanted to fail. “My entire life was built around doing well here, from the day I was made until now, why on earth would I fail on purpose?” I asked.

She smirked, like she knew what she said would get a response out of me. For all I know, she planned it, because her answer seemed rehearsed.

“Because, Sam, your donor would do the exact same thing.”

I was not sure how to respond to that. I didn’t even know my donor’s name, much less how he or she acted before death. We

were “discouraged” from trying to find anything out about whom we came from by the board at ReRez. That didn’t stop us, of course, but it meant details came few and far between. Mel seemed to be reading my mind.

“I know we have an official non-disclosure policy about our donors, so this may come as a shock to you,” she said. Her eyes twinkled a bit when she said that last part.

Shock was right. I shifted into a more comfortable position on the bed.

“Sam, you are doing exactly what your donor did when he was your age,” she told me calmly.

Ah, so my donor was a he. I always wondered, they frequently change our genders to discourage us from playing “who most closely resembles me from the history book” in our spare time. They must do some kind of genetic reconfiguring too, because nobody was able to find anyone they looked like.

I continued to process what Mel was saying to me, while she adjusted her skirt. It seemed as though she was looking through me instead of at me. I shivered.

“So, why tell me this now?” I asked. I was beginning to get irritated. She laughed at the question, which angered me even more.

“Because, my dear Sam, it seems you need to know why you were really made in order to work your hardest. You weren’t built to do math problems or improve our hovercraft engines. Your purpose is much more important.”

I decided to be quiet again, until she explained more. It was hard to be silent, but I held out.

She rose and moved next to me. That couldn’t be good. Her eyes were almost moss green and the small wrinkles around her mouth were just beginning to show.

“Sam, haven’t you ever wondered why we never gave you a designated path? Most of your companions have titles like geologist, battle-tactician, physicist. Have you ever wondered what yours should be?”

Of course I had. Everyone I know had a purpose, a reason for being, a plan for their existence, except me. When we were

younger it wasn't that big of a deal, but when everyone else started specializing into their fields of study, learning the purpose for their creation, it had definitely kept me up at night. It wasn't that I was lazy or dumb; I was neither. I just couldn't find anything that interested me, anything I liked.

"So what's my purpose, lady?" I was irritated. This was my life, not something she was going to play games with. We all had heard what the ReRez did to clones who didn't preform, didn't meet quality standards. Sometimes people just disappeared. Instructors told us they were "transferred" to another building, but we knew what that really meant. I think that was why they reshuffled our rooms so often. Mel surprised me by smiling and standing up.

"Sam, if I tell you what you're supposed to do, you will never work as hard as you would have if you chose for yourself. You're one of the only subjects we've ever had this issue with," she said. Her voice became soft again and she moved towards the door.

"So that means you're *not* going to tell me what the point of my life is?" I asked her.

"I came to tell you that there is one, even if you don't know it yet. Isn't it enough to know that your life has a purpose?" she asked. She walked through door, but turned around at the last second.

"That's more than the rest of us ever got."

# VISUAL ARTS

Wy'East Sunrise <i>by Manuel Mendoza</i>	64	Hydrangeas <i>by Jordan Byman</i>	89
Owyhee River <i>by Dale Strouse</i>	66	The Nest <i>by Yuriy Kuprikov</i>	90
Different Worlds <i>by Faun Scurlock</i>	67	Sol <i>by Julia Rose Waters</i>	91
Dude What You Love <i>by Anna Swan</i>	68	Midnight Sorrow <i>by Kory Dollar</i>	92
A game with no clock <i>by Kevin Alvarez</i>	69	Pumpkins <i>by Charles Jacob Melara</i>	93
Fluffy Little Fibers <i>by Brittany Wouden</i>	70	Palmer Snowfield <i>by James Gray</i>	94
Confusion <i>by Marrassa Marie Yazdani</i>	71	Morning by Water <i>by Julia (Harmer) Conrad</i>	95
Destitute Redmond <i>by Emily Field</i>	72	What doesn't kill you... <i>by Charles Jacob Melara</i>	96
The Dark Side of the Sun <i>by Navid Saneie</i>	73	Aurora Borealis <i>by Julia Rose Waters</i>	97
Ripple and Wake <i>by Sammy Reel</i>	74	Shahsevan Nomads <i>by Sina Alizadeh Ashrafi</i>	98
She in the Big Trees <i>by Peter Arlen Collier</i>	75	Study of Horizon Lines #2 <i>by Alisa Greenwood</i>	99
Sing in Me <i>by Gordon Hays</i>	76	Octadic <i>by Marrassa Marie Yazdani</i>	100
Simple Lines <i>by Marites Castro</i>	77	ChainDeer <i>by Jasmine V. Boothroyd</i>	101
Wanderlust: Warsaw Old Town <i>by Ariel Mate</i>	78	Life and Death on the Ganges <i>by Sina Alizadeh Ashrafi</i>	102
Saints of the Vatican <i>by Emily Field</i>	79	Religious Juxtaposition <i>by Alisa Greenwood</i>	103
Routine <i>by Anna Swan</i>	80	Luminescent <i>by Rebecca Hilberg</i>	104
Confinement <i>by C.D. Tuttoilmondo-Homes</i>	81	We Accept Plastic <i>by Amil Haddad</i>	105
Mountains of Ts'ehlanyane National Park <i>by Nicholas Rolig</i>	82	Blood Moon Rises <i>by Breanna Shores</i>	106
A Day's Ending <i>by Warren Marshall</i>	83	It takes but a single step <i>by Daniil Martyn</i>	107
Dali's Mustache <i>by Cole Benak</i>	84	River Nightlife <i>by Gary Dean Bolen Jr.</i>	108
The Divided Man <i>by Gordon Hays</i>	85	The Rise <i>by Yuriy Kuprikov</i>	109
Seattle Night <i>by Peter Arlen Collier</i>	86	Oceanic Travels <i>by Kory Dollar</i>	110
Midnight City Lights <i>by Jordan Byman</i>	87	Young Brazillian <i>by Christopher Vicente Pacanins</i>	111
Frosted Salmon <i>by Dale Strause</i>	88		



