

poetry | fiction | creative nonfiction | original artwork | photography

# mariposa

201213

Estrella Mountain  
Literary Review

**Arts and Composition**

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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# Moth Balls

first place fiction

Joel Salcido



## Entry #5420 Saturday

How they got me to work on “half-off Saturday” is beyond me. I vaguely remember speaking with my manager, Mindy, but sometimes when she talks, I get stuck watching the sweat bead on her lips and the way her enormous jowls tremble when she chews gum. And she always sweats, chews gum, and talks. I’d prefer to spend my time at work alone, with just my thoughts and observations, but for some reason, she always feels the need to share some bullshit about her sisters or night school or her fucking cats. She does this especially when I’m writing.

I’ve carried a 3x5 inch composition notebook in my left pocket every day since I was 11. I use it to document conversations, eavesdrops and vague hallucinations. It’s partly the reason I decided to work at the Goodwill. I figured there would be an endless wealth of observable freakery, and there is, but it’s hard not to get depressed seeing so many forgotten and unwanted pieces of someone’s personal history being peddled to god-knows-who. Occasionally, when I’m stocking and sorting a piece of clothing, a stuffed animal or someone’s second place golf trophy, I can’t help but feel an overwhelming sense that the item itself has an innate sadness. I pity them – the items, not the people. I always hide them in a blue, homemade chest that resembles a pastel colored coffin more than any kind of furniture. It hasn’t sold in the five years I’ve worked here, and the inherent creepiness of its design usually deters any would be item hiders from stashing those \$45 work boots until the half-off Saturday sale. Speaking of: I’m not supposed to be here today.

It’s not that I don’t work weekends. Shit, I’ll take pretty much any hours I can get at this point. But not half-off Saturdays. It’s not the people specifically, although, from what I’ve gathered from my coworker, those Saturdays bring out the sketchy, unkempt, frugal tweekers and sandal-wearing amateur pickers. I see them on regular days too, but those Saturdays bring out the real winners amongst them.

“It’s time, kids,” Mindy declared between gum smacks. I hate it that she calls us kids. It always feels like she’s undermining us because we actually need this job. That, and she’s one of those cat ladies that talks about her cats as “children.” She probably sees us as her little kittens, running confused, like a cat with a laser pointer. Sometimes I think the only reason she still works here is to mind-fuck us, that and holiday sweaters. She wears those year-round. Today, it was a faded orange jack-o-lantern, browned with fur and stretched so that she looked like a massive tabby.

“Remember kids, don’t let stuff clutter. If it clutters, you’re in trouble. Karlus and Wan, keep an eye on the knickknacks. I don’t want them sliding off the shelves because someone left them too close to the edge. You kids mind the old folks too. The manager at the Avondale store said she catches more elderly people stealing than teenagers.”

I had to tune her out: I had to prepare my mind for the crowd. It’s not so much each asshole individually, but the multitudes: visor wearing coupon ladies, Vietnam vets with fanny packs and tube socks, shopping carts filled with children grabbing at junk food amidst some raucous family weekend. The accelerated air of a big group of humans in an enclosed space suffocates me, my heart rises in my throat and my veins pump molasses.

But it’s past complaining or hyperventilating at this point. I’m already here watching the clock’s sardonic ticks until opening. My fingers drumming nervous rhythms, my palms leaving their moist imprints on the glass table in the break room.

“Take it easy, bro. No hay pedo,” Juan said, grinning encouragingly with a hand on my shoulder. “If you listened to me and just smoked, you’d be relaxed. You ever see me stress?” He could always sense my anxiety; he says it’s the weed.

“You should be stressing. How many kids do you have now?” I replied coyly.

“With my old lady?” he joked. “Four, plus the one that’s coming. Even Maury couldn’t pin me with those other ones, fool!” He laughed. Juan didn’t take anything seriously except taking care of his kids and marijuana. He was the coolest, calmest, retired cholo I’d ever met.

The crowd wasn’t as big as I’d feared, which meant I wasn’t wiping my palms on my slacks 10 times a minute. Dry palms are essential when organizing knickknacks into epic dioramas, which is how I started my day, pretending to work.

“Young man, is this made in America?” An elderly man with a flattop and cop face interrupted mid arrangement. I was nearly finished recreating the last scene of “Star Wars: Episode IV” when I was approached by this xenophobic cousin of Jaba the Hutt.

“I’m not sure, sir. Let me take a look.” It’s a goofy mug with an American flag emblazoned on it. On the bottom of the mug is a gold sticker that says “Made in China.”

“I only buy American, young feller. Too much crap in this country’s made in China. Did you know Obama sold our country to the Chinese?” he said matter-of-factly in his “Unapologetically American” t-shirt and “USA” ball cap (judging from their nauseating simplicity and graphical busyness, they came from Wal-Mart.)

“I concur. I too am a God fearing American,” I replied



**Nymph**  
first place visual arts  
Amanda Bravo

***I dreamt of the ocean. I was on a row boat filled with notebook pages filled with unreadable handwriting. There was a giant pencil in my hand and I was using it to row in a circle while the moons red eye scrutinized from above.***

in the least sarcastic tone I could. “And yes, this was made in this fine Christian nation.” I was laying it on too thick but it was early and this guy didn’t seem to speak facetious. “Non-union too from the looks of the shoddy edgework. It’s a steal at fifty cents.” I gave him my best auctioneer peer right into his rheumy eyes just as a slender but filthy hand flashed between us, snatching the cup from my increasingly sweaty grip.

I turned and felt a sweet punch to the stomach. Next to me were two caramel eyes in an absurd costume. She was wearing a silver tutu, black tights, a The Smiths t-shirt and a pair of bedazzled, worn sneakers. Her cheeks had subtle streaks of dirt, like when you wipe your sweating face with dirty hands. It worked like a soiled blush to accentuate her chocolate eyes. And her smile was the cleanest, next to godliest smile I’d ever seen in my life.

“This is shit, Arnold. Not worth the child labored coffee you’d pour in here. You sir would do better with this.” She handed him a Marine mug that looked like something you were given when you raised a rank or some shit, lots of colors and flair. “This piece is an officer mug. I know my father was a commander in the first gulf war, he has one like this on his desk back home.”

