

fiction | creative nonfiction | poetry | visual art

mariposa

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Estrella Mountain
Literary Review




Arts and Composition

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE






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Estrella Mountain Literary Review

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Awarding Judge

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Lee Barnes is author of eight books, the latest being *Car Tag*, and some 40 short stories. He earned a Master of Fine Arts in fiction writing from Arizona State University. In addition to publishing fiction, he writes and publishes essays and works of creative nonfiction. *When We Walked Above the Clouds*, a memoir of his tour in Vietnam, was released in September 2011 from the University of Nebraska Press. He has received the Presidential Award for Teaching Excellence from the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) and has been twice honored as an instructor by the Board of Regents for the Nevada System of Higher Education. In 2009, he was inducted into the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame at the University of Nevada Reno. He serves as lead faculty for the creative writing program at CSN. In his past lives, he was member the U.S. Army Special Forces, a deputy sheriff, a narcotics agent, a private detective, a construction laborer, and a casino dealer.

A Revolution of Dancing

first place fiction

Joel Salcido



"You need to get up, *mijo*," Kika repeated for the fourth time that morning.

Joseph laid face down on his bed all summer, not quite crying - he was too proud for that deep a display of emotion - but stuck in the despair between uncontrollable tears and nihilistic numbness.

"*Andale, Joseph. A comer chamaco*," Kika, his grandmother, instructed, yanking off the tattered zarape that Joseph had haphazardly thumbtacked over the blinds so the sunlight would leave him to suffer. She stood in her pajamas, arms crossed the sun bleeding through the blinds behind her, eyeing Joseph with a stern compassion. The light created a matrix of lines around her like a deconstructed halo. The expression on her shadowed face was the same mask she wore every time they did this dance.

"*Abuela*, I told you give me some time and I'll be OK. I promise," repeated Joseph, for what seemed like the hundredth time. Every day, she would go through the same motions of opening his curtains and imparting reassuring words, hoping to jostle him out of his funk. It may have been the way the light shone behind her, the position of the sun at that particular moment, or perhaps she had grown weary of the breakfast growing cold, but something gave her the strength to stop coddling him.

"No more *cabrón, levantate, bañate y cambiate!* And shave, *pareces un pinché oso!*" she said, throwing a towel, socks, underwear, and a razor as she said each word. Joseph could not hold back his smile when she said *oso*, the name she used to call his grandfather, who didn't resemble a bear at all. His grandfather, Jesus, was six feet tall and 170 pounds, a wiry, leather-skinned man with sparse hair and humorous eyes. Every winter he would grow a beard to keep his face warm, or at least that's what he said. Joseph remembered his grandmother playfully swatting Jesus' face away when he would get drunk off *tepache*, kissing her with his scraggly facial hair reeking of liquor. How she would wake him up when he passed out on the porch by pulling the grey hairs out of his moustache, laughing when he woke up feigning fury. How last winter before he died she would comb his beard as he slept in his narcotic coma before his liver finally gave out.

Joseph remembered his grandfather, helpless and emaciated. His skin, blotchy from psoriasis, was dry and cracked. His beard wild and completely grayed. His chapped

lips were unable to speak as he lay, waiting to die. His bright eyes dimmed not just from pain but seeing the hurt his family had to endure for his reckless living. How his suffering wasn't his alone but something parceled to everyone he loved.

Joseph thought and watched his grandmother standing strong, tears pooling in her eyes, as if she too were envisioning Jesus lying in his bed waiting to die. Then they both thought of Carmen, Joseph's mother, and preferred to stop thinking at all.

Joseph rolled over, his consciousness teetering toward the gravity of sleep. He blinked back into lucidity and yelled as his grandmother shut the door behind her. "*Ay voy.*"

Ten minutes later Joseph came down the stairs, still unshaven, wearing the zarape he had been using as a curtain and a pair of moccasins he purchased on the Indian reservation last winter. Kika saw his reflection in the glass of the coffee pot and chuckled to herself. He always used to dress ridiculously. In the early 90's he would wear cowboy boots, shorts and a red Michael Jackson jacket with a dozen zippers every day to school. His mother encouraged his strange ensembles despite Jesus' reproaching. She would explain to her father that she was fostering his artistic side and argue about how her upbringing had stifled hers.

Jesus wasn't raised compassionate and always had difficulty dealing with his daughter's emotions. For him a good life involved having children, food on the table and most of all laughter. While Carmen and her father shared a sense of humor, he had no patience when she decided she wanted to be a photographer. Kika always regretted not standing up for Carmen, not allowing her to become the woman she was meant to be. By the time she realized that, it was too late.

"*Quieres café?*" Kika asked with her back to Joseph so he wouldn't notice the tears that ached to fall.

"Yes please." Joseph decided that his grandmother didn't deserve any more suffering, and his depression was causing her pain. If she could deal with the loss of her daughter and now her husband then he needed to man up and be strong. He stared into the coffee cup as the milk danced into a whirlpool. "I think I'm going to go see Carlos today and ask for my job back, or look for something else. I'll shave and change before I go."

"*Esperate,*" Kika said as she placed her hands on his arm. "Don't change, *mejor mañana.*" She had a key in her hand that she removed from the cupboard when she grabbed the coffee mugs. "Your *abuelo* left you this. It's for a safety deposit box at the credit union. Go see what he left for you, and take care of those other things tomorrow." She hardened her face, but the wrinkles in her eyes couldn't hide the kindness. There was something else buried beyond the pain and age, a sweet knowledge that Joseph was barely noticing.

“What’s in there?” Joseph asked, hoping to uncover the knowing in her eyes. “It’s not like *abuelo* had anything. All his valuables are in the shed.” He smiled at her, and she laughed. Jesus would’ve become a hoarder had Kika allowed it, but instead, she restricted his treasure hunts to one weekend a month. All his discoveries and speculations and hopes were packed into a shed he built in the backyard. “Maybe he found something worth money and never told you.”

“There are many things more precious than money, *mijo*, and a lot you didn’t know about your *abuelo*.” Her eyes gleamed again.

“OK, OK. Let me put on a shirt.”

“No. Go now *andale!*” Kiki gave him a little shove.

“*Abuela*, wait. I look ridiculous,” he said, noticing his absurd outfit in the mirror behind the kitchen table.

“Please. Go now.”

He felt an intuition that he had been numb to for the last few months. Instead of letting his brain explain it away, he followed his instinct. “OK, I’m going.”

He kissed his grandmother, grabbed his sunglasses from the counter and walked out the door into the steadily warming autumn afternoon. He hadn’t been outside for a few weeks, and the slight breeze was soothing, like an invisible arm

around the shoulder. Yet as good as the wind and sunlight felt, inside he was conflicted. Joseph wasn’t sure he wanted to know what was in the box. What did she mean when she said there was a lot he didn’t know about his grandfather? Jesus was a fair man, and hilarious, but he had a dark side. Joseph couldn’t help but feel that whatever he had gone to so much effort to hide was part of that secret life. Joseph didn’t want the responsibility of knowing that, or worse, of having to tell his grandmother about it.

The speculations were rolling around in his head while he walked past the lofts and storefronts that lined the downtown streets leading to the credit union. A small brownstone coffee shop adjacent to the credit union had its door open, and the deep, eye-opening aroma of roasted coffee lingered on the sidewalk where Joseph passed. The fragrance stopped him for a moment, and a loud voice spilled out of the dark space inside.

“Make art that matters! That demands to be made! That breeds from necessity! Art that’s both didactic and sexy!” A tall skinny guy with glasses and a huge head of hair was yelling into a microphone on a tiny stage inside the empty shop. “The best art is art that asks who we are, that guides to the glorious discovery of ourselves and our divinity!” Behind the counter an



attractive woman with purple hair was leaning on the counter toward the speaker, smiling and staring attentively.

Meanwhile, the man continued with increasing passion. Joseph walked in, partially to put off what he had to do, partially because of a visceral intrigue.

"Make your art reflective, a mirror of the world you see. Ask yourself if your art doesn't just say something but if it speaks!" He sat at a small table nearest the exit and let the poet continue as the woman from behind the counter approached with a menu and glass of water.

"Hi! How's it?" the woman asked setting down the glass of water and noticing Joseph's focus on the words spilling from the tiny stage.

"Let your art breathe into the souls of the eyes and dance with the spirits of its observers like quantum particles! Let your colors become sounds vibrating the very being of the audience! Let your pens soak up experiences and drip with emotions! Let them move and groove with intuition and dance in your hands, because who knows what cosmic vibrations are motivating our movements?" The poet continued his energy building.

"I'm OK. Who's he?" Joseph was amazed at the vigor of the performance. Since he stepped in, the man on stage was pouring his heart out to the empty chairs and nicely folded napkins.

"He's my husband, Paolo. I'm Joelle and this is our new shop." She motioned with her hand across the empty room. "Thank you so much for coming in. Would you like some coffee?"

"No thanks. Who's he performing for?"

"Your next piece could be prophecy! Give your brushes melodies and manifest the beautiful singing voice of its textures. Give your strokes warmth and depth. Mix your color with spit and sweat blood and love, massaging the intellect, arousing the spirit so every layer of paint bleeds your beliefs and ideology!" Paolo spat ecstatically, his hands waving to give the words punch. Joelle waited a moment before explaining.

"For me, of course!" she said laughing exuberantly. "Well only when he's reading the really good stuff. He would probably say he was ministering the wind, or clamoring to the sun but really," she whispered the last part, "he's up there for you." She was looking at him deeply and unwaveringly,

which made Joseph uncomfortable. When he had the courage to look away, Paolo the poet was looking at him the same way.