# Editor's Choice

## Wy'East Sunrise

*by Manuel Mendoza*

Medium: String and nails applied to a  
1'8" x 2'6" foam board



# Owyhee River

*by Dale Strouse*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Different Worlds

*by Faun Scurlock*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Dude What You Love

*by Anna Swan*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# A game with no clock

*by Kevin Alvarez*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Fluffy Little Fibers

*by Brittany Wouden*



Medium: Digital Art

# Confusion

*by Marrison Marie Yazdani*



Medium: Digital Art

# Destitute Redmond

*by Emily Field*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# The Dark Side of the Sun

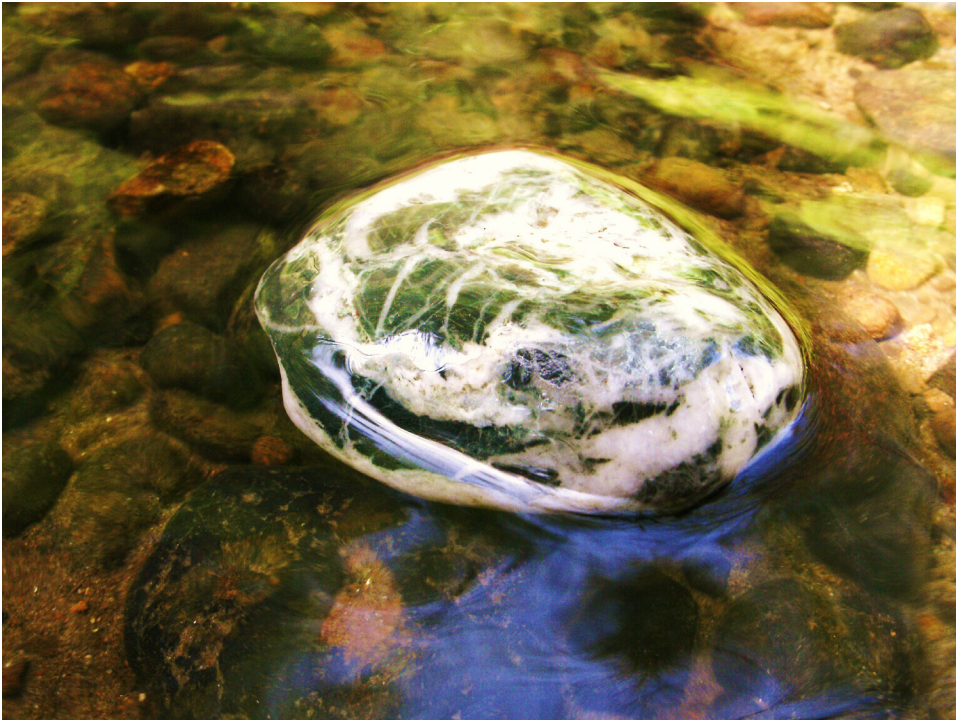
*by Navid Saneie*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Ripple and Wake

*by Samy Reel*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# She in the Big Trees