He took the mug from her hand with a suspicious side glance and waddled away like an annoyed oxen. “Excuse me can I help you?” I asked her nervously but dutifully. She looked me over like she was appraising an antique.

“From the smell of you, I doubt it. But, I can help you,” she said with the conviction of a scientist through her glowing smile. I couldn’t tell if it was mocking or courteous, but I was nonetheless infatuated.

“Smell? Uhhhh.. Well, lucky me... did you know that guy?” I stammered somehow.

“Arnold? If that’s his real name... Nope. Now first lesson: There is no luck,” she chided happily.

“Lessons? I don’t really have time for that, I work here.” Why I offered that lame excuse, I don’t know. I would’ve liked nothing more than to have watched her talk for the next eight hours.

“Work? Did I not just see you playing soldiers with the ceramics for the last 10 minutes?”

“Not soldiers, per se, more of an epic, static scene. How’d you know that? We’re you watching me?” I asked, half hoping she was, half creeped out. She laughed this mad, off-beat melody that made strangely beautiful music, like a Thelonious Monk riff.

“Of course not, Karlos. Can’t you tell I’m clairvoyant? I am wearing a tutu.”

“Clairvoyant, like psychic? How’d you know my name?”

“No not like psychic. My name’s Claire, and your name’s Karlos- it says so on your shirt. I like the K, very Marxist. And I know that you were idling around because you had that veiled look on your face that people put on when they pretend to be working but are actually thinking something profound. Now that’s what I want to know. What was that profound thought?” Her face hardened into a mock-seriousness that looked too intense to be mocking.

“You’re the psychic, tell me?” Finally, some semblance of wit escaped my lips, hailing yet another smile.

“Let me think.” Her brow wrinkled its pondering flex. “Something about the innate sadness of someone’s second place golf trophy, beautiful tragedies and a bunch of other sentimental bullshit.”

“What? Huh?” How the fuck does she know that? “How the fu... how do you know that?” I could feel my hands starting to sweat and my throat tighten. She reached out with her hand, which wasn’t dirty at all just covered in paint, and put a stiff yet soft palm on my chest and pressed as if she were resuscitating me.

“Your notebook said so.” She held it up in her other hand. “Wow, your heart’s beating fast.”

“How did you get that from my pocket? It’s always in my pocket,” I managed.

“You left it on the counter when you were dealing with Captain America. I’m a very fast reader of words and people. I got through eight pages before I had to intervene on your behalf. Anyway it’s really brillia...”

“Nobody reads that,” I interrupted. I felt like a high definition camera was zoomed on my face, showing every detail and ugly reality. My heart was fluttering like a caged bird.

“Well, I’m *hardly* nobody. I’m Claire! Really, you have to keep up if this relationship is going to work,” she said.

“Relationship?” *How the hell did I lose my notebook?* “Why is this beautiful and disheveled woman giving me so much shit? Did I just say that out loud?” I was bleating out confused questions like some malfunctioning robot. My head was spinning in a drunken-rolling-dervish and there were glowing specks of light fractals snow-flaking on the edge of my vision.

“Whoa, buddy we’re not getting married. No need to get pale,” I heard faraway in some echoed cave as the world dissolved to black.

I dreamt of the ocean. I was on a row boat filled with notebook pages filled with unreadable handwriting. There was a giant pencil in my hand and I was using it to row in a circle while the moons red eye scrutinized from above. Suddenly, the wind became violent and the pages flew

in dozens of tornadoes. Jumping to catch them, the boat rocked and teetered under my feet and my pencil dropped into the water. When I reached over the side to grab my useless oar, a pair of hands gloved in colors eased on top of mine. Two orbs of mahogany glowed through the water as I let go of the pencil and let the hands slide me into the water. Lips greeted me warmly. Sweet, freezing water rushed into my throat and lungs.

“Was that necessary?” Claire said, her wet hair sticking to her face. “He’s fine. Well, dangerously neurotic and hopelessly codependent, but those are things I can deal with. No worries, gentle people. I was a lifeguard in high school.” My face was wet, and I was on the floor surrounded by the staff and a dozen customers. Claire was straddling me. Mindy was holding an empty Icee cup with a look of embarrassment and relief on her face. “Oh, shit. Who called the cops?”

“What happened?” I finally asked, still on the floor.

“You passed out. I really like your writing. You shouldn’t be so anxious if someone reads it. You know the primary purpose of the written language is to communicate,” she said with authority sitting on my lap like a throne.

“I’m so glad you’re OK, kid. I don’t know what we would’ve done had you been seriously hurt. We can’t afford worker’s comp,” said Mindy.

“Where’s the emergency?” asked the EMT who’d just walked in.

“He’s right here officer. I administered CPR with very little tongue. Mindy here followed with an Icee splash, blue flavor as you can see. Not my preference, but nonetheless effective,” Claire explained to the confused paramedic.

“He seems fine to me. Lots of people might want to trade places with you,” he said smiling.

I squirmed my way from beneath Claire, grabbing at the knickknack rack, my legs trembling like Jell-O in an earthquake. They fell out from underneath me as I pulled the entire rack down in a symphonic cacophony of ceramic and porcelain. Juan caught me before my face hit the linoleum.

“Calmado hermano. You fell hard bro, probably concussed or someshit,” Juan told me.

“Well, since we’re here, we’ll take him to the ER make sure his heads OK,” the EMT said to his muscular coworker with the gurney.

“Yes, we must. Of course, as his lawyer, I must come too,” Claire added, sticking her head between Juan and me.

“Orale,” Juan said, his eyes laughing. “She’s perfect for you, bro. Atrevida. You could use some ball busting.”

“Not on the first date,” said Claire. Seconds were bleeding into each other, and the world got quiet and dark again.

I woke up to the wails of the ambulance and warm fingers gripping my palms. Claire was running her fingers

over the cracks of my hands like a blind palm reader, her face looking away. “Where are we going?” I asked my voice strained and dry.

“To the hospital, you’re ‘concussed or someshit’. I’ve been reading this notebook, and I have to say, I feel like I need to write something. Something about me for you to read.”