"Make your art personal! We want to know who you are. What makes your cry and laugh. What turns you on and makes you angry, because we all relate to your humanity, but we're interested in your individuality." The words were raucous but winding down like the crescendo of a symphony, the poet's voice slowing and quieting as he rounded out to the end. "We need challenges! Confrontations with the beautiful and ugly because life is both those things and so much more simultaneously and infinitely changing. Demonstrate this constant evolution in all your creative endeavors!" Paolo concluded breathing heavily and sweating profusely. His wife clapped loudly, grabbing Joseph by the shoulder.

"That was great, right? Good job, babe. You managed to rope one in," she said holding up Joseph's hand. He was shaken by her friendliness but more shocked by the words swimming in his consciousness.

"Hey man, thanks for coming in," the poet said, approaching with his hand extended.

"That was awesome, man. I've never really heard anything like that." Joseph shook Paolo's hand.

"Well, I hope not. I just wrote it today. Did you get anything out of it?" Paolo asked hopefully. He pulled out the chair facing Joseph and sat down, peering into him.

Joseph had been confused when he walked in, and now he was more perplexed than ever. "It was really, well, good, but I'm not sure what I could get out of it. What do you mean?"

"I mean you're an artist, so what did you think of my manifesto?"

Joseph took a long drink from his glass of water. "I'm not an artist. Honestly, I don't know shit about poetry or anything like that. I was just on my way to the bank next door and by coincidence..."

"You're not an artist?" Joelle asked rhetorically. She looked at her husband and they both looked Joseph up and down. "Well, you sure look like one." She smiled encouragingly.

"Of course he's an artist! That's the entire point!" Paolo stood up, placed his hands on the table and leaned toward Joseph. "There is no coincidence, and there is no person bereft of artistry. Perhaps yours is just locked away somewhere, and you've yet to find the keys." With that, he walked to the back of the shop where the kitchen was, slightly perturbed.

"Sorry about that. As you can see he's very passionate. So what kind of art do you do?"

"No worries. When I was a kid I used to draw a lot, I was pretty good too but when my mom... I don't draw anymore. Sometimes though, I notice things, shapes and movement, and I think about how I could... Anyway, thanks for the

"Make your art personal! We want to know who you are. What makes your cry and laugh. What turns you on and makes you angry, because we all relate to your humanity, but we're interested in your individuality." The words were raucous but winding down like the crescendo of a symphony, the poet's voice slowing and quieting as he rounded out to the end.

water and the words but I really have to go.” He didn’t want to talk about when his mom died. It was sudden, violent and tragic, and he preferred to keep it buried deep.

“I don’t know you, obviously, but maybe you should start again,” Joelle said softly. He smiled and thanked her again. He walked out of the shop and into the credit union next door.

Ten minutes later, Joseph sat in a private room with the oversized metal box, twirling its keys in his fingers. *What might be in there?* was twirling around in his head, but the words he just heard made it clear that no matter what was in there, it was his responsibility. There was no avoiding it, even if that felt like the best option.

Joseph opened the box and pulled out a thick manila folder. Inside were dozens of photographs of people he knew. Black and white scenes of his great uncles and aunts, group photos of his cousins, portraits of people in his family, then desert skyline shots and strange angled city views; all original prints and negatives of professional quality. Then dozens of pictures of himself laughing, playing and wearing his favorite red jacket and cowboy boots. The last large picture of the set was of his mother taking a picture of herself in a mirror, the large camera obscuring all of her face except for her eyes. He held it in his hands for a long moment, and the tears he had been holding for what felt like a lifetime burst down onto his beard like dew. When he wiped his eyes on his arm, he noticed a small, yellowed picture taped to the back of his mother’s self-portrait. It was a thick bearded Jesus in his 20’s smiling and playing an accordion as Kika held up her skirt, looking over her shoulder mid-twirl. Then he found dozens of his drawings, ones that he had buried among his grandfather’s junk in the shed. Joseph smiled and rolled away a tear that landed on something large, wrapped in newspaper. He tore at the paper and revealed the accordion from the picture, wrapped in his Michael Jackson jacket. Underneath everything were dozens of the illustrations he used to draw that he threw away the summer his mother died.

Fifteen minutes later, Joseph stood outside of the front of his house. Everything that happened in the two hours he was gone felt surreal. He opened the door to music playing. It was a solemn ballad by Los Cadetes de Linares, and the accordion on the song wailed through the empty house. Joseph walked into the kitchen finding his grandmother sitting at the kitchen table bawling, staring at the stereo. The song ended and began again with the subdued soliloquy of the singer nostalgic about lost love. Joseph placed the folder and the jacket wrapped accordion on the table and stood wordlessly, unsure what to do. He’d never seen his grandmother cry like this, even at the funerals. She always held her emotions

back, quiet, proud and dignified. He opened the folder and looked at the picture of his mother, then the picture of his grandparents, and knew.

Joseph did his best to imitate his grandfather’s characteristic half smile, bowed and held out his hand chivalrously. “*Bailamos?*” he asked. Kika looked up and remembered the day Jesus asked her to be his wife. He played her a song on the accordion while his brother took pictures and like that day, she reached out and danced. ■ ■ ■

Up Home

✿ first place nonfiction

Aja Garcia



It’s always so peaceful being up home. There’s nothing up here except the mountains, the sun, the houses, and the school. There is the little playground near Valerie’s house and the villages that are divided into Three Mesas. The First Mesa consists of the small villages that I hear about through my So’o (grandmother). Then, there’s Second Mesa, which is where we are currently located. In Second Mesa, there are three villages. We often come up here to Sipaulovi to watch the dances. There is nothing but rocks, tumbleweeds, dirt, and very little housing.

Then, there’s Third Mesa, which has four villages. Two of them I’ve been to because we saw the dances in the village plazas years back. One dance was in Hotevilla, and the other was in Kykotsmovi. I was overwhelmed at the sight of seeing the Kachina’s dance and pass out gifts, mostly baskets and big bowls of goodies which normally contained fruit, cookies and on some occasions, Kachina Dolls.

In Sipaulovi, this dance only happens during a certain time. Since it’s the summer, the dance for this morning and early afternoon is called “The Basket Dance” and I’m excited to see who’s going to be “throwing stuff” this year. Mom didn’t come with us this time because she had to work, so my sister and I decided to go with my So’o (grandmother), my Ka’a (aunt), my sister, and my younger cousins.

The drive up here was bumpy, tiring and frustrating at times because majority of the time we didn’t really do anything except sleep in the back of grandpa’s big green truck and rotate who was driving. There was dirt everywhere. Rocks were cluttering the dirt roads. Tumbleweeds were tumbling by carelessly. Bullheads were on the ground ready to stick to their next victim. They always hurt when you stepped on them without knowing it. Besetsolis (bed bugs) were ready to eat you alive while you slept. That’s not what I was looking forward to, especially since mom and Auntie Morn used to scare us by telling us their horror stories of being attacked by the Besetsolis

while they slept because they were common up here even if you had a brand new mattress. Mom told us that she and her sisters used to wake up covered in bites, and that part always freaked me out. It's scary getting eaten alive by them which is why I checked the bed the moment we arrived in Valerie's house.

I walked up to her house and gave her a quick "Hello," and ran to the room where my sister and I would be staying and inspected the room, making sure nothing was there; I sat down on the bed and waited for someone to bother me. My cousins were still sleeping out in grandpa's truck because they were afraid to sleep in Valerie's house. I would've slept out there with them if it wasn't crowded already, but I'll take what I can get. So'o was talking with Valerie in the kitchen about tomorrow in Hopi, which is something I'm not too good at, and neither are my cousins, sister, aunts, or mom. I sat there about to take my shoes off when my sister came into the room and dropped our bags down on the carpet of the room. The room we're staying in is one of Valerie's guestrooms because her kids don't live with her anymore. I suppose I understand why they're not here because, well, there's nothing to really do here other than watch the dances, eat and watch TV.

My sister frowned at me and said, "Thanks for helping with the bags, stoop."

"Sorry, had to check the bed for Besetsolis," I said.

"Find any?" she asked.

"Nope, all clear except for the bullheads," I said and lifted up my foot to show her the bullheads sticking to my shoe.

"I got some too. Damn things hurt," she said and lifted up her foot to show me that she also had bullheads stuck to her shoes.

I couldn't help but laugh because the truth was it was funny and because those stupid things really did hurt. It was like a small nail was stabbing you in the foot whenever you accidentally stepped on a bullhead, and the immediate pain you felt after that was complete and utter torture.

"Early day tomorrow," said my sister and plopped herself down on the bed next to me.

"Do we really have to wake up early? It's the same dance all day so does it really matter if we miss the morning dance?" I asked.

She just shrugged her shoulders and lay down on the bed. I suppose I felt pretty tired too because it was a long drive and it was very boring too. Hopping off the bed and trying not to wake up my sister, I opened our bag and picked out my pajamas then went out to the hall toward the hallway bathroom to change. Valerie and So'o were still talking in the kitchen because I could hear them. Closing the bathroom door, I saw myself in the mirror and noticed I had dark bags underneath my brown eyes.

My wavy yet stubborn hair had started to stick out from

its ponytail making me look as though I had antennae. My skin was light with hints of freckles just underneath my curly eyelashes. I had this pink luster to my face, but only on my cheeks and forehead, I hadn't the slightest clue why, but it made me look as though I had makeup on. Maybe I was just flushed, or maybe it was because of the heat up here, even though it wasn't really hot right now. The sun was down so it's fairly cold outside. I could feel the cold coming from the floor making my skin form goosebumps and making the hairs on my arms stand up. So I hurried up and quickly changed into my pajamas and went back into the room, where I found my sister sleeping already in her pajamas. I turned off the light in the room and joined my sister on the bed and fell asleep.

A knock at the door woke me up. When I opened my eyes, I saw that So'o was fully dressed and ready for the morning dance. I looked over at the clock on the small white nightstand and saw that the clock read 6 a.m. I whined and pulled the blankets over my face.

"Si'wa, are you going to morning dance?" So'o asked.