*by Peter Arlen Collier*



Medium: 24" by 18" acrylic on canvas

## Sing in Me

*by Gordon Hays*



Medium: 24"x 36" watercolor and acrylic on paper

## Simple Lines

*by Marites Castro*



Medium: Digital Photograph

## Wanderlust: Warszaw Old Town

*by Ariel Mate*



Medium: Digital Photograph

## Saints of the Vatican

*by Emily Field*



Medium: Digital Photograph



# Routine

*by Anna Swan*



Medium: Digital Photograph Manipulation

# Confinement

*by C.D. Tuttoilmondo-Homes*



Medium: 6"x6" silver gelatin

## Mountains of Ts'ehlanyane National Park

*by Nicholas Rolig*



Medium: Digital Photograph

## A Day's Ending

*by Warren Marshall*



Medium: Digital Photograph

## Dali's Mustache

*A recreation of Philippe Halsman's photograph*

*by Cole Benak*



Medium: 10.5" x 8" ink and calligraphy pen on vellum paper

## The Divided Man

*by Gordon Hays*



Medium: 16"x20" watercolor and acrylic on paper

# Seattle Night

*by Peter Arlen Collier*



Medium: 10" x 7.5" acrylic on canvas

# Midnight City Lights

*by Jordan Byman*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Frosted Salmon

*by Dale Strause*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Hydrangeas

*by Jordan Byman*



Medium: Digital Photograph

## The Nest

*by Yuriy Kuprikov*



Medium: Sculpture

## Sol

*by Julia Rose Waters*



Medium: 8" x 7" intaglio and monotype print

# Midnight Sorrow

*by Kory Dollar*



Medium: 30" x 28" recycled stained glass, vintage window, glue, grout, one hand pressed yellow 1" jewel, vintage textured stained glass, abalone chips, blue mirror and plastic snowflakes.

# Pumpkins

*by Charles Jacob Melara*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Palmer Snowfield

*by James Gray*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Morning by Water

*by Julia (Harmer) Conrad*



Medium: Digital Photograph



# What doesn't kill you...

*by Charles Jacob Melara*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Aurora Borealis

*by Julia Rose Waters*



Medium: 11"x 13" triple plate polymer relief print

# Shahsevan Nomads

*by Sina Alizadeh Ashrafi*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Study of Horizon Lines #2

*by Alisa Greenwood*



Medium: 24"x 24" acrylic on wood

# Octadic

*by Marrison Marie Yazdani*



Medium: Digital Art

# ChainDeer

*by Jasmine V. Boothroyd*



Medium: Plate Photopolymer Intaglio Print

# Life and Death on the Ganges

*by Sina Alizadeh Ashrafi*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Religious Juxtaposition

*by Alisa Greenwood*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# Luminescent

*by Rebecca Hillberg*



Medium: 9.5" x 24" glow sticks on bristol paper

# We Accept Plastic

*by Amil Haddad*



Medium: 9" x 12" acrylic on wax paper

## Blood Moon Rises



*by Breanna Shores*

Medium: 10" x  
25" oil on canvas

## It takes but a single step



*by Daniil Martyn*

Medium: 18"  
x 6" coffee on  
bristol paper

# River Nightlife

*by Gary Dean Bolen Jr.*



Medium: Digital Photograph

# The Rise

*by Yuriy Kuprikov*



Medium: Digital Photograph

## Oceanic Travels

*by Kory Dollar*



Medium: 21" x 44" recycled stained glass, vintage window, glue, grout, one 2" recycled vintage tail light, crystal string beads, recycled beads, two 1/2" vintage reflector jewels blue, one 3/4" x 1 1/2" reflector oval jewel, one 1" round flat backed teal glass eye, and one 2" clear beveled round glass eye.

## Young Brazilian

*by Christopher Vicente Pacanins*



Medium: Digital Photograph



# POETRY

Orangeville	114
<i>by Kathryn Ann Freese</i>	
Ms. Campbell	116
<i>by D. Venn Penrose</i>	
Staging Ground	117
<i>by Jerry Goodstein</i>	
Dandelion	118
<i>by Jared Smith</i>	
Coming Home	119
<i>by Tabi Chivaugne</i>	
Locked Out	120
<i>by Hailey L. Hanson</i>	
Drought	121
<i>by Heather Wiedenhof</i>	
Imposter	122
<i>by Ginille Forest</i>	
untitled	123
<i>by Heather Wiedenhof</i>	
The Land of Dreams	124
<i>by Jennifer Schwartz</i>	
the dancing night	125
<i>by Ryan Griffith</i>	
Proof of Self	126
<i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	
στοργή	128
<i>by Tabi Chivaugne</i>	
Five:ZeroZero	130
<i>by Richard Soles</i>	
Gerudo Valley Theme	132
<i>by Richard Soles</i>	
Hometown	134
<i>by Zahara Hakim</i>	
laying on of hands	136
<i>by Ryan Griffith</i>	
Antidote	137
<i>by Jerry Goodstein</i>	
The Makers	138
<i>by Lucas Wiseman</i>	
THE WOLVES	139
<i>by Samy Reel</i>	
Rainbow Cup	140
<i>by Gordon Hays</i>	
Ode to the Plot	141
<i>by Brandon Jaymes Condon</i>	