Strangely, I felt no apprehension. I don’t know if it was the blow to the head or the way her hands just fit into mine.

“Sounds like a plan. Why’d you come?”

“Y’know, when I saw you lost in thought, I said to myself, ‘Maybe there’s something great there.’ Of course I’m a hopeless optimist, so that happens often enough. I thought I could help you. And maybe I still can. But I really think you can help me. I need something you have.”

“What’s that?” I was getting dizzy again, but not in my head. It was that sensation of gravity loss, that elevator feeling you get when you’re secretly wishing for something to turn out.

“I’m not sure yet. But we’re going to have to get close to discover it,” she said as serious as I’ve ever seen a person. Her face inches from mine; I wiped the hair from her face and kissed her.

END. ■■■

## The Chase

✿ first place nonfiction

Alesha Blauer

“Where the hell is my son?” I roared into the face of an Icouldgiveashit punk.

He dropped his eyes in dismissal, which only fueled my rage. A rotund older lady in a ratty t-shirt and stained sweatpants stepped up behind him to gape at the commotion at their front door. It was a crappy little house in a seedy neighborhood in the worst part of downtown Phoenix, a place I had never been before, as I lived safely ensconced in the tranquil suburbs. Sure, daily, I drove past, well over it, from the safety of the elevated highway. But this was nowhere I ever planned to stop.

It was 9:00 am on a Thursday and on this street people were still sleeping off the damages of the night before. Filth and hopelessness were so entrenched that they clung even to the very air. Neglect had permanent residence in this neighborhood: vehicles, houses, and people alike. All were broken down and in disrepair. Empty fast food packages, smashed cigarette butts, and broken bottles of beer and whiskey were scattered about like the bones of roadkill after a swarm of buzzards. The young man’s apathetic attitude was all too common here.



***If had been three days since we discovered that my 15-year-old son had run away in the night, stowing his possessions into my husband's old giant military pack. The nightmare began on Monday morning as I stood in his empty room with my 16-year-old daughter weeping in the background. Through an emotional haze, I realized she was muttering about her brother using drugs. We called the police, as those of us naïve suburbanites would...***

"Listen you shit, I know he was here. Where is he?"

These were my first swear words in nearly 20 years and surely unexpected by my current and ex husband, who both stood behind me. But then in that moment I didn't care what either of them thought, the one a dark haired clean-cut man and the other an arrogant ass, with Fabio hair, who always demanded his way.

Odd, I was taking the lead. But it wasn't like anyone could stop me. Not even my petite teenage daughter who stood behind them furiously texting. She had led us there with the help of the teenage network. She, given her age alone, was a trusted member of what we were beginning to understand was an informal teenage alliance, akin to a modern day Underground Railroad for wayward teens.

"Ah, I don't know..." the shit stammered.

My eyes quickly darted between him and the woman, evaluating usefulness. Adrenaline and emotion fueled me. My focus had never been so intense.

It had been three days since we discovered that my 15-year-old son had run away in the night, stowing his possessions into my husband's old giant military pack. The nightmare began on Monday morning as I stood in his empty room with my 16-year-old daughter weeping in the background. Through an emotional haze, I realized she was muttering about her brother using drugs. We called the police, as those of us naïve suburbanites would, and expected them to be able to do something. Actually, they were powerless, unless you considered their clerical skills.

"I called the cops, they're on the way," I prodded, fostering the delusion that perhaps that would scare the kid.

The lady turned away back to her TV, which I imagined to never be turned off and terminally stuck on the Cartoon Network.

"OK, OK, lady, shit, he was here, but he left."

"When?" All four of us seemed to inquire at once.

The punk's head and shoulders bobbed in an upper body shrug/head shake hybrid. In an instant I saw it, I can't say what it was, perhaps experience from raising two teenagers, but I knew the kid was lying. My son was still there last he

knew, perhaps when he had answered the door.

The old lady must have read it on my face, because she met my eyes and declared, "He just jumped the fence out the back." She apathetically pointed to their putrid alleyway.

I spun and ran. The alley was filled with all sorts of nastiness, making the exposed street in front look like a resort, but there wasn't a trace of my son.

With my entourage in tow, except my current husband, who had the foresight to leap into our truck, I raced back to the front of the house.

"Where did he go?" I screamed into the face of the punk, who again, simply shrugged.

"He is a 15-year-old kid on the inner city streets, you shit!" I spat into his face.

"Mom, he's going to try to catch a bus." My daughter declared behind me, her eyes barely lifting from her phone.

"How do you know?" my ex asked as we ran to the truck.

"Chelsie said he talked to Kara and told her he was meeting Billy and them at Metro at noon."

"Which way?" my husband asked, anxious to be going when we leaped into the running vehicle.

"To 35th Ave.," I said, pointing west. "It's the closet major cross street. He'll go that way. Maybe we'll catch him at a bus stop."

It was wishful thinking, but I knew my son had inherited my sense of direction. He could find his way anywhere. The closest bus stop going north was empty and the one to the south appeared deserted as well. We turned north and in less than half a mile, we came upon a bus that declared in gold lights its destination to be Metro Center. Perhaps, we had lucked out. I prayed under my breath as we trailed the bus.

When it pulled into the mall, we positioned our vehicle so we could watch the passengers disembark, but they might not notice our truck. My anxiety grew as the bus slowly emptied. Odds were against us and my mind raced ahead to our next possible move.

Then, a scrawny kid dwarfed by an army green bag slung over his back strode off the bus. We leaped from the truck like a tactical team. One man darted left and the other right, implementing an unspoken plan to entrap the teen should he try to flee on foot. I ran straight toward my son, this 15-year-old version of the little boy who used to beg me to carry him to bed. He raised his eyes, seeing me just before we reached him. Tears streaming down my face, I wanted to hug him, but stood frozen. His eyes quickly dropped as he stopped. The heavy bag sunk from his shoulders to the ground. The two men with me were silent as well.

The only voice heard was my normally shy daughter's as she stepped out from behind me. "Drew, what the hell?!" ■■■



# Audiophile

first place poetry  
Joel Salcido



Where were you when we heard the sound?