"It's too early," I told her and tried not to knock my elbow against my sister, who was still sound asleep.

So'o made this funny noise she always made whenever we didn't do something, and I laughed quietly so she couldn't hear me. I didn't even have to look at her to know what she was wearing because she always dressed traditional whenever we came up here for the dances. Her hair, now gray and silver floating just above her small shoulders, was combed nicely and was accessorized with a small pin to hold back the stray hairs that always seemed to get away from you no matter what you did. Hairspray couldn't hold them back, either. She wore deerskin that formed like a dress and hugged her tightly to keep her warm. There was a red scarf she always had wrapped around her neck with some silky black material that also wrapped around the waist like a belt. She covered herself with a shawl because it's cold outside as it always is in the mornings up here. On her feet, she was wearing the traditional moccasins that someone had made for her a long time ago. I was always jealous because she had a pair and I didn't, and neither did my sister nor cousins.

"OK, Si'wa, don't sleep in too late," she said and closed the door behind her, leaving the house with Mitwe while I fell back to sleep.

I woke up and saw that it was now 11 a.m., and the "Basket Dance" would be starting soon. My sister was already awake and getting ready, and to my surprise, when I had gotten out of the bed and walked into the living room, I found my cousins and my aunt sitting on the couch waiting for us. My cousins were yawning and picking off the bullheads that had attached

themselves to their shoes while my sister and I got dressed.

My stomach was rumbling, and there wasn't any food in here that was made so we all walked to Dora's house because there was always some food on the stove. It was cold even though it wasn't early morning anymore. My cousins and I were shivering as we walked down the dirt road toward Dora's house. Her house was always so memorable because it was the only one up here that had a porch! She had a porch made of wood with two thick pillars that held up the awning to block the sunlight. The curtains in the window were open and we could see the inside of the house even from where we were.

"It's cold," I said, shivering.

"No, it's not. It's nice," said my sister.

My cousins and I looked at her like, "Bitch, you're crazy," because it was cold outside. If you can see your breath in the air, then it's cold. When we walked into Dora's house, we hurried up and started eating the stew that was in a huge pot that was about as tall as my legs.

After we were done eating, all of us piled into grandpa's truck, and my aunt drove us up to the top. Looking out the windows, we could see the village starting to grow packed with cars and people. The rocks were so tan, they almost looked pink at some points. Large chunks of rock were piled on top of each other, creating steps for us to be able to reach the top. We could see the Kivas from the bottom while my aunt kept driving. My cousins and I, including my sister, were excited because it has been so long since we've seen these dances. My aunt was taking her time driving up the hill because there wasn't really a railing to make sure that you didn't fall off, so basically if you fell off the side, then you're dead, which is why she was being so careful.

The road up was bumpy, and we literally flew off the mattress in the back of the truck, but we laughed about it and did it again until we had made it to the top. All that was left was to climb the steps and meet So'o in the Kiva.

We parked the truck and hopped out, grabbing our jackets just in case the wind picked up because Valerie said it's been windy the past couple of days. My aunt, my cousins, sister, and I began hopping up the hugely spaced apart steps. The steps were so old that huge chunks of them were missing and still chipping away. I hopped to the first step and felt completely exhausted already. My legs were burning as if I had been running a marathon. I looked back and saw that my sister and cousins were struggling, too. It was a lot of work.

When we made it to the top, we found So'o and made our way to the Plaza. We found the ladder to the Kiva and quickly climbed up and waited for the dance to start.

My mom's cousins came out, lined up in a circle with their ceremonial clothing made of the same material that my

So'o's moccasins were made of. Carrying the plaques they had made, they began the song to start the dance, and everyone listened. I looked over and saw that all the goodies were piled up just a few feet behind them, and I knew that once my cousin Rochelle and the others came out, it was going to start.

"Aja," said my sister. I looked in her direction.

"Hm?"

"Do you see Rochelle?" she asked.

I looked around for her, but didn't see her.

"No, she's probably not ready yet. Sharon must be doing her hair still," I said.

"It's cold," my youngest cousin complained.

"Put on your jacket, fool," said her brother.

"Shh! It's starting," I told them.

My mom's cousins began to sing louder, and that's when I noticed my cousins beginning to walk to the back where the goodies were. I could already tell this was going to be one hell of a day, violence and all. She made her way to the center and started throwing. Chaos broke out.

She started throwing plates, bowls, cups, and food along with some toys. The crowd was pulling together to catch the goodies, but they didn't realize that they were too close to each other. Some people were knocked down and trampled on, while others were perfectly fine and catching the goodies with trash bags. That wasn't the worst part about the dance. The worst part was about to come.

My cousin started to throw the plaques and baskets that were handmade and that's when people started to beat each other up. They pushed and shoved and trampled innocent bystanders until they got what they wanted. Rochelle threw a very prettily decorated plaque in my direction, and this group of guys immediately trampled me to get to it. They pulled it as if it were a tug-o-war rope, which was ruining the plaque's beauty. But, as I had tried to get out from underneath them, screaming at the top of my lungs, they kept fighting for the ruined plaque. They tore it up just as I had managed to climb out from underneath them.

My body was in so much pain that I had given up on catching the goodies that my cousin was throwing. I left and went into the Kiva to calm down until my sister came in and asked if I was OK. I told her I was pissed off and that I had wanted to kill that guy who fell on top of me, but she just laughed and went back outside to the chaos. I was lucky to have survived this horrible dance. ■■■

My cousin started to throw the plaques and baskets that were handmade and that's when people started to beat each other up. They pushed and shoved and trampled innocent bystanders until they got what they wanted.



New York Dreamscape
second place visual arts
Jaren Davis

Prosa del Chamán (Shaman's Prose)

✿ first place poetry

Joel Salcido

dapper bow tie *guayabera* for the Halloween *carrín*
naps dragging like coattails dragon breath from midnight
stroller coffee beans

spitting caffeinated prosaic thought mosaic language

Día de los Vivos! words *vino*

and all the old wine skins can't hold strange flows like Nile,
meanwhile on Mayan pyramids myriads of Miriam's from
Magdalene

growing dandelions growling sugar skull jaguars

elsewhere Mississippi delta nine recordings of Robert
Johnson

lamenting his lost soul sold to satan, who peddles oranges
under overpasses

but I'll pass on fruits from trees of knowledge

I'd rather burn the herbs of wisdom until the kingdom
comes

It's orgasmic and tragic but that's blues, its hues colored
phantasmagoric

Fantastic! Amazing! Unbelievable!

we yell down wells wondering if we're communicating
with the past when it echoes

It's a single drop of awe bouncing off walls

as if the uttered words went mad and had to be trapped in
padded rooms with barred windows but we can tunnel

whether it's for escape or depth or death

who waits on a park bench in Madrid watching the ballet
of falling leaves in autumn

which is often associated with witches

and wishes since night falls like a hapless romantic- early,

and the stars have more time to hang in the sky until
they're hidden by the light,

light hides as much as it reveals which exposes a lot about
the word unearthen

as if truth was foreign to this planet

as if the iron in our blood wasn't magnetic

as if the electricity in our brains wasn't kinetic

nothing is antiseptic,

things are dirty fingernails and yellowed shirt collars and
old collard greens growing holy molds

who can break the shape of bacteria? who can stop the
migration of electrons?

who can channel the power of a river to pour out a poem?

not sure but there are rafts of craft for turbulent waves

drafts on a page and when there isn't,
a heady draft is a sage an herb is a mage and time is a cage
that gives no escape

to the accelerated inspiration traveling without destination
plans are overrated, but mapping the galaxy can calculate
or at least approximate

the rate at which the strings of being vibrate the unheard
tunes of the moon

Ideas are hinges doors held open ■■■

Fragmented

✿ second place fiction

Shea Huffman

"I can't do this anymore," I whispered softly to myself, hands trembling as I stared down at the white glimmering kitchen counter. A warm breath of golden sunshine streamed in through the large glass-paned windows, and a glint of sunlight bounced off of a small coffee spoon. The harsh aroma of burnt coffee hit me suddenly, and my nostrils flared at the smell. Tapping my coarse fingers across the counter spastically, I snatched the coffee pot up, flicked the switch off and poured myself a large mug of billowing black goop. I lifted the cup to my lips hesitantly, sipping on the hot liquid. Then I placed it back down on the marble slat, anxiety bubbling inside of my chest as I began to pace frantically in the lone kitchen. The eerie sound of nothingness filled the room and swallowed me whole, and I could feel the walls closing in, suffocating me and making the airways in my lungs close up.

What have you done? A voice uttered in my ears and it made the hairs on the back of my neck stand straight up. I had a cry stuck in the back of my throat, stinging but when I opened my mouth to scream, I could feel my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth like sandpaper and only silence came out.

Spinning around on the heels of my black high-top converse, I caught a glimpse of the mess I had made last night.

Why? Why would you do this to me?

Staggering, I stared down at the scarlet puddle on the floor with the broken body of my girlfriend folded into the ground, lying on the slick tile floor and looking almost like a fragmented butterfly. I could feel my heart slowly crawling up my throat and I was choking on it.

"No..." I stammered out, struggling to keep myself from falling. "No, this isn't happening!" I screamed out in rage, tears streaming down my face, stinging my cheeks and I could taste the tang of salt on my tongue. Memories flashed through my brain and crippled my thoughts.

"Olivia, are you coming?" I called out to my beautiful girlfriend, smirking back at her. The freshly fallen snow crunched

beneath my boots, and the crisp winter air felt refreshing against my pale skin. I was a skinny, gangly thing—5'9" with messy black hair and ice blue eyes.

Olivia hopped along in my deep footprints, giggling as she tried to keep her balance. She blinked up at me, pushing her long black hair out of her face and her gorgeous glimmering green eyes sparkled as she smiled at me. Blushing, I stopped in my tracks and waited for her to catch up to me. The clouds were rolling in overhead and the sky was turning overcast. I shuddered at the chilly air; the hairs on my arm were sticking up then I felt a warm touch press against my skin. Glancing down, I felt an effortless smile breathe onto my lips.