# Editor's Choice

## Orangeville

*by Kathryn Ann Freese*

You don't come here because you want to.  
 You come because an elderly relative passed  
 And left a houseful of life to wade through,  
 Hands to shake and casseroles to pretend to eat.  
 You change planes twice and still have to drive three hours to get  
 here.

Orangeville is sleepy.  
 You slip in when it yawns  
 And tickle the back of its throat,  
 You may elicit a dry cough, but little else.

Time stopped here in 1964.  
 People live small lives in small houses.  
 No one sees anyone else cry,  
 But Sherri next door can name each of her neighbor's cousins.  
 There are seven and she was in grade school with three of them.  
 High school, of course, is the end of the line for Sherris in  
 Orangeville.  
 And Frans and Janets and the occasional Bob.

Because of this, or the drought, or liberals,  
 Things are tight at the end of the month.  
 Most households come up a little short.  
 Canned soup for dinner again.  
 This is the same for everyone.  
 No one says a word about it.

You walk up the steps of the elderly relative's house  
 And pause a moment  
 Because you thought you heard a laugh.  
 The old man loved to tell stories, but rarely finished them—  
 He made himself laugh too hard to speak,  
 But it was just a breeze in the cherry tree out back.  
 That laugh now resides at Stephenson County Family Funeral  
 Home: Affordable Dignity.

There's a whistle and a plaid cap for you.  
 Putting these on, you amble back down the street  
 Order a cheese and mustard sandwich from the best restaurant in  
 town.  
 Your former neighbors still save up for these.  
 The cap smells old. A little must, a little sweat.  
 A dash of laughter, a pinch of hard times.  
 A sprinkle of Granddad,  
 And a lot of Orangeville.

## Ms. Campbell

*by D. Venn Penrose*

She did me a solid,  
 Ms. Campbell.  
 I wish that I were speaking for us when I mention  
 The heartsick I feel from our affair with inertia,  
 Our headstrong momentum of built assertions that carry us  
 At speed through our days, past the towers of expectations and  
 assumptions  
 Of who we are and how things are and how we are supposed to  
 Be.  
 You and I are locked in a race, streaming along exclusive corridors  
 Of erected desires, wistful and petty alike, that we carry on at such  
 speed  
 Through the blurring of our time here, that we sail past  
 Those blind alleyways,  
 Those creases we habitually fold into our days  
 That retain the potential to surprise us,  
 To pull us from our orbits as if they were the gravity wells  
 Of hidden, simple fortune.  
 It shouldn't take much to slow one's self, to duck into  
 One of those corners where wonder sidles and creeps.  
 Sometimes a shove will do.  
 Sometimes it is a person that steps out of their track to knock you  
 Out of yours, spiraling the two of you into new orbits,  
 Along the curvature of a world refreshed from that dogged track  
 you left  
 And into new colors, new shapes.  
 That the simple act of generosity redefines  
 The both of you.  
 Ms. Campbell did that for me. Her giving,  
 And my gratitude,  
 Brought the two of our lives  
 Back into beauty.

## Staging Ground

*by Jerry Goodstein*

On an empty field behind the school  
 geese gather, joyous and expectant.  
 They remind me of excited tourists,  
 ready to depart for some welcoming place.  
 They wait and honk until its time.

Then they lift as one,  
 take shape, and fly away.  
 I suppose they are going south for the winter.  
 It wouldn't matter to me.  
 I'd join their chorus anytime, anywhere.

## Dandelion

*by Jared Smith*

Hello, child of the field  
Golden crown.  
And verdant stem  
Slave to wind  
And the sun's piercing beam

Countless brothers expand  
Among blades  
Of weak thin jade  
Bowing down  
Before summer's warm breath

Striped beads of gold and night  
Hum above  
Bright, gilded crest  
They feed deep  
From the wells of your joy

Here today, not the next  
Your crown gone  
Wasted to ash  
Sailing away  
Grey wisps caught by wind's hand

## Coming Home

*by Tabi Chivaugne*

My 1.31 mile run down the highway,  
Delano Road, marina parking lot,  
Gets me to the deli in time for sunrise.