Were you drowned in apathy channel surfing inundated with information? Or were you yogic posing chanting chakra mantras and heard the thunder rumble from the dirt?

Were you going through the motions at work, hypnotized by the silent murmur of computers muscles robotically pushing buttons?

Or were you ocean side with your feet in the sand eyeing the horizon for metaphorical life boats and noticed the flares of emergency? Were you sleeping off revelry? Or waking dazed amazed that the Sun came up? Were you too drunk jumping the moon starry eyed in a staggered evening rumba leaning against brick walls in alleys staring into the sky for signs of life?

Were you listening?

Or glistening with the sweat of strange sex lost in your lover's breath? Were you interrupted when you heard the trumpets and stuck your head out from under the covers?

Were your eyes closed meditating cross-legged? Or were you ecstatic dancing pupils dilated irises spiraling on the colorful geometry of hallucinations?

Were you lost in art and heard the sweet whisper of intuition? Were you painting, clothes soaked in acrylics and oils, brush between your lips trying to draw the taste of inspiration? Or were you occupying writers block throwing prose at walls hoping something sticks?

Were you excitedly hiding behind a camera giddy about capturing the imagery of intimacy? Or were you posing, and just as it flashed looked into the eye of the lens shuttering with the certainty that the alarm had sounded?

Were you grounded?

In a self-imposed solitary confinement with your records trying to locate the groove of your mood to theme your dreams? Were you sitting under a tree recording the melody of falling leaves when you felt the vibrations in the stones?

Were you stoned at home writing scattered prose cutting it out into maniacal collaged poetics? Were you headed out with hopes of music and sex when the muted saxophone of the wind crooning its solemn anthem of evening caught your ear?

Were you singing in traffic oblivious to the serious? Were you on the corner frantically passing pamphlets, screaming, "The end is near!"

Did you hear?

It's only the beginning, and we're winning,

Were you grinning as you watched your child play when

you heard the earth's bass resonate in your DNA and were shaken to the marrow? Were you wearing headphones plugged into nothing sitting on the bus eavesdropping for accidental journalism?

Or were you marching, circling sheriff's office, screaming condemnations from megaphones, advocating for the abolition of police?

Were you in the streets? Fostering hope through art interviewing indigents recording the pulse of poverty? Or were you in dark lofts translating your heart waves through finger gyrations into mixer-out speakers injecting into ears?

Were you contemplating God while on the lonely walk along train tracks rattling in the moonlight waiting for a gap in the night? Were you complacent adjacent to couches overwhelmed with talent confounded by your lack of motivation?

Know this! Motive is always difficult to prove, but evidence sings! Did you hear the ring? Did you sneak outside with boom sticks and microphones trying to locate the cadence so you could sample the palpable clamor of change?

Change is not manmade. It's engrained in the threads of existence.

It's the only thing in life that's consistent.

We are its shining example; its glittering sequins. Now is just a sequence. Time is just a pretense. We are God's active presence in its infinitely creative manifestations humming at our own unique frequencies. Were you aware that we're quantum harmony? And that when we dance we remove the veil of theory and create reality? So move!

Dancing is the most revolutionary movement! Music is the new philosophy! Conversation is our journalism!

It's the notes that aren't played that make it jazz and the unsaid words that make it poetry, but let it be said and known that our presence here is indicative of one thing: we survived!

We overdosed on good times nauseous with reminiscences of endless parties drenched in the panic of experiments of existence. I'm here to scream the salt of thoughts into the cloud of collective consciousness so inspiration might rain down art.

Stick out your tongues. Open your eyes. Every drop is indelible and intransient. Every thought produced will be profound, only if we think out loud can we permeate the cloud.

Crowd erupt abruptly! Sound! That's what we're here for. To make our lives reverberate at a rate whereby we in-tune the universe.

The stars are silent messengers if only we could learn the Braille of heaven, or the sign language of blatant irony or how to interpret the poetry of the wind.

The wind howls. The trees boogie. The sun beats. The moon circles and orchestrates the waves as they collide like cymbals on rocks, who drum the hushed signal.

Where were you, did you hear it? ■■■

# Espresso

first place one-act play

Alesha Blauer



*A busy modern coffee shop in the mid-morning has a steady stream of customers. A barista plus an additional employee work behind an espresso machine and a pastry display case. The barista makes drinks at a steady rhythm creating a system of clanking that is heard. Steam rises from the machine. Upon completion of each drink, the barista drops the used grounds into a trash can. Customers come in, order, receive drinks and leave behind the scenes throughout the action. Songs play as if background music with emphasis on specific lyrics.*

Music: Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high.

*Lights come up. Two men with laptop bags are ordering drinks. Spot light upon a mother and daughter who enter with shopping bags. The older woman is in her late 40's, wearing slacks, a cardigan and a blouse. The younger in her 20's is wearing loose jeans and a t-shirt, her hair is pulled back into a pony tail.*

Music: There's a land that I heard of, once in a lullaby.

*The two women get in line behind the men.*

Sonja: Lisa, I really think you should have bought that dress, the one with the print.

*Lisa shrugs. A husband and wife enter the shop and line up behind them.*

Music: Somewhere over the rainbow, skies are blue.

Lisa: *(looking at the pastries)* It's too frilly.

Sonja: *(fusses with Lisa's hair, smoothing it. Lisa shifts slightly away)* Nonsense, it would be beautiful on you.

Music: Someday I'll wish upon a star, and wake up where the clouds are far, behind me.

*In the background the two men have finished ordering and sit down at a table open up their laptops and begin working. While the music plays, Sonja and daughter order their drinks and move off to wait to receive them. The couple place their order in the background.*

Lisa: *(Turning to her mother)* What about that suit we looked at? Don't you think it is more professional?

Sonja: *(bristling)* In this day and age, a woman can look like a woman and be professional too.

*Lisa nods slightly.*

Barista: *(calls out)* Will!

*One of the men receives his latte from the barista.*

Music: Where troubles melt like lemon drops.



Lisa: (*mutters unclear whether to herself or her Sonja*) It's just not me.

Barista: (*calls out*) Jorge!