"Hey," Olivia whispered, her breath coming out in puffs of fog and I held her closer, our body heat mixing together and warming each other.

"Hi." I pressed my lips against her forehead and closed my eyes, intertwining my skeleton fingers with her perfectly manicured ones. We walked along in the soft white fluff then arrived back to my house, the porch lights flickering even though it was only five in the afternoon. I fished the old Toronto Maple Leaves house key out of my pocket and turned the knob.

Blood splatter drenched my trembling hands and I screamed, racing to the kitchen sink. I hastily turned the handle for 'warm' and thrust my soaked hands into the clear water. It instantly turned crimson and I felt my stomach drop like a rock into my lower intestines. The warm, comforting heat of the water slowly turned scalding, and I bit back a yelp and shut the tap off, my hands white and numb from the tingling, burning sensation. My nerves were shot and I shook my head, tremors racking my body and I tried to take a slow, deep breath to calm my heartbeat. The tile floor of the kitchen looked so slick and I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to recall what had happened last night.

Creaking the front door open, I helped Olivia inside and she walked in slowly, glancing around the large empty house. A soft, bemused smile grew on my lips. "You act like you've never been here before." I teased gently and she glanced back at me, smirking.

"I've never been here before without your parents here too, silly..." She blushed at the unspoken sense of freedom. "Where are they, anyways?"

"They're out of town, they went to go see Jake," I replied, thinking of my older brother and grimaced slightly. He was everything I'd always aspired to be but never was. He was a top athlete, and I was scrawny and weak. He was extremely smart and I struggled in school, even now in my first year of community college (he, of course, went to a big university on a football scholarship). He was the Golden Child and I was the fuck-up.

Olivia blinked up at me, her emerald eyes studying me and she touched her palm to my cheek gingerly. "Grayson...don't," she whispered, reading my mind and knowing exactly what I was

thinking. She had a knack for that kind of thing.

Sighing, I shook my head and my eyes drifted away from her. "Olivia...you're perfect, you can't possibly understand how I feel about my brother. He's the favorite child, he's amazing in every single thing he does, he never does anything wrong...and I've screwed up on everything since I was born." I mumbled, my words stammering out as I felt unease rising in my chest.

"Hey, hey!" A tiny, adorable frown formed on Olivia's rose-colored lips and she grabbed my hands in hers, staring up at me. I couldn't look at her, not with the disappointment I could already foresee glittering in her eyes.

She squeezed my hands again, tighter, and finally I looked back down. Blinking in surprise, I was greeted by not harsh judging eyes, but warmth and understanding. She had always been my soft place to fall. I gulped and hugged her close, burying my face in her small rounded shoulder, the comforting scent of her strawberry shampoo mixing with her cherry blossom perfume and I inhaled deeply, feeling a sense of relief and serenity. "I'm sorry." I whispered, my breath feeling shallow against her skin. "I know I'm pathetic."

"Grayson. Stop." Olivia pulled away slightly and held my face in her hands. "You are an amazing person. You're brave, intelligent and caring. And I love you so much." She leaned up on her tiptoes and kissed my lips slowly, very tenderly and loving.

I wanted to drown in her.

As we stood there in the front room kissing, I thought back to the first time we met.

I stared up at the large brick high school, my feet grounded into the pavement and I couldn't move, frozen like a statue. My legs felt like anchors, weighing me down and I forced myself forward, mustering up all the courage inside my small body and scaled the steps to the sliding fiberglass doors. As I reached for the handle, the doors suddenly slammed into my face from the other side and I fell backward on the hard asphalt. The sound of mocking laughter filled the air and I felt gruff, calloused hands wrap around my thick gray hoodie and lift me off the floor.

I hated ignorant pricks like these. They were so full of themselves. I wished I could just go back to my birthplace—Toronto, Canada. Everything was so peaceful there, and here it was just so depressing. The transition was hard enough to adjust to, and the dumbass jocks didn't make it any better. I always wondered why more jocks weren't like my big brother—it seemed like he was the only one who had a heart.

They taunted and teased me, playing with my psyche and putting me down for how I looked and my interests. Girly poetry. Gay music. Emo writing. Weirdo. Pansy. Faggot.

I tried to ignore their stinging words, but I could already feel the hurt creeping into my skin, piercing my confidence and sucking it away. I tried to squirm out of the big one's grip, but

he wasn't done with me yet. I'd never been much of a fighter. In fact, I always preferred cooperation to confrontation.

"Where's big brother to rescue you? He isn't coming this time," one hissed in my ear, his breath hot and threatening. Jake had always been there to protect me. But he was gone now.

I could feel rage boiling inside my chest and I closed my eyes, flashes of white blinding my vision. I was enveloped in a soundless darkness. I could feel the crunch of tiny, frail bones cracking against my knuckles. I dropped to the floor and the sound of pained screaming echoed in my ears. People were beating the shit out of me. I could feel myself slipping from consciousness; in and out, in and out...

Voices echoed, ringing like church bells relentlessly and I winced in pain, thrashing violently in the pitch-blackness I was stuck in.

"Leave him alone!" A girl's voice, strangled and distant.

"Holy shit! Look what he did!" I recognized this voice, one of the bullies.

A gasp. Loud male voices and quick footsteps, then silence.

"A-are you OK...?" The girl's voice, hesitant and concerned. I could feel a hand caress my cheek and I jolted up. Blood was spattered everywhere on the asphalt. I was lying on my back, staring up at the somber sky and the bullies were gone.

"Wh-where did they go?" I stammered out, words hard to pick apart. I felt dizzy, trying to shake myself out of it.

"Another blackout, Grayson? That's the third one this month..."

The girl stared at me, her piercing emerald eyes studying me. "You don't know?" she breathed, shock edging her voice. I shook my head no, oblivious.

"They were ganging up on you, and then you just-" she paused, riffling through her mind for the word. "Snapped."

"You mean...I fought all of them?"

"You've got to learn to control yourself, dude. One day you're going to get yourself into serious trouble."

"You creamed all of them," she admitted, laughing slightly and it caught me off guard. Shouldn't that scare her? Glancing up, I stopped as I caught a real glance of the girl kneeling in front of me. She was beautiful.

I tried to think of something to say, but nothing would come up, my mouth like sandpaper. She smiled very softly and stood up, helping me onto my shaky feet. "Come on, let's get you to the nurse."

"Thank you..." I trailed off awkwardly, not knowing her name. She smirked a tiny bit at that.

"Olivia."

The flag of scarlet went unnoticed.

I blinked, coming back-to and realized Olivia and I were on my parent's couch, making out and listening to the soft hum of

my iPod on the playlist she'd created. The rest of the night was a hazy blur of bliss.

Reality hit me hard and I staggered backwards, my mind still reeling and trying to piece together what was going on. I blinked down at Olivia's broken, lifeless body and I fell to my knees, sobbing. I crawled to where she was and lifted her up into my arms, screaming.

"OLIVIA! OLIVIA, WAKE UP!" I yelled, my heart twisting in pain and I thought I could feel myself blacking out. I could hear my brother's voice, two weeks earlier...

"I can't let her slip through my fingers, Jacob." Panic grew like a tidal wave and threatened to crash down as I spoke. "She's been distant lately, she's at the university, we never hang out anymore..."

Jake just shook his head, staring ahead at the flickering television screen. "Gray...you just need to calm down. Take a deep breath, it'll all be OK."

"No it won't, not if I lose her!" I spat out, fury rising in my voice. Everyone was so against me lately.

He glanced back down at me, staring for a long time then slowly, cautiously, placed a hand on my shoulder. I bit down hard on my bottom lip in irritation at him.

Don't look at me like that. I know what you're thinking, I thought to myself.

"Grayson. Stop. Even if Olivia breaks it off, there will always be other fish in the sea. Trust me," he said, stone cold and serious. "You just need to focus on yourself right now, and..." He didn't finish his sentence, trailing off.

Fix yourself. I finished it for him in my mind.

He looked dazed, slight fear glinting in his amber eyes then he shook it off, smiling at me. "Just try to think of other things besides Olivia for now, OK buddy?"

But I couldn't stop thinking about her.

"OLIVIA, PLEASE! PLEASE WAKE UP! I'M SO SORRY, SO SORRY, PLEASE GET UP BABY!!" I cried uncontrollably, my body spasming and my mind staggering, trying to hold onto any sanity I had left. Flashes of last night finally resurfaced and I passed out on the floor, crashing onto the tile beside my love.

Our last interaction rose in my mind suddenly, the last time I'd seen Olivia alive...

"I KNOW WHERE THE FUCK YOU WERE TONIGHT!" I shouted angrily at Olivia as she walked inside, her T-shirt messy and awkward-looking and her long black hair was frazzled and covering her green eyes. She looked like a different person standing in front of me, so much further from the girl in the snow all those months ago and from the girl who had saved my life four and a half years ago. Now she was killing me.

"Grayson, what are you talking about-"

"YOU'RE FUCKING AROUND WITH THAT OTHER

GUY, I KNOW YOU ARE!!” I hollered at the top of my lungs, my throat sore from screaming. I needed a drink of water so badly. I couldn’t breathe again and I could feel another panic attack creeping into my system.

“What?! No I’m not, what guy? Grayson, calm down, I have no clue what you’re even talking about!” Olivia spat back, chucking her backpack into a corner of the room and walking up to me in the kitchen.

Bright white lights glared down on me, blinding my vision and I blinked, trying to see and process what was going on as figures came into focus and they were shouting things at me.

Psychopath, sick, crazy, murderer.

“OLIVIA STOP LYING TO ME!” I cried, hiding the large butcher knife behind the counter, trembling and gripping the wooden handle so tightly my knuckles turned white and the veins in my bony hand nearly burst.