Bert and Ernie,  
The strange geese that never leave,  
Don't judge the neon stripe in my running tights,  
And don't ask about my city life.

I walk every pier,  
Pet the dogs who never forgot me.  
Everyone gives out hugs,  
Comments on how much I've grown,  
Always say how much I'm missed.

I can walk the beach back;  
The tide is out.  
Neighborhood dogs traipse along too,  
Help me watch for the geoducks,  
And avoid their spitting rage.

The familiar steps,  
That I used to climb every day,  
Still have the smiley face,  
Painted in wood stain.

My grandfather greets me at the top of the stairs,  
The empty chair next to him reminds me  
Why I always come back.

## Locked Out

*by Hailey L. Hanson*

The air smells damp  
held in by the low, looming fog ceiling  
with a hint of smoke  
from glowing houses tucked down by the creek

Our feet muck through the deep red leaves and mud  
and the twigs we break echo across the canyon

I duck under dewy webs and  
watch the frogs leap from our approach  
The bugs chirp and snap  
giving life to the cool, still evening

The saddle squeaks and my horse's ears flinch  
distracting for a moment from her tense, sure-footed stomp

A dog howls in the distance as our pace quickens  
and turns into a bark as each branchy silhouette  
becomes a buck in hiding  
Our trudge gets heavier and her head bobs more quickly with each  
step

Soon we're running  
Eyes wide and jaws clenched  
both looking back with one eye, fearing the slick ground below

We rush the gate  
bracing for a slippery crash  
Only to find ourselves

Locked Out.

## Drought

*by Heather Wiedenhoft*

When she opened her lips  
I knew before she said  
Who or what she was  
What she felt, what she wanted.

It was in the fiber of her body  
Her heart next to me  
The way her shadow eased into mine.

She was sweet relief  
from my long dry spell  
And my eyes  
swallowed her whole.

## Imposter

*by Ginille Forest*

In June,  
the fields fill up with wild daisies.  
White flowers dancing in the breeze.  
They're beautiful,  
but they smell like shit.

Ashley was a daisy.

## untitled

*by Heather Wiedenhoft*

Ripe and sweet  
It dribbles down chin  
And glistens on lips  
A bite cut into a lusty moon  
The gold and silver beams  
Shine through cracked teeth  
Night Candy

## The Land of Dreams

*by Jennifer Schwartz*

Scotland, the sweet land of dreams  
Kissing my cheek with misty rain  
I can hear the voices of years past  
Carried on the wind of memories

The endless rolling hills of emerald  
With mossy gray stones jutting out  
Of the ancient jeweled landscaped  
Like trolls guarding their treasure

Crystal lakes reflect the skies above  
But I wonder what secrets they hold  
Is there another world hidden below?  
A sapphire palace sparkling with stardust

Haunting castle ruins steal my breath  
As if they jolt me to an earlier time  
I suddenly forget when and who I am  
Willingly trapped in its eternal spell

I trudge through the thick dark mud  
Sprinkled with the magic pixie dust  
Of fairy queens that bless the land  
Calling my spirit to dance wildly  
Like a child in star studded rain boots

## the dancing night

*by Ryan Griffith*

how lonely must  
shadows be, forever  
stitched to the movements  
of our bodies in the  
daylight. crawling unto  
the collective union  
of midnight, as each  
day draws to it's  
close. only to be captured  
once more by fluorescent  
stars, burning back  
the silent mass of  
disquiet at the  
flick of a switch.  
the caged bird never  
did sing as sweetly  
as when free, just the  
same of our shadows  
only when we turn  
off the light will  
we actually  
see.

# Proof of Self

by *Brandon Jaymes Condon*

mama papa  
 boy girl  
 black white  
 us them  
 mama is lady  
 mama is black lady  
 papa is not black lady  
 papa is not mama  
 Mama sez life is hard  
 She sez boyz are out to get you  
 Espeshuly the wite ones  
 Mama is very strong  
 Daddy tolded me Mommy is just hurt  
 Mommy doesint want to see me hurt  
 He says I should assume the best about people  
 Daddy is not Mommy  
 Mommy wants me to be a good example.  
 She says girls have to try extra hard.  
 Black girls have to try really, REALLY hard.  
 One day I'm going to be just like Mommy.  
 Dad told me I was worrying too much,  
 And that I don't have to prove anything.  
 Dad's heart is in the right place,  
 But he just hasn't known Mom's life.  
 I asked Mom what it was like growing up,  
 And she told me all about the back of the bus.  
 Today, the driver wouldn't let her on because she was short on  
 fare.  
 She says she still gets a lot of prejudice.  
 My father told me he didn't care about Mom's race  
 And that he was actually glad she was a woman.