*The other man gets his drink from the barista.*

Sonja: (*stating tight mouthed, though almost as if to herself*) You're too young to have such a ridged opinion. You haven't found your style yet. (*looking off in faint dismissal*) You're just starting off.

Music: Away above the chimney tops.

*Lisa looks down and away.*

Barista: (*calls out*) Lisa!

*Lisa takes a warm drink from the barista. The couple which had been behind them, having ordered is seated at a table waiting for their drinks. Other background customers come and go.*

Sonja: (*attempting to make light conversation*) Did you hear? They put Eleanor Clark in charge of the program this year?

*Lisa shakes her head.*

Barista: (*calls out*) Sonja!

Sonja: (*picking up her frozen drink from the barista*) Well, her husband died.

Music: And the dreams that you dare to dream, really do come true.

Sonja: (*unsheathing a straw and plunging it into her drink*) That guy you brought to Thanksgiving last year, Mike, no Mark. Yes, Mark, did he graduate too?

Lisa: (*with her back to Sonja as she stirs sugar into her drink*) I think so. We don't really hang out anymore.

Music: Somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds fly.

Barista: (*calls out*) Dirk! (*brief pause*) And Bree!

*The couple in the background get their drinks and sit back down.*

Sonja: (*patting Lisa's upper arm in consolation*) That's too bad. Well, there are a lot of guys out there.

Lisa: See mom, that's the thing. I actually don't ... (*voice trails off, Music interrupts*)

Music: If happy little bluebirds fly, beyond the rainbow.

Lisa: (*following her mom as the two cross to exit the shop*) So why is Mrs. Clark doing the program this year?

Sonja: (*after taking a sip of her drink*) Well, her husband died.

*Lights fade out.*

Music: Why, oh why can't I?

*Lights come up. A spot light on the couple seated at a table. Bree is a woman in her early 30's who is gazing into her latte. Dirk is gazing into his phone.*

Music: There must be 50 ways to leave your lover.

Bree: (*looking at Dirk's down turned face*) I haven't heard that song in a long time.

Dirk: Hmm, yeah, (*glances up momentarily*) Paul Simon, I think.

Music: Slip out the back, Jack. Make a new plan, Stan.

Bree: (*leaned in speaking in a playful tone, trying to engage Dirk*) Fifty ways, ha, and that was the 70s. We could add several to that with today's technology.

Dirk: (*never lifting his eyes from his phone*) Yeah, I guess so.

Music: Hop on the bus, Gus. You don't need to discuss much, just drop of the key, Lee.

Bree: (*moving her head in rhythm*) Change your status on Facebook, Brook. Send him a text, Lex. Wait, that doesn't quite rhyme does it?

Dirk: (*half heartedly trying to converse*) Huh? Oh, yeah no, but text doesn't rhyme with much.

Music: I wish there was something I could do, to make you smile again.

Bree: (*irritated, but persisting*) I never listened to the verses before. Who do you think the woman is?

Dirk: (*taking a sip of his coffee*) I don't know.

Bree: (*leaning forward again staring at Dirk's face*) Sounds almost like his mistress or the new woman who is telling him how to leave the one he's with.

*Dirk shrugs and looks back at his phone.*

Bree: (*insistent*) Well, she's talking about sleeping on it and kissing him.

Dirk: Maybe, hard to say.

Bree: (*somewhat dismissive*) Seems obvious to me.

Music: Don't need to be coy, Roy. Just listen to me.

Bree: (*sits back into her seat with her drink to her lips*) Write him an e-mail, Gayle.

Dirk: (*for the first time meeting Bree's eyes across the table*) Why are you using women's names, Bree? Paul Simon's version was all men.

*Bree shrugs.*

*Lights fade out.*

Music: Get yourself free.

*Lights come up. A spot light on the two men seated at a table. Will is a man around 30. Jorge is slightly younger. They have been working on laptops and conversing during the previous.*

Music: I'm a stone cold believer, yes, I am.

Jorge: (*looking around the room*) I like this coffee shop. (*closing his laptop*) It's nice to get out of the office.

Will: (*glancing up briefly from laptop*) Yep, it is handy.

Music: I believe you can do it if you say that you can.

Jorge: (*sitting back in his chair*) Yeah, I like it. So much better than those cubical walls.

Will: (*eyes on lap top*) I hear ya. (*meeting Jorge's eyes*) I'll have a corner office with a window, someday.

*Jorge merely nods.*

Music: Wanna climb that ladder, y' wanna make it to the top.

Will: (*begins to close his laptop and pack up*). That's you

and I, buddy, (*pointing overhead*) the two of us climbing the ladder.

*Jorge doesn't answer continues looking around.*

Will: (*slapping Jorge on the shoulder*) Right?

Jorge: (*unenthusiastic*) Sure.

Music: Takes only one thing, gotta give it all y' got.

Will: (*sitting back, having packed up his stuff*) This idea was all your's man, we just get Wilkins and Morales to go for it and we are set. (*gesturing upward*) Fast track. I'll take you with me every step of the way.

Music: I'm a stone cold believer, not a smooth talkin' man.

Jorge: (*looking down into his drink*) I don't know man, this is a little too...

Music: I believe you can do it if you say that you can.

Jorge: (*looking at Will's drink on the table*) Naw, Will, really. This isn't for me.

Will: (*shrugs dismissively*) You'll get there, Jorge. (*Leaned in toward Jorge*) I was a little squeamish at first, too. It is just business man (*enunciates each word separately*), nothing personal. It's a work thing. Ya know?

Music: That's how I am, and I'm hopin' that's where you' at.

Jorge: (*Shaking his head and looking away*) I wish I could separate it like that, but... (*voice drops of and music interrupts*)

Music: I speak my mind. I don't hold it back.

Jorge: (*more assured*) I need to quit, do something else.

Will: (*annoyed*) Like what dude? In this economy? (*shaking his head*) That is just nerves talking, (*looking down, nearly as if speaking more to himself*) you'll be fine.

Music: If you're gonna make it, man you've got to agree.