“HE KILLED MY BABY!” The sound of a man’s voice distantly rang in my ears and I felt strong hands reach for my throat to latch on and choke me.

“Grayson, stop yelling at me!” Olivia squeaked, pleading with me to calm down but I couldn’t. I was so high up right now that nothing could bring me back down, not even the one person I lived and breathed for. I glared at her, feeling hopelessness clamp its menacing jaws down on me and I gasped for breath.

I had been teetering back and forth on this slippery ledge for so long.

“I tried to tell you, Mom...there was always something off about him. You should have sent him away when you had the chance,” Jake muttered under his breath.

“STOP IT, OLIVIA!” I sobbed, pulling the knife out haphazardly and thrust the blade into her side.

I finally fell, so far.

“Life in prison without parole. Court dismissed.” The gavel smashed against the table.

Olivia’s bright green eyes widened in shock and horror, tears forming and I stopped as I saw hurt shining through them. She fell forward and crumpled in my arms and the knife slipped out of my fingers, clattering against the cold tile floor.

What had I done?

“I’m so sorry, Olivia...” I whispered, scars covering my body, violent slashes to my wrists and arms; my voice echoed against the barren white walls of the cell. With bloodshot eyes, I weaved the mattress sheet around my neck, tying it to one of the rusty pipes overhead, balancing on a wooden stool.

“I loved you so much, Grayson....you have no clue.” Olivia croaked out her final words before going limp in my arms.

I closed my eyes, the blurry, fragmented image of Olivia playing through my head on repeat like a broken record and a tiny smile danced along my cracked lips.

“I love you.” ■■■

The Definition of a Daughter

second place nonfiction

Lauren Kelley



“What’s the definition of a daughter?” My father asked me this during my first visit back from college freshmen year.

He was picking me up from the shuttle station to drop me off at my mother’s apartment. As I waited I started to feel anxious about our encounter. My father is a tall, light-skinned black man, with a slender athletic build, coarse black hair, green eyes, and a clean mustache. His name is Michael Kelley.

On this visit, I envisioned a nice homecoming, as I am homecoming queen, you know? With lots of questions about how classes were going, the friends I had made, and what college was like. However, this was not how things started off. In the back of my mind the premonition of conflict grew. I was worried about what he was going to say and how I was going to react. But when he pulled up I smiled hoping these insecure thoughts were only in my head.

“What’s the definition of a daughter?” he asked after I tossed my bag behind the passenger seat, sat down and shut the car door.

Well, here we go, I thought. This was not the first time I have been asked this question and every time this question is explored we argue. So I chose a road less traveled and sat in silence. I refuse to answer his question. I remember the days when it used to be easy to speak to one another; the laughter, admiration and good times had now come to this.

The reason for my defiant behavior is because this question is literally the bane of my existence. I hated the question. It provoked an aggravated unwarranted response out of me. I never understood the question because I already knew what a daughter is. She’s a child to a mother and father. She may have a brother, sister, none, or both, and most importantly she should love her parents.

But for some, love has conditions. For me, these conditions were established just before my mother and father got divorced.

The definition of divorce: a legal dissolution of marriage or total separation.

As my father and mother approached a divorce I can honestly say my father began to check out. Not only from his family and friends but from life, the realm of reality and very often reality is rarely viewed in the same way. In this moment, I no longer respected my father’s reality and this is why we fight. The fact my mother was no longer in love with him caused him to live a hollow life filled only with heartache and pain. Even when the word “divorce” is so clearly defined,

could it also mean this?

Since my father was also using silence as a tactic, I began to reminisce about the day he left during the ride home. It was earlier that year on Christmas Eve. After coming home from Midnight Mass it was only my mother, sister and I now, a small family of women. I can remember it being a chilly crisp night. The wind was gently blowing off my face. A slight scent of pine followed the breeze. My sister and I walked upstairs to our apartment chatting and smiling for what was in store next. Our family traditionally was opening presents after church. However, something was different inside our home; it was also strangely cold and unfamiliar. I couldn't place my finger on it. What was missing?

"Dad?" I called out when I unlocked the door. My sister shuffled past me to get him.

"He's not here, Lauren," my mother said matter of factly.

Immediately, I was let down. Why couldn't he at least stay for presents? But I wasn't going to let my sister see the disappointment on my face. I had to be strong for her because I knew she would regard his absence as a crushing loss. She emerged from the hallway finally realizing what had happened; he was gone. I smiled at her but she didn't smile back. It was our first Christmas without a father and we all missed him – most of all, my sister.

The definition of sister: A daughter in relationship to another child of the same parents.

This memory played continuously in my mind as my father and I approached the apartment. It's remarkable how someone can become consumed in thought during a car ride. However, my excitement grew because I knew my sister was close. I would see her soon! I missed the conversations we used to have, the laughter we shared, and being in her presence.

My father did not have a son, just two daughters. Since my sister was the baby and because my mother figuratively built up a Wall of China securing her behind its fortress, my father took his turmoil out on me. I didn't blame my mother; my father was a man who absolutely needed clear boundaries. It just meant that I must now fill the role of the missing women in his life. Whenever I tried to bow out of the position something always happened. Either confusion, grief, jealousy, or regretfully hate would fill up our space. And when there is nowhere to move, people start getting testy--especially when you're in a car.

"Lauren, did you hear me?" my father asked, finally speaking as we pulled up to the apartment.

Stay silent, I thought. Maybe if I don't say anything the question will go away and we can act normal.

"Lauren, I know you hear me talking to you," my father said again. He has a particular knack for repeating himself.

Finally, I was fed up.

"Why do you have to ask me that question? Are all the feelings of pain and sorrow, heartache and despair now my burden to bear? Is this the definition of a daughter?" I asked.

"Look it up," he replied.

When the car stopped, I grabbed my bag and ran upstairs before he had time to follow. On the way up I saw my mother in the adjacent window from the front door. She was washing dishes and wearing those god awful yellow rubber gloves. Her hair was pulled back behind her ears. She smiled at me but I didn't smile back, signaling to her the car ride didn't go well.

I burst through the door of our apartment hoping to find sanctuary. My sister was on the couch watching TV, remote in hand. She was wearing a purple top, jeans and her hair was in a ponytail. She looked up at me somewhat startled by my entrance. I didn't acknowledge her. Our father was now right behind me. I walked past her and headed to the kitchen. My mother was finishing dinner. She made shrimp pasta. It was my favorite dish. I caught a whiff of garlic bread toasting in the oven. *Mmmm, good.* But before I could speak, my father repeated for a third time.

"I'm talking to you, Lauren. What's the definition of a daughter?"

My appetite dissolved in an instant.

I looked at my mother for help as I stood by the dining room table, clutching the chair tightly with my left hand willing the negative energy swelling up inside me to be transferred into this lifeless object. But my mother stayed focused on her task, her body language saying, *"This is your fight not mine."*

The definition of mother: A female parent; a woman in a position of authority.

I turned my head back to my father. He was coming closer to me luring me with his eyes to get a dictionary and look up the word "daughter." But my resolve was clear. I will not allow this word to define me.

"What's the definition of a father?" was my reply.

The definition of father: The male parent; an originator, a venerable person; to originate and guide through the early stages of life.

When the words left my mouth, I knew I made a mistake because my father does not like to be challenged. My sister squirmed on the couch but her eyes stayed glued to the TV showing no sign of the fight my father and I were about to have.

"You think you're so smart?" he asked.

The words hissed out of his mouth like a snake. His tone warned me to be careful of what I said next. Our eyes locked and this action was unnerving to all in the room. My mother tried to intervene.

"Michael, why don't you stop? Lauren just got home," she said.

But her efforts failed, neither of us wanted to back down. As I looked into his eyes, I could see the hurt, sadness and anger. What did he see in mine? He should see a proud daughter, enrolled in college. I would be the first in our family to graduate. Then I lost it.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME? Isn't it enough I'm in college trying to make something of myself? Are you jealous I'm in school and you're not?!" I yelled.

"Jealous of you, who do you think you are?" he answered back. "You're no better than me. NO BETTER! You're such a disrespectful child. Do you even know what the word respect means?" he said.

The definition of respect: The special esteem or consideration in which one holds another person or thing.

"Respect? How could I respect you? You don't even respect yourself!" I said as my vocal cords began to tighten in my throat.

My mother walked in-between us and pleaded for my father stop.

"Michael, please go," she said.

I stared at him, my left hand still seizing the chair at the head of the table. My chest rose heavily as I tried to control my heart beat and a sound like steam locomotive departing the station escaped through my nostrils while I exhaled. For a moment, he just stood there, staring at us, looking at us as if we were strangers. Then he turned around, walked out of the house and slammed the door behind him leaving yet again. When his car drove off I retreated to my old room for recovery, the sun was setting and the room was getting dark. I closed the door, sat on the bed, buried my face in my hands and sobbed.

When I finally looked up, my eyes fixed on a blue dictionary lying on the dresser. I flipped on the light switch, walked over to the dresser and reluctantly opened the dictionary, flipping the pages to the letter D. When I found what I was looking for, I sighed.

The definition of daughter: A female human being in relation to her parents; a woman whose character has been molded by a particular event of set circumstances.

It was the circumstances that have defined me. Not the word but the conditions in which I was raised. While I meditated on this I formulated my own definition.

The definition of Lauren: A daughter and sister, a woman who is strong and selfless, she is the head and not the tail; her behavior is modeled from the behavior of her mother and father, a person who has loved and lost.

I am my father's daughter. This is what I have always longed to say. ■ ■ ■

Water

second place poetry

Alexis McCoy

I was born for water, maybe she as well

Living to splash as brine hardens our skin our hair,
our eyes.

Oh, to discover the deep. Chills of flesh cannot halt the age
of discovery.