I guess it would be a problem if she were a man.  
 I wish everyone could be like Dad.  
 When Mom died, Dad cried the most at the funeral.  
 She was hit by a white motorist.  
 My father says I shouldn't hold grudges, but  
 I don't pay him much attention.  
 My father's death was just as untimely.  
 He was shot by an assailant during a robbery.  
 The robber and his crew were all black.  
 I remember this surprised me.  
 It's been 20 years since I met Darren.  
 Like me, he is half-black, half-white.  
 He's going back to college to continue his education.  
 I told him he should look into some grants for African Americans.  
 He refused.  
 Darren died this year.  
 He'd been a pediatrician for almost 30 years, since graduation.  
 At the funeral, guests of all colors were speckled about.  
 It made me happy to see how things had changed.  
 I remember the back of the bus, and the drinking fountains.  
 I remember the public beatings, the surprise at mixed couples.  
 All the things my mother had always told me about.  
 All the things I had never seen.  
 The doctors told me the disease is terminal.  
 But that's all right. I've lived a good, long life.  
 I wonder why I find myself thinking of my father now?  
 Maybe my children should hear him before I go.  
 "I'm not long for this world," I say.  
 "I know you want to spend more time with me,  
 But there's someone else you should meet."  
 "Mom?" they asked. "Kids..." I told them,  
 "Don't live to prove yourself to anyone. You are proof of self  
 enough."



# στοργή

*by Tabi Chivaugne*

I am roused out of bed,  
by the bing-bang-boom of the music emanating from my  
bathroom,  
over the pitter-patter of her shower water.  
I hate being woken up this way,  
But my daughter says she absolutely cannot  
share a bathroom with her stinky, smelly, stupid, six-year-old  
brother.

I cook them their hearty-healthy breakfast,  
of things I know they'll roll their eyes at, but wish they had  
when they no longer have me to cook for them.  
I reminisce on days I had before them,  
but I would never wish them away,  
and I remind her to buckle up, headlights on, 10 and 2.

I clean up her bedroom,  
and even though she's sixteen, I still make sure her silver, stuffed  
koala, Frederick,  
stays on her twin-sized bed, resting on the abandoned pillow while  
she's away.  
I hear my phone ring,  
but I'm taking these few moments to relax and reload, breathe and  
bathe,  
plus, I didn't bring my cell phone in the bathroom.

I finally realize the time,  
and it's 2pm, 3pm, and her little brother walks home from the bus,  
it's 5pm, 6pm, her dad comes home, she should be here too.  
I remember my earlier abandoned cell phone,  
before she was born, it never left my palm, pocket, purse,

and I don't know why today had been different.

I listen to the voicemail,  
the nasally tone of her school's attendance secretary  
concerned that she hadn't made it to her 7am sophomore science  
class.

I conceal my panic in the charade of routine,  
bake bread, steam spinach, breathe, breathe, breathe,  
set the table, four forks, four plates, four knives, a thumbs  
distance from the edge.

I hear a door close outside,  
the distinct tap-tap-tap of a sixteen-year-old in kitten heels  
and a pause to hit send on a text message that will be her last for  
quite some time.

I compose my face into a pinched up annoyance,  
resist the urge to take stock of every molecule of DNA that I  
provided for her,  
and somehow I manage to pretend to be angry, even though I'm  
just so glad she's home.

# Five:ZeroZero

*by Richard Soles*

“Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man stupid and blind in the eyes.”

-Mazer Rackham

Ender’s Game by Orson Scott Card

From the deserted parking lot of my apartment  
I can see the traffic light,  
standing as a red-eyed reflection  
of the cold dread in the pit of my guts.  
Chains shaped like telephone wires and headset cables  
break through the concrete  
and coil around my wrists, dragging me forward  
inch-by-inch, step-by-step.  
The memory of a nightmare drives my progress,  
filling the space between eyes and lids  
with the buzzing glow of a monitor.  
There’s a ringing in my ears,  
punctuated by a soft repeating beep,  
and followed by the background noise  
of a phone line clicking to life.

“Thank you for calling. Please allow me to ruin your day.”

Smoky air and coffee breaks.  
Crisp white shirts and carpet-like walls.  
Boxes raised around helpless animals strapped in chairs,  
held tight in place by numeric sequences  
representing the apparent worth  
of the precious minutes and hours that make up a life.

Beep.

“Calm down, sir, there’s no need to yell.”

Beep.