Jorge: No, no, I don't think so. (*sighs*) I can't do this. I'm quitting. (*stands and tosses his empty drink into the trash can*) I'll e-mail you a formal letter or whatever. But I can't.

Music: Knew a man who couldn't lose, 'cause he never gave in.

Will: (*holds hands up trying to reason with Jorge*) Come on, Jorge, you can't. This was your idea. I need you. After this goes through things will be better. (*leans farther in*) At least give it a shot, a couple months or so.

Jorge: (*picking up his bag while still standing*) Sorry, Will, I really can't.

Music: He stuck to his pistol well it made him a better man.

Will: (*still seated*) What do you think you're going to do?

Jorge: I don't know man, but something (*gestures to the trash can where the old espresso has been repeatedly dumped with a thud behind them*) that doesn't leave me feeling like used grounds.

*Jorge exits. Lights fade out.*

Music: Believe I got things well at hand. ■ ■ ■

# Black Plastic Trash Bags

## By Jennifer Birnbaum

✿ second place fiction

Alesha Blauer



March 23, 1978

I'm 10 years old and in Mrs. Keenly's class. She wants us to write an essay about an everyday thing. So I'm going to tell you about black plastic trash bags.

Black plastic trash bags belong on their spool under the kitchen sink in their box, if it isn't too damaged from opening. That is except the one that is always in the large trash can in the kitchen.

"Haul out the trash, dip shit, don't just pile more on," says my stepdad when one of us puts an empty package or bottle in a full can. This he tells my sister and me, but not my mom. She must not make those mistakes.

There are many things to remember when cleaning up the kitchen. Sometimes it is hard to know if washing the dishes, cleaning the table, or hauling out the trash is the most important. This is especially hard for Lisa because she is only seven and gets confused all the time.

The can is big so the bag is always heavy, and by the time it is full it is really tall. I have to tip it to the side to get it out. All of this without dropping any trash on the floor, because that almost always leads more to work and a smack.

The bag is as tall as my chest, so it is easier to carry it over my shoulder. Flinging it into the dumpster is kind of hard too. A bag can fall back on my head as I try to push it over with my finger tips. Then I smell rotten for the rest of the day.

If it is moving time, then the box is emptied because the bags are used to pack everything that isn't heavy. Clothes, pillows, blankets, even toys go in them. But never books. Books never go in trash bags.

"Shit, you idiot, you overloaded the bag," declares my stepdad when a bag he lifts to load into the truck rips.

My sister is smacked as she is closest. I'm not sure if she packed that bag. They all look alike knotted closed.

There is a full trash bag that sits in my parent's closet. I see it one Sunday morning.

"Bring Dad a cup of coffee," yells my mom from their bed where they read the paper.

It is on his side of the closet. I think it is a bag that didn't get unpacked after the last move, maybe winter coats or summer clothes packed away.

But a few weeks later, I see the bag open, and it is full of baggies of the stuff that they smoke.

“Bring some pot out with you,” shouts my stepdad to my mom.

It is not like the Marlboro cigarettes that I am sent to buy from the convenience store. My stepdad always has a cigarette sitting on his lip.

“Go to your room and stay there,” he says, even though my sister and I know that if it isn’t dinner time or time to clean, our room is where we stay.

My mom smokes this with him and sometimes different friends of their’s come over. I hear their voices through the wall and imagine what they look like.

“Good stuff,” they declare.

It smells odd and things are always calm then. Not like the nights before there are a lot of beer bottles to clean up.

One moving time, Lisa is hauling the trash out. Because she uses two hands to open the door, she puts the trash bag down next to the full ones waiting to be loaded.

“Shithead, which bag is the trash?” asks my stepdad.

She looks around, confused. I run over to help, as I know trash filled bags are always heavier than moving bags.

This is what I know about black plastic trash bags. They are useful to hold a lot of things, some valuable and some just garbage. It is important to know the difference. ■ ■ ■

out of it just in time to unlock the car doors.

“Mom what’s wrong?” my son asked.

“I’m just tired. It was a tough first day that’s all,” I replied.

He nodded in agreement. “I hate first days,” he said. I nodded back in agreement. I really did not want to reveal too much. My morals and personal beliefs were tested today. How am I going to explain that to my son? He would rather play video games or watch basketball. How was I going to share that with my 15 year old?

Despite my reservations, I was inspired to share a little bit of my day, and he sat and listened, nodding when he thought he should nod.

“Here comes the Crazies, mom. I don’t want to be kicked with their cleats if I don’t give them their bags,” he said. I nodded in agreement. My son jumped out of the car but poked his head back in the doorframe.

“It’s going to get better. You have never worked with those kinds of kids before. You are kind and a fun person. You will be great! Tell me the whole story on the ride home, OK?” I nodded again. He slammed the car door and ran off to bring his sisters their soccer bags. I was in shock and taken aback from my son’s knowledge of my feelings. How lucky am I to have a great healthy kid. So on the way home, I told them what happened my first day.

I had only a quick distorted view of the classroom. The plastic clear room dividers hung in the wider classroom door. I only could see shapes and figures moving about, I was scared to go in. I took a deep long breath and walked in the classroom. I pushed aside the plastic long clear strips hanging in that large doorway. My view became much clearer. I could see a young girl sitting in a green huge wheelchair. The chair just swallowed up the tiny girl’s body. It reminded me of a Tim Burton drawing. I found her having that sad looking stare most of Tim Burton’s female characters had. She had thin, long hair, drawn in cheekbones with a pale complexion. She wore a smock style dress with black and white striped leggings. She sat motionless staring at a mobile of plastic fishes. Her body was distorted and twisted. Her hands twisted upwards, her fingers thin as twigs on a small tree. I thought she was about 10 years old, but she was 15. She looked so uncomfortable sitting in that green monster of a chair. I thought I was really lucky to have three healthy children, two of them the same age as this poor girl. My heart hurt.