Discovery of body, mind, of the treasures underneath.

Underneath the skins' surface, under the layers of constant
motion, where beings undiscovered sleep.

Are we dolphins clicking and whistling playing all the time
only to be caged and perform for the masses of land
walkers?

Or are we crabs, diligent, always running for survival, then
captured and awaiting an obese, power monger, to crack
our shells

letting nothing to remain but our husks, broken and
brittle?

Maybe sharks? Misunderstood terrors of the saltiest of
water,

smooth skin, scarred and ragged with the weight of what
we will live through

strengthened by the gnash of sharp teeth between hooks
in a futile attempt

to imprison us for a sick delicacy.

We are not one of the millions of fish that swim in what
they see as clear, living in

an eat or be eaten world with the best of their ability.

Nor any of those in the abyss always hiding in their
mysterious ways

keeping themselves from all creation.

Or as the moss eaten bones of pirates, and adventurers
whose life long journey's come to an always moving end.

I know we are different. We swim away from the schools,
the masses.

Dodging between coral and anemones as we drift on the
current

We are a dying breed, we are turtles, our hard shell shelters us,
while we are still hunted, we are protected by the masses,
those who don't know our lives,

keeping us in the rage of a tsunami, in the calm of the
storm.

But free to survive, side by side. ■ ■ ■



Recurring Reality



✿ third place fiction

Gabriel Hernandez

No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands. – Arthur H. Stainback

It begins with pitch blackness as the infinite waking world slips away, replaced by an infinite dream world. Daylight sets each minute detail of the horrific scene. For now, this is reality.

The undead are everywhere, stalking me, voraciously attempting to take me over, to assimilate me into their multitude. Wanting me to be like them, to live how they live, to desire what they desire. But while undesired, I wonder what would happen if they were to be successful.

There are four of us; each figure representing a part of me. There's the fragile, young woman who keeps her blonde, silky hair tied in a ponytail. She's Emotion. There's the intelligent-looking man with short, brown hair and thin-rimmed glasses that make him look like the ideal cross between a nerd and a handsome doctor. He's Logic. Then there's the guy who I can only describe as

Danny Trejo; a big, tanned Mexican with longish, black hair and a tough exterior to match his attitude. Judging by the sheer size of his mustache, I can only assume he represents my Ego. And finally, of course, is myself; the intuition leading their way.

Climbing the rickety, exterior metal stairs of a tall, older, white building, we run as if we're taking flight; only we can't. The toxic stench of death would overwhelm us if we weren't already familiar with it. Seeking to achieve higher ground, each step taken by each of us makes a clanking sound as we feel the reverberations of the undead in their own reckless ascensions in our wake. The sounds in unison form a haunting melody that almost masks the reality of the hordes tirelessly in pursuit.

Whenever I look back at the unstoppable mass of decaying bodies, I don't feel like I'm running to live. I don't fear them. Perhaps it's because I'm accustomed to them. It could be that I know I'm in their world and, therefore, I'm the outsider. They are simply doing what they do. Surviving the way they know how. I don't blame them for following their instincts. But I also have to follow mine.

We make it to the roof. It's a small victory, as the undead still trail us. Our one hope is a raised concrete platform. It's a

Headlights
✿ third place visual arts
Heather Ubil



The first waves are easy kills, with the fallen lifeless bodies serving as good obstacles for the desperate others. But we know it won't last long. They will come through. They will swarm us.

good jump's height just to grab hold of the ledge. They won't be able to follow us up there.

Our group splits in half. Logic and Emotion are first to attempt their jumps while Danny Trejo and I hold off the oncoming frenzy. I prefer using my shotgun as a blunt object as noise only attracts more of them and there are enough to deal with as it is. Danny Trejo prefers his machete, slicing, rather than chopping, then shoving and kicking the bodies away. Nothing worse for him than getting his weapon stuck in one of them. Having to pull it free slows him down. In a crowd of ravenous beings bearing down all at once, the only advantage he has, the only advantage any of us has, is to be faster than them, to be one step ahead of them.

The first waves are easy kills, with the fallen lifeless bodies serving as good obstacles for the desperate others. But we know it won't last long. They will come through. They will swarm us. As we make our stand, we both know the time will come when we lose. The smaller will inevitably be enveloped by the greater.

Logic and Emotion quickly hoist themselves up onto the platform. They don't yell down at us to hurry and join them in safety. They're not panicking. Neither are we, despite the ferociously hungry groans calling out into the calm, clear sky. Urging Danny Trejo to go, I take position to cover him. The small stairs create a bottleneck; I can hold them on my own for a short time. The undead bodies stack up as I slowly inch backward, allowing more and more of them to come up to the roof at one time. I'm losing the bottleneck. Fast.

But it was inevitable. That's why I'm not scared. It was inevitable.

I take a quick peek behind me, spotting Danny Trejo having trouble getting up to the platform. Logic and Emotion are struggling to help. I want to buy them more time, but as their vast numbers surround me, the only option is to dash away from the horde.

As Danny Trejo laboriously rolls up onto the platform, I toss my shotgun aside and leap up, taking hold of the cold, rough concrete edges with my fingers. Pulling myself up, I bring one foot on top of the platform. The other foot I bring up as withered, grasping hands fight for a hold of the last living flesh to be within their reach.

This time, I will not be amongst them. As the sun sets, and the light draws further away, I will not be amongst them.

But as I now lie in wake, I know there will be more opportunities for them. They have had their chances before and they will try again. There is no getting away from them. They will always come.

I can't stop it.

It's imminent.

There's no stopping it.

It's here.

At first, I can scarcely feel its presence. But I can feel it more and more. As I let out a deep breath, everything around me settles. The walls crumble into themselves. The door creaks in contraction. The empty space folds in on itself. Everything settles in: the bed constricting me, the ceiling looming above me, the floor ascending beneath me along with my body. Along with my mind as it steadily draws itself into the dream world once again, softening more and more to a frightening point at which surrender is all that's possible.

We're in a two-story house. They're rushing in at us. They're in. But we're not afraid. We're fighting. We have to fight. We have to get up the stairs. We have to get to higher ground where they can't reach, where we can take ourselves from their reach.

Danny Trejo is the first to make a move toward salvation, clearing the way to white plush carpeted stairs, but still staying near us. We protect him, he protects us.

He starts up the stairs, moving as swiftly as he can. Emotion heads up next, Logic covers her. I'm last once again. I'm always putting myself last. I can handle it.

Stepping off of the scarlet-stained plush carpet and up onto the stairs, soon to be colored as well, I force a bottleneck, an advantage I'll soon lose.

They charge at me. Furiously. Incessantly. I can only stab them away with the baseball bat I'm wielding as there's not enough room to swing. There's only room to knock them back, to keep them at bay just long enough.

Logic spots an attic entrance on the ceiling, tugging on the rope to bring the attic steps down. Danny Trejo slashes the rope off with his machete as Emotion hurries up the stairs. Logic follows, with Danny Trejo close behind.

At the top of the steps, I make one final push to create some space, some breathing room for those who still breathe. One of them has a firm grip on the bat, forcing me to let it go. I dash across the hall. Scurry up the stairs. Dive to safety. Danny Trejo emphatically pulls the attic stairs up, closing them behind me as the tide of undead rush in to fill the hall.

We huddle in the attic. Blackness and emptiness cradle us. We're just out of their reach once more, in the confines of our own secure darkness. The external light is now extinguishing, opening back up to the other solitary reality.

The dreams are a mirror of waking life, of walking around, not giving thought to the many places; places to seek satisfaction. Satisfaction of cravings filling bellies with the things of this life that this life tells they are to be filled with. Everybody is going through the motions of this existence. Just doing what they do, instinctively. Filling themselves, constantly.

It's difficult seeing this, being aware of this, being aware of myself. Knowing everyone who surrounds me, who closes in on me, who tries to bring me into their fold, have no idea. This is what drives my feeling of being isolated.

As in my dreams.

Isolated.

Amongst the volume of the undead.

Again.

We're hold up in a single-story house, barely enough space to hold the four of us. Danny Trejo rests in the living room as Logic and Emotion are sleeping in a bedroom. I'm alone in keeping watch while the others slumber, hoping the undead simply walk by the house when they come.

They will come. They always come.

There's no running this time, no fighting. We only hide, trying to blend in with the serenity of the silent night, hoping to not draw their attention.

The lights are off.

I can feel them all around. Walking through the interior of the house, I check the perimeter, carrying a crowbar, another blunt object.

In the dining room, I notice through the glass sliding door, standing directly outside is a female zombie; her face I'll never forget as long as I live to dream. Young, light skin contrasted with her black, wavy hair curling down at her shoulders. Freshly dead, she's actually quite beautiful. Magnificent, actually.

She's looking in with interest, her head turning to one side ever so slightly, scanning to find someone, to find me. The way she stares into my window with those dark, hollow eyes is remarkable, reminiscent of someone in my waking life looking into my eyes, trying to see who I am inside. But as in the dream, they can't see me. I won't let them see me. I won't let her see me.

Creeping into the adjacent study, I hope she doesn't notice me, but rather, loses interest and departs. Peeking back into the other room and out the window, I find she hasn't gone away. Neither of us can get what we want, it seems. She's still there. Still staring in, trying to find me. So I stay in this room. Stay away. Where there is distance, where she can't see me. Yet there she remains, wanting to find me.

Black surrounds her. Black surrounds me. As the dream subsides, I'm not sure I wanted it to, not sure I wanted to leave her.

I wonder if deep inside, deep down inside, I sincerely want to join them. Become one of them. Be one of them. Give in for the sake of giving in, for the sake of maybe being able to finally rest and to not have to face the exhaustion of running and not knowing when I must run again. Not knowing how much of a reprieve lay before me or how much time remains before the inevitable next run.

I wonder if I truly may already be one of them in a way.