“Why yes, ma’am, that’ll only be 20 dollars more.”

Beep.

“I’m sorry, but we can’t move forward without collecting the full amount.”

Beep.

A fence stands before me,

tall and unnecessarily barbed.

In its shadow my hearing is clouded,

and from somewhere behind me a familiar voice beckons.

The message repeats:

“Your fifteen minutes are over,

please return to your desks.”

My shoes are made of stone as I turn my back

on the rusted fence.

Hyperbole, tried and true,

helps dull the ache,

five days out of seven.

## Gerudo Valley Theme (American Colossus Version)

*by Richard Soles*

There is something to be said for this narcoleptic sense of self  
I've come to identify as our collective calling card.  
The shedding of one's self-awareness is, to be sure, a useful trick  
when faced with moments in which strength  
tempered by thoughtful reflection might be considered prudent.  
Admittedly, a thoughtful disposition is naught but an impediment  
if one wishes to continue simply marching into the  
sun-soaked desert, wherein lie the secrets of "looking tough."  
The Giant walks and the world shakes beneath his feet.

We of the New World have our "big sticks," we keep them in  
abundance;  
it's our inside voices that we've lost,  
or maybe purposefully discarded somewhere  
along this road in the last 30-odd years. One tends to forget such  
trivialities –  
such as why we left our mouths gaping wide  
even as the sand poured down our throats –  
when occupied with much more imperative tasks like sewing flags  
and tapping wells.

It seems as though howling cries for Jesus to take the wheel  
weren't enough (imagine that!) to keep us on the road.  
Perhaps the idols we worship kept Him from returning our calls,  
but I'd be willing to bet that He was just never there and we  
simply decided,  
as with everything else, that just saying it was so would save our  
souls.  
There was no Divine Plan, just old words blowing in from the  
West,  
written, so it would seem, just for us:

"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings.  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"<sup>1</sup>  
And where the Giant once stood, straight-backed and proud,  
he now lies, dying alone under the desert sky.

1. Shelley, Percy. "Ozymandias." *Keats-Shelley Journal* 6 (1957): 31. Web. 14. Nov. 2014.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30210020>>

# Hometown

*by Zahara Hakim*

He drives.  
 Past the Rose Motel which is remembered  
 And forgotten by that murder-suicide last year.  
 Past the NAPA  
 Where those frat boys go  
 Because they can't even change their own air filters.  
 Whose slew of fully automatic silver Hondas and red Mazdas  
 make him  
 Carefully lock both his doors on his way to order a case of 15W40.  
 He drives.  
 To that diner whose fluorescent sign  
 Is the only kept lamp on 1st street.  
 Where his glossy hands,  
 Blackened from the grime of the ever failing combine,  
 Rise nearly in unison  
 With matching hands that  
 Grumble  
 At the stiff haired waitress  
 For more fried pickles.  
 He drives.  
 As his sunburnt ears,  
 Overexposed in the space usually filled by noise canceling muffs,  
 Glide back as the apathetic radio announces a touchdown for the  
 home team.  
 Back through the sociable hills.  
 To finish bailing for the night.  
 In the field owned by the ignorant doctor  
 Who calls this town quaint  
 But is too busy  
 To drive.  
 Through the Ponderosas that babysit

The hotheaded Indian Paintbrushes so they don't  
 Run onto the railroad tracks.  
 Through the neighborhood where hundred-year-old Jim tries to  
 Rip down his own barn with his lawnmower just so  
 His wife will let him buy a new calf.  
 Along the fence where children collect fallen apples to feed  
 Commander, the aging pony.  
 The doctor drives.  
 Straight through this town on the highway.  
 Never stopping to try our fried pickles.

## laying on of hands

*by Ryan Griffith*

i see it there.  
burning throughout you,  
each smile a shaded  
facade in front of  
the immeasurable  
hurt within. you  
didn't get dealt  
a bad hand, no  
none of that  
predestined bullshit.  
someone came and  
took your happiness  
from you, didn't they?  
you trusted them  
and they  
tore your securities  
right out of your chest.  
leaving only the remains  
of those aching  
memories of  
happy  
ruin.

## Antidote

*by Jerry Goodstein*

Step outside on a cold, winter morning.  
Look up at the vast sky and let  
the flicker of stars soothe you.  
Forget for a time black-hearted bosses, crushed hopes,  
wracking pain, self-important clods, haunting regrets.  
Take a deep breath, and hold.

## The Makers

*by Lucas Wiseman*

Those of us who step along the thorny path of making  
Tell true stories with colorful, beautiful lies.  
The curse of the maker is also the greatest blessing;  
We tell false stories that paint pictures of the truth.