My directions for the day would be to attend to this young girl. I would feed her by grinding up her food and putting it into a bottle, change her. I would take her to her classes. I would help with her physical therapy. I would also attend to any of her goals that were set for her that week. I think I could handle that. I could help this young disabled person. I could learn a great lesson and maybe teach my children the

## A Distorted View

✿ second place nonfiction

Carol Fegenbush



I really felt defeated. I felt like my stomach was rejecting the cafeteria lunch. Each of my emotions was out of control. My body seemed to be working in slow motion. I could not escape that classroom fast enough. My eyes were tearing up. I had to hurry to the car before the other students roaming the halls saw me. I dug deep into my purse grasping at anything that felt like sunglasses. I pinched my little finger in the hinge of the glasses. The sharp pain made the tears come quickly to my already cloudy eyes. Quickly I turned down the last hallway. The sunlight hit my eyes. Squinting I tried to scan the parking lot. Where did I park my car? I again fumbled around in my purse to dig for the car keys. This would be a good time to have an auto door opener on my key ring. I could feel the keys digging into the palm of my hand. My eyes were filled with tears as I opened the car door. I fell in and I slammed the door, quickly putting my head down on the steering wheel tears and sobs came flooding out. How can I go back tomorrow? This was only my first day? What was I thinking?

I must have gotten lost so in my emotions that I didn’t even notice my son pounding on the car window. I snapped

lesson of compassion. I thought this would be a satisfying new adventure in my life.

My horror began when this young girl had a major seizure. This young girl was prone to seizures, which the teacher had forgotten to mention. The look of pain came across her face. Her body shook with such great force. *How can she survive this*, I wondered? Again I was shocked when the teacher told me not to do anything unless the seizure lasted more than 10 minutes.

“What, no 9-1-1?” I blurted out.

“The mother has a written order not to do anything, just keep her safe. Then call her, she would come and assess the situation and to let her know if she stops breathing for more than five minutes,” the teacher said with no emotion.

“What, no 9-1-1?” again I commented.

OK, this mom is pissing me off already. My heart was breaking. It was the longest 10 minutes ever. I kept my eye on the little trembling twig, thrashing about on the platform that she was placed on that day. Tears came to my eyes for a few times and I hoped no one was watching. I could only stand by and watch the girl and watch the clock. The teacher casually walked over to tell me to blow in her face a few times and this might start her breathing. I had lost my breathing at this time, too. *Who is going to blow in my face?*, I wondered.



I made a quick comment back to the teacher. “Is there any medications we give can her to help with the seizures?”

The teacher sighed. “No, the mother does not believe in medication.” My anger showed a bit on my face. “We cannot even call 9-1-1 without the mother’s approval,” the teacher sighed again. “She will come and assess the situation and maybe take her home.”

I was shocked. My morals and personal beliefs were being tested. I would do anything to keep my child free of pain and discomfort. I would make sure my child had the best medical care possible, nutrition and personal care that I could afford. Is this mother really doing this? I was angry and had to bite my lip to hold back the tears again.

I found a chair and pulled it up to the platform. I wanted to hold the young girl’s hand until she was done. If I did, I think I would break her fingers. I could not put my fingers into her little curling hand; her nails were cutting into the skin and bleeding now. I went and got a warm washcloth and began to clean her face of the drool and sweat.

Once I saw that she had stopped seizing, I cleaned the blood off her hands. I leaned over her small stretched out body that was limp and tired. “It’s over now. Good job. You did really well.” Is this all I could think of saying to her?

I saw her eyes open and look at me. Tears began to roll down one side of her cheek. I had to look away. I stroked her long hair and redid her hair tie. I started to wonder if this child had been neglected. Her skin was dry and peeling, her little hands when I washed them had peeling skin come off on the washcloth with dirt and dried food. Again, I wondered why this child was in this condition. What is wrong with this mother?

The teacher came over. She must have known what I was thinking. She took me into her office. After the three seizures she had that day she told me, “This is between me and you. I have baby Tylenol in my bottom drawer. I give it to her after the seizures. CPS has been notified many times and the mom is under investigation, I can’t let her be in pain all day, so let me know after the second seizure.” All I could do is nod. The teacher left the office and closed the door. I sat in the office just for a few minutes and cried.

How could I keep this job? How could I go day after day without strangling the mother of this poor young girl? My beliefs were not the same as hers. My morals were not the same as hers. I was a parent, and so was she? The only lesson I could learn that day was I needed to return the next day so I could care for this girl. I would know she was safe with me for at least eight hours of her day. I wondered if I could change the mom’s point view someday. If she sees how wonderful her daughter was doing in class, she would carry this back home with her.

I saw the outside view of the world again, I thought looking through the plastic slats dividing the real world from this really distorted world I live in. Slowly I walked out of the classroom, hoping I could return the next day. ■■■

## West L.A.

✿ second place poetry  
Glenda Muckleroy

Sycamore, West View,  
Manufacturing plant on the corner,  
Record distribution plants everywhere.  
La Cienega Elementary School,  
Dorsey High School not far.  
Trojan Liquors by the tracks,  
Launderette Laundromat,  
La Brea Motel,  
Spaulding Funeral Home near the  
Chandelier shop.

The fruit stand,  
Baldwin Hills – money people,  
Bus number 9,  
Garment Workers,  
At 7:00 A.M.

Frank and Muriel,  
Brother and sister  
Living with father and stepmother,  
“A” students,  
Shoplifting from Thrifty Drug Store.  
With Frank at Alpha Beta Market,  
Got caught,  
Momma beat me  
With an umbrella.

Golden Bird Chicken,  
Bill’s Taco, Johnny’s Pastrami,  
Drive-in movies,  
Venice Beach, house parties,  
Street gangs: Rebel Rousers, Bloods, and Crips.  
Impalas going by,  
Impressions on the radio,  
“I’m So Proud”  
Stevie Wonder – “Fingertips”  
The Temptations – “Ain’t to Proud to Beg”

West LA  
A good, clean place... ■■■

## The Education of Gillian Louise Sweeney

✿ second place one-act play  
Gabriel Hernandez

Starbucks. Late afternoon. MARY, a 16-year-old girl, sits alone at a table, reading a book. She is approached by a 15-year-old girl, GILLIAN.

GILLIAN

Gillian.

(GILLIAN extends her hand to MARY for a handshake that MARY does not return.)

We go to school together.

MARY

That’s nice.