When awake. Living the way they live. Desiring what they desire. Maybe the dream isn't a warning of what I'm seeking to avoid, but a contrast attempting to make me realize what I was before becoming what I have become in my own indiscernible, oblivious way. Walking dead. No reason to live, just doing what is called surviving. Living and yet dead, and decayed and decaying.

With nothing to find solace in save for one enviable option: inevitably, to die again.

Just as I die every night when I lay down to realize the living I cling to in the other reality. That is, unless I'm willing to not cling anymore. For her. There. In that place I now travel to, desiring to see her again.

She's inside now. I let her in. I had to.

To survive, I need her. I need her to overwhelm me. I need her to contain my struggle within her secure embrace. To engage my soul with her exquisite kiss.

Her kiss. A kiss that transforms her before my jaded eyes to reveal another extraordinary beauty lying beneath what I once looked upon. A kiss I've been longing for. A kiss I've never had. A kiss I wasn't aware that I always desired. A kiss I found myself begging for the moment the hunger in her eyes offered it.

Her hunger for me. What transforms me to reveal underneath what I once feared I would lose. What I've been longing for. What I've never had. What I wasn't aware that I always desired. What I found myself begging for the moment the offering in her eyes sparkled.

An offering to be one of them. To be normal. To crave what they crave. To have what they have. To exist how they exist.

An offering to belong with her. To not want stillness. To not want distance. To not want to wake.

Always in her embrace. Not having to let her go while I sleep.

Though I have to wonder, with her, if this is not the dream. ■ ■ ■

Up and Away
Bailey Amnell

Growing Up

third place nonfiction

Troy Michael Chupp



A current obsession which one could associate with nightmares for me is war. I don't know why I grew up fighting, it was fun to us as kids in Arvada, Colorado. I do know why I grew up running from fights; I was one skinny, weak, tall kid. As a result, as in much of life, height makes you nothing but a target. So as a tall kid, you're naturally the weakest because all life's energy goes to grow your ass tall, you don't get the strength. It was definitely fight or flight growing up, generally flight. It's funny; we had so many fights at every level of school, elementary, middle, high school that each school had two designated spots to meet and one designated time, daily for fighting. Usually it was 30 minutes after school let out. Each spot was in a different direction from the school. So if there was adult heat on one spot, we could always go to the other one when we had axes to grind.

The daily discussion was which fight we were going to attend or were involved in... Basically it was a situation where if you weren't running from a fight, you were in a fight, if you weren't running or in one, your buddy was and you'd better be there. If none of the above, you weren't in it, running from it, there for your buddy, then it was up to discussion which spot you were going to based on which fight you'd rather see. If you were caught traversing these two spots on your own, outside of officially sanctioned school sponsored fights you would definitely get the spiritual vibe that you were in trouble and best look over your shoulder and quicken your step. They weren't popular spots, because of course we didn't want to get caught. You always wanted the fight to play out and not be interfered with.

Three thirty, every day. Rainbow Park. Flag pole. Rainbow Park was in one direction, the flag pole the other. It was this culture that the current UFC fighting league was born out of. Originally when full contact, no rules, octagon fighting was introduced (UFC1) on pay-per-view television, it was outlawed in 48 states. This original UFC was in my hometown of Denver, Colorado.

By now UFC is a multimillion dollar professional sport with even youths training themselves up to be professional athletes/fighters. I think UFC is on like UFC150 or something by now. Anyway, several fights happened on the spot in school, usually related to recess and sports. But the only one I ever 'arranged' or had arranged 'for me' was Brian Anderson, and I felt I was doing the world a favor. Brian Anderson was the guy in class whose only purpose was to prove that you were stupid. You know the guy. Every word out his mouth was basically "I'm Smart" or "you're dumb", i.e. their only reason for existing or speaking is to prove they're the smartest one in the room. So when I told his ass at recess (fifth grade) to get over to Rainbow Park at 3:30,

there was definitely a crowd headed in that direction.

Somehow administration got wind of the show and I was held after class for some petty grievance the teacher had with me. After sitting on my ass for 30 minutes, waiting for the clock to strike 3:30, I bolted outta there and on my way to the park... Upon arrival, my suspicions were confirmed. I wasn't the only ax needing grinding, because I didn't even get to fight the dude. A buddy on my soccer team had already whooped his ass and the crowd was dispersing.... Bummed out, I figured justice was served and just a little disappointed I didn't get to serve it.

Upon graduation from a local university, I continued the theme and entered the military. Six years, two wars and hundreds of flight hours later, I was part of the proud majority of per capita people joining the military from the Denver metro area. We have consistently chosen that vocation on a larger percentage basis than the rest of the country. The Denver metro leads the country in per capita rates of people joining the military. From being in the military on 9/11 to the 10 plus years of war we've continued, I feel like I can't rest until we've completed it. I feel like violence and war is a mantra we're bringing to a close in the next couple years, and I was in on the very first weapons dropped in anger in the conflict over Afghanistan and Baghdad, Iraq. I almost feel as if I can't rest until I'm in on the end of the conflicts as well. Success or failure, a waste or a benefit, the demise of our economy or the rise of another seems immaterial to me. Instead it seems as if I just need to be there to finish the job I was there to begin.

I've got several buddies telling me they can't sleep due to nightmares, and I can't stop obsessing with violence and war relative to our country's two conflicts until we've completed them. A lot of time I feel like contesting is the same thing as competing, as fighting, as war. I've competed in so many sports at so many levels and two wars I feel like it's coming to a close, but hasn't quite run its course in me yet. I think violence is a part of everyone's nature and there comes a point in life at which you can in fact leave it behind. I just don't think I've reached that place yet. With 20 years of competitive sports culminating in NCAA Division I and II men's basketball and volleyball competition and training, practice, repetition, inculcation, inoculation, and indoctrination, followed by six years military service and a year of semi-professional sports overseas, I feel like I've been so indoctrinated with competition and fight I wonder if war will ever stop being an obsession.

I don't necessarily think violence has to be a part of the equation, but I've never been in a sport or military unit where it wasn't... Hopefully, with the conclusion of the two wars we can bring this chapter to an end in our country and culture, although Plato did say –"only the dead have seen the end of war." So violence will ALWAYS be in our nature, but I think a right relationship to God can change our nature and our obsessions. ■■■

Solitude

✿ third place poetry

Astrid Castaneda



Alone I stay in my room
from dusk to dawn
in solitude.

Anger hates,
Anger controls,
as it drags me to my room.

Lock the door,
close the blinds,
I let my heart rip apart.

Anger screams,
Anger hits,
Anxiety waits for its shift.

And as I crawl
into bed,
Anxiety whispers 'this is grim'.

Anxiety rants
in a panic,
as I heave out of breath.

And in the dark
I feel a presence,
padded on despair.

Depression crawls by my feet,
as it cries
'the world is bleak'.

Depression whispers
thoughts of death,
and Anger and Anxiety reside again. ■ ■ ■



Anguish
Lacey Holstein

A Lullaby for Remembering

Gabriel Hernandez



Yesterday is a dream whose memory fades
upon waking inside today,
whose curious hordes and curious strangers
are curiously kept at bay.
Bringing with them their copious attempts
to have an ever-present say,
taking from me any semblance of effort
or consequence to portray.
The lost notions and lost carriers of notions
threatening to fade away,
victims of contributions quietly expecting
an imposition of their decay.
Leaving corrupt questions to pursue
and innocent memories to betray
as varying translations exhume the corpses
inhabiting any previous day.
The last rites of the first thoughts read
in the tangible disorder of the fray,
capturing every tireless retreading
of unraveling strings being led astray.
Lending meaning to where meaning is sought
even as seeking breeds delay
in ventures to appease the curious,
praised in their backwardly curious way;
a blank exhaustion enduring in bygone realms
as the dreams of yesterday. ■ ■ ■

Various Selves

Joel Salcido



My various selves have been a recurring theme in a lot of my poetry. One line says “I’m Luke dreamwalker 2012, various selves dwell in planets with rings” which came out of an ecstatic line of rhythm and sound but was nonetheless speaking to a dichotomy I personify at times. To decipher, I was getting at my spaced-out wandering wonder (with a “Star Wars” reference for my geeks and a slight allusion to apocalypse) where parts of my consciousness and personality permanently inhabit. No matter where my life leads, wonder is there like a fixed point for me to revolve around.

Yet often enough my wonder is stifled by mundane wageslavedom. It’s the first thing that comes to mind when I think of my other self because it’s the self I unfortunately have to spend the most time as. When I go to work and sit behind my plexi-glass window, as if I were a criminal or a pope, I’m just a floating head of information, an automaton pushing keys entering an endless array of acronyms into databases, you know, super creative stuff. I work for a third party government agency which is another weird juxtaposition. Basically, we’re

contracted by the state to handle MVD (DMV) work and we’re allowed to charge a convenience fee. It’s a glaring example of the inefficiency of certain government institutions and a testament to the oft repeated right-wing talking point that private business can do the government’s job more effectively, and this is one instance where I agree. Nevertheless, it’s weird to be a leftist libertarian essentially working for the government, and while I’m not a “burn the system” type of anarchist, it’s still an awkward marriage and doesn’t help my street cred. Moreover, I am stuck staring out a window out another window (and yet two more windows if you count my glasses!) surrounded by the hum of computers for at least 40 hours a week. Not really the most inspirational stuff for creative writing. Yet there are positives beyond the pay and chill bosses, and that’s the occasional interesting individuals and slew of experienced weirdoes that thankfully are sprinkled intermittently between the hoard of uppity suburbanites and unmitigated assholes. I’ve found a wealth of writing fodder from people’s anecdotes or at least my speculations about the things they allude to.