Our makings do not need to be true,  
But they always point toward truth;  
A prophet crying to an unbelieving people.

We are free because our obligation is to the spirit of truth,  
Not necessarily the true state of things.

We are the lens; not seen, but looked through.

## THE WOLVES

*by Samy Reel*

Are at the door,  
I can hear them can't you?  
Their voices echo  
racing through the night  
against the damp of creeping frost.  
Rapping on the dark stained door  
their claws tap, like wayward branches  
reaching out with spindly fingers.  
They grind their pointed teeth  
sharpening them like spears  
the yellow ivory of them bared  
in greeting.  
Through splinter thin cracks  
I see the glow of amber reflecting  
back to me, twisted.  
I watch them  
lick their ruby lips  
dark matted fur rising with each ragged breath  
sinewy bodies glide beneath the trees.  
I wish to unlock the door,  
join the revelry  
and race through the forest  
howling and stamping my feet  
as the cadence rises and falls  
gliding through the air  
and floating like a dream  
towards the silver moon.

## Rainbow Cup

*by Gordon Hays*

Nothing can grow from falsehood. It must begin with the seed of Truth.

Story shapers and deceivers know this alike.

The beginning. It starts with me.

People say I have an attitude, among other things.

I say, I speak my mind.

I say, I claim my voice.

I alone have walked through the fires of my life.

I alone exist with the charred remains of my personal triumphs, and the wasteland of my failures, flaws and missed opportunities.

I draw from the deep well of a varied past. Covert and cruel, beautiful and heartbreaking. The enduring spectrum of the modern queer.

I drink from a rainbow cup. Thick with the spoiled slick of hate and rejection, dredged with tears and brutality.

I drink from a rainbow cup. Spilling over with jubilant celebration, the flood of creative liberation.

I drink from a rainbow cup. Longing for a mulled sweetness, warmed by desire. A never sated want of un-ending thirst.

I drink from a rainbow cup. Poured from a history of silence and enduring strength. Poured from shadows of the past into an illuminated future.

## Ode to the Plot

*by Brandon Jaymes Condon*

How long have you been with us?

How many centuries has it been?

Once no more than a little sperm cell

Scribbled on cave walls by your oafish parents,

And now, look at you.

What a handsome fellow you've become.

Is there a subject on your body not yet toned?

How chiseled you are.

Is there a topic on your body not yet explored?

How lewd you are.

But you are beautiful all the same.

Such a shame that so many are blind to your charm.

Dressed up in that coat of stunning visuals,

Those ever-so-crisp-sounding pants;

Down to all those cheap thrills you wear on your feet.

Really, winter is no time to be wearing gunfights and explosions.

What frivolity.

Alas, "the clothes make the man," so they say.

Why do you let them do this to you?

You know it blinds them to your true beauty,

Your inner beauty.

Your intellect, always giving me something to ponder, some new insight.

How many hours you must spend thinking those strange thoughts of yours.

Your heart, always ready for a laugh, and able to share in mine.

How much talent you must have to produce such wit.

Your soul, so open and willing to share your tears with others.

How much effort you must expend in practicing such courage.

Some see you through very narrow eyes.

Certainly they must be nearsighted.

They see the brown-haired plots, the romantics; one as good as any other.  
They see the black-haired plots, the dramas; nothing deeper required.  
They see the blonde plots, the comical; anything for a good laugh.  
Even those red-haired plots about magic and zombies and other such nonsense you see nowadays.  
I feel sorry for these people's plots.  
I imagine they must be very shallow indeed.  
But you, you are a unique individual;  
You have so much potential.  
Able to be anything you wish,  
Willing to be anything I wish.  
One day, I'm going to surprise you.  
I'm going to find that subject unsculpted, and give it a good workout.  
I'm going to find that topic unexplored, and oh, the things you'll feel.  
I'll find a new, yet undiscovered side of you  
And it will be all the more difficult for those who follow me to do the same.  
One day, you will stand in your perfection  
And you will laugh at we who seek to find more.  
One day, there will be nothing left to explore.  
It is a very good thing that that day is not today.



# PERFORMING ARTS

# Editor's Choice

## Light of Love

*By Brian Idle*

Light of Love is a song featured on the Salmon Creek Journal's website. Please visit [www.salmoncreekjournal.com](http://www.salmoncreekjournal.com) to listen.

Designed by Lucas Wiseman

The fonts used in this journal are Phosphate,  
Georgia and Helvetica Neue.

Created by the Students, Staff, Faculty and Alumni  
of WSU Vancouver.  
Washington State University Publishing.  
April 2015.