I remember in high school chanting the line from “A Bronx Tale” like a mantra, “the working man’s a chump,” more because I never saw myself as a working stiff than disparaging the working class. The more I became aware of the difficulty of blue collar work beyond physical toil and realizing that my family comes from that tradition, my view on jobs changed. I’ve never minded work, but a job to me was always a dirty word because in most cases they are very fascistic institutions. However, meeting my wife made me more willing to confine myself in the cubicle of a nine-to-five. Which lead to another balancing act of sorts when I decided to get married and eventually start a family. I will never give up who I am as an individual but I definitely had to temper my madness and excessive nature, and while a stroller is a great distraction for would be heroes while you’re catching a tag, it’s hard to run from the police while pushing one. While I’d like to stand on the conveyer belt at Wal-Mart and explain to the female cashiers how they’re being screwed out of pay and benefits, now I have to whisper it to them quietly when I’m buying diapers.

Sometimes it feels like I’ve lost something, and perhaps I have, but what I’ve gained is exponentially more gratifying and inspiring. I like to see myself as a super dad at times (although the real hero at home is my wife, she does it all with a smile on her face while still looking amazing and growing as an individual) because that’s how I always saw my dad. Not to say that I’m the best dad ever because that’s how you get complacent and stop progressing, but I do the occasional super human feat to keep my boys awed by the mysterious magic of fatherhood. When my older son, Yeshua, falls asleep in the car, I’ll throw him over a shoulder grab my baby son, Ezra, and his way too heavy car seat in my left hand, backpack





over one shoulder and about half a dozen plastic supermarket bags all the way up each arm like bracelets and take them up two flights of stairs without waking them. While it's nothing extraordinary, sometimes when I see my reflection in the window of someone's apartment that image brings me more personal gratification than being on stage performing or receiving accolades for one of my creative endeavors because those are fleeting, but my children will always remember me as that man just like I do with my Dad. ■ ■ ■

A Woman

Chelsea Valdivia



Ever since I can remember, my mother has always served my father his first plate of food. Whether it was breakfast, lunch or dinner, she made sure to have his right fixings and the right amount of food to his liking. After he was done with his first plate, it was then up to him to get himself a second or even a third plate of food. Such a gesture kept me questioning as to why my mother would always do that for him, and once I reached an understanding age she told me it was one of the many small ways a woman can show her love to her husband. She's done it for 21 years at home and gatherings at other homes. This has almost become a tradition because once I'm a married woman; I'd like to do the same for my husband.

I come from somewhat of a very traditional Mexican family. In Mexican culture, women have been the nurturers of the family and the ones who take care of what needs to be taken care of. The men are the providers, the builders and the discipliners, but show just as much nurturing as women. We live for our family and we live to put each other before ourselves.

The women in our family are the ones who are cooking and are the ones who are cleaning, but I've been raised to understand it's gestures of love. A man should do his duties as a man and a woman does hers. Nowadays, I feel like women have turned these actions into negative ones. I feel like they are offended and feel degraded when someone assumes they clean and cook or do most of the work in a home and that actually offends me. I haven't met any man who is turned off from knowing a woman who can clean and cook. I take pride in knowing that I can clean and cook. I take pride in showing love to my family and in the future, to my husband. It is the women's job to turn a house into a home, and that's something I'm looking forward to accomplishing.

I'm proud to be a woman and I know what is respectful and disrespectful. I'm aware that women have a lot more opportunity now than in the past who work very hard. Women can provide themselves to an education and take care of themselves with their careers. I'm very thankful for the freedom I have as a woman and I take advantage of that every day. I know there are people who expect us women to do it all, and there are those who expect we are nothing better than cooks and cleaners, but why not prove those people wrong? Women, who work all day and come home in the evening to cook, clean and take care of children are superwomen. It is your choice, as a woman, to be offended at the responsibilities women have or it is also your choice to take pride in it and turn those responsibilities into love. You make yourself bitter, not anyone else.

Every evening at dinner when my mom prepares my dad's plate, I realize how blessed my dad is to have her. But in return, I know my dad is aware of how lucky he is and he gives my mom all in the world that he can because of all she does for him. I hope to be the woman my mom is, and I hope to be the woman who has the power and strength to do everything. ■ ■ ■



Shipwrecked

Julie Pham

Life is autumn, the edge of life going down.
The chill, the frost, still warm, but nearing the unbound.
Let wandering ghosts dance on the wind.
What time does the daylight end?

Urban Autumn

Let wandering ghosts dance on the wind
and bare the trees of metal and wire.
What time will the daylight end?

The sun glides slowly, high glass shining
chill diminished with gases never tired.
Let wavering ghosts curse to the wind.

Necessary prisons call to young and old,
only coffee can make the early sleepwalk drown.
What time does the morning end?

Endless screams of horns and business wail
and silence is a nonexistent thing as gray surrounds.
Let busy ghosts be taken over by the wind.

Noon passes with childlike joy
kites fill smog colored sky, a taste of freedom around.
What time does the afternoon end?

Too soon does the sun fall to night
chasing wanderers into comfort and unnatural warmth.
Let freezing ghosts fight against the wind.

Warmth comes from artificial lights aflame
confusing life and habits to survive.
What time did the evening end?

The new survival method, pretend it isn't there and hide
within.

How do they live in these conditions of screeches and
unreal screams?

Let wandering ghosts dance on the wind.
What time does the daylight end? ■ ■ ■

When the darkness begins to thunder
And its wave's crash against my soul's Ark,
I scream for balance
But all sense of stability falls apart.
Tide pools of rage and fury
Rush through my veins
Making me feel unworthy
Of the soul I seem to claim.
The bow of my emotions disintegrates
Anger washes over my deck
I cast out a net to retrieve my peace
But it sinks into the cold oceans depths.
A tsunami of my wits
Become a blur; a disarray
I've seemed to let my mind slip off...
Conducting myself as a castaway
An SOS has been signaled
Flares have been flared
As the only inhabitant of this island
I wait for help in my nightmare
I row down my anchor,
And prepared myself for shore.
A new light guided me through
A clear stream to end this self war.
The storm's noose has been loosened
The ability to breathe has been restored
The plague that swept my inner being
Is now withering on the sea's floor.
I grasp onto the hand of my helper
As they pulled me further away from sea
The loss of my self-loathing
Kept my sanity intact; to be who I used to be.
I set my feet on land
And I begin to walk anew
The misery that overcame my Psyche
Has shriveled and is no longer in bloom.
I inhaled and exhaled calmly,
Walking head-on to the new set of paths.
Keeping my chin up in glory,
Restraining myself from looking back. ■ ■ ■

Unappreciated Beauty

Christa Berthelson



Growing up in the desert town of Alamogordo, New Mexico, the only thing I knew of was hot summer days and lots of dirt. My Nanna would watch me while my mom went to school, and we would play in the large blue blow-up pool in her dry backyard. There was no need for a winter coat or mittens and boots; I could live in tank tops and shorts, flip flops, and sun dresses.

When I was four years old, my mom and dad knew that living in the ghost town wasn't going to take us very far in life, so we ended up moving to Aurora, Colorado. Being only a small child, the only thing I understood was we were moving away from our family and friends, and we couldn't take the blow up pool with us. Needless to say, I wasn't happy with that idea at all, and I cried for three days.

We were trading in the desert for mountains and snow, and my mom couldn't have been happier. When we arrived to our boxed-in apartment, it was already snowing. My parents brought all of the boxes inside the living room and put me in a pink, fluffy winter coat and black snow boots. Across the

street from the apartment complex, there was a large park covered in blankets of fluffy white. I wanted to explore, so my dad took my hand and we walked across the icy street and sat down on the cold ground.

Looking around, I remember it being the most beautiful sight in the world. The trees were weighed down in sparking ice and snowflakes. Nobody was outside because it was so cold. As I grew up in Colorado, I underappreciated its beauty. It was always green in the spring and summer, brown and red in the fall, and blue and white in the winter. Not a day passed by when the outdoors weren't breathtaking. ■ ■ ■

The Story of the Unborn Me

Noelani Gouveia



8 Weeks go by and I grow webbed fingers and toes,
My eyes yet to seek life remain shut closed.

"Get rid of it!" I hear a man explain
Get "rid" of what? And who was "it"?

I pushed myself against my mother's womb,



Myself so small but my heart has bloomed.

16 weeks go by and I can finally move,
Flexing my legs and arms I am quite the charm.

“Get rid of it!” I hear a man sigh
Get “rid” of what? And who was “it”?
I moved myself against my mother’s womb,
My body so small yet my heart has bloomed.

24 weeks go by and I’m startled by a noise,
My mother’s screaming to a man that she hates boys.
They confirmed I was a she,
But my mother never named me.

“Get rid of it!” a man shouts
Get “rid” of what? And who was “it”?
I moved myself against my mother’s womb,
My body so small yet my heart has bloomed.

82 weeks go by and my eyes are open,
I hear my mother sobbing and chocking.

“Get rid of it!” a man threatens
Get “rid” or what? And who was “it”?
I swam to the peak of my mother’s great tummy,
I hear her crying and I reply “mommy?”
Though my mother cannot hear me I know she feels me
slight,
She grabs to her stomach and grasps too tight.

I kick to tell her “I’m here mommy don’t cry”
But all I hear is her whispering “goodbye”

“Get rid of it!” my mother screams
I finally realized what it means,
It meant that my mommy did no love me,
She wanted to let be with just her and the man,
And there’s only one way that can-

“Get rid of the baby” she cried to the doctors,
I was “baby” and “it”?- “it” was Me. ■ ■ ■



Transformations

Violeta Gonzalez

En la vida y el amor
Pelie mucha batallas
El dolor de un Corazon distrozado
La muerte de mi bebe hermano
Y en el final
Soy mas fuerte que ayer

In life and love
I fought many battles
Pain of a shattered heart
Death of my baby brother
But at the end
I’m much stronger than yesterday ■ ■ ■



Birds of a Feather Flock Together
Noelani Gouveia



mariposa

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