(GILLIAN pulls her hand back.)

GILLIAN

My parents named me after the movie *To Gillian on Her 37th Birthday*. Isn’t that wild?

MARY

It’s something.

GILLIAN

Your name’s Mary, right? I see you around this place all the time. You must, like, really like coffee or something.

(MARY turns a page in her book)

MARY

I don’t drink coffee.

GILLIAN

Really?! O-M-G!

(GILLIAN sits down in the chair opposite of MARY)

MARY (V.O.)

Oh my God, she said, “O-M-G.” She actually text-spoke directly to me.

GILLIAN

So you’re, like, abstaining from coffee or something. HUUUUHHHH... is it against your religion? You know, like sex?

MARY (V.O.)

Did she really just draw in a long dramatic breath?

GILLIAN

Not that I’m saying that sex is against your religion or anything. Maybe you’re not Mormon or Catholic, I don’t know. Who are those people that follow Jesus? Jesuit Witnesses? Oh wait, I think it’s pronounced ‘Hey-susuits.’ It’s like a Spanish thing or something.

MARY

I just don’t like coffee.

GILLIAN

Well that's cool... And, hey, it's cool that you like sex. Not that I'm implying that you've had sex. I mean, we're both, like, 15 or something. I'm not trying to call you a ho or anything. You look like the total opposite of a ho actually.

MARY (V.O.)

Does this girl ever stop?

GILLIAN

I mean, just backing up a bit and looking at you, I can easily see you got that whole 'total opposite of a ho' thing going on. No confusion what-so-ever.

**MARY (V.O.)**

**God, please make her stop.**

**GILLIAN**

**Oh and I wasn't saying 'hey, it's cool that you like sex' as a proposition or anything. I'm not, like, a total lesbo or anything.**

**MARY (V.O.)**

**And make her go away.**

**GILLIAN**

**Not that I wouldn't be attracted to you if I was. You do have that 'attractive' thing going for you. But I just don't play on that team. It's a choice I made for myself when I was, like, 10 years old.**

**MARY**

**Good for you.**

prettiest dresses and always had pink lipstick on. You were, like, the total opposite; to-tal tomboy. It's nice to see that you're dressing a little snazzier these days. You even wear make-up now.

(MARY looks up at GILLIAN, giving her a quick glare)

GILLIAN

I wish I had a sister. I'm, like, an only child.

MARY

It shows.

GILLIAN

It'd be totally fun to have someone close like that. You

MARY (V.O.)

God, please make her stop.

GILLIAN

Oh and I wasn't saying 'hey, it's cool that you like sex' as a proposition or anything. I'm not, like, a total lesbo or anything.

MARY (V.O.)

And make her go away.

GILLIAN

Not that I wouldn't be attracted to you if I was. You do have that 'attractive' thing going for you. But I just don't play on that team. It's a choice I made for myself when I was, like, 10 years old.

MARY

Good for you.

GILLIAN

Speaking of 10 years old, I remember when you and your sister used to come in here. She was, like, your twin, right? It's really sad what happened to her, the accident. I'm so sorry. I'm glad they put that driver in jail. She was so beautiful. And you too, of course. But she always wore the

know, someone you can talk to and share stuff with.

(MARY turns a page in her book)

GILLIAN

So how come you always wear pink lipstick? I've noticed you never wear any other color. Not that I'm, like, stalking you or anything. I wouldn't do that. I can see how that would totally make you nervous if I did. I mean, 'Lesbo stalker. News at seven.' But don't you worry, I'm not that type. I just happen to notice what people are wearing. I'm kind of into that sort of thing, you know. So why only pink lipstick?

MARY

I just like it.

(A few seconds of silence.)

MARY (V.O.)

Is that a pause I hear? Did she finally need to take IN some air?

GILLIAN (singing)

Heaven isn't too far away

Closer to it ev-er-y day

MARY (V.O.)

She's not actually singing to the music playing over the speaker, is she? What made her suddenly decide to do that?

GILLIAN

That word's kinda funny, don't you think? Heaven? It sounds so much like the word 'haven.' I wonder if long ago someone misspelled the word 'haven,' you know like h-a-e-v-e-n and then someone else misspelled that as h-e-a-v-e-n. And now we have the word 'heaven' that's actually supposed to be 'haven.'

MARY (V.O.)

I wonder if this is the dumbest thing she's going to say.

GILLIAN

So now we all go around mispronouncing the misspelling of a misspelled word. Kinda freaky, don't you think? Heeeyyyy, what if the word 'kinda' actually started out as two words?

MARY (V.O.)

Can't say I saw that one coming.

GILLIAN

Do you think there's a God?

MARY

Not at the moment.

GILLIAN

Hey, your eye looks better than it did last week. I can't believe you took on Rachel Brewer and her fashion boutique goon squad all by yourself. But yeah, it was a good cause. They were just picking on that poor Native American girl for no reason at all. That was cool of you to stand up for her like that. It's so sad how little respect we have for those people



in our country. I mean, I don't even know where that girl's home country is because we don't put Native America on any of our maps.

(MARY lets out a soft burst of a chuckle.)

GILLIAN (face lighting up)

Hey, I made you smile.

MARY

Don't count on it happening again.

GILLIAN

So your last name is Rivera, right? What's your full name?

(MARY turns a page in her book.)

GILLIAN

My full name is Gillian Louise Sweeney. My parents named me Louise because of, you know, *Thelma & Louise*. And I think Sweeney comes from *Sweeney Todd*. Although I'm not really sure. That one still baffles me.

(MARY closes her book.)

MARY (frustrated)

Look. I really just want to be left alone. And it's not you, trust me; I just don't like anyone.

GILLIAN

Yeah, I noticed you don't, like, have any friends or anything. That's why I came over to talk. So you can have a friend.

MARY

I don't want a friend. OK?

GILLIAN (becoming sad)

Oh.

MARY

Why are you sad? Is it because I don't want a friend?

GILLIAN (fighting tears)

No. It's because... that's all I want.

(MARY stands up, gathers her backpack, and straps it over one shoulder as she starts to leave, but then stops.)

MARY (softly speaking)

C'mon.

(MARY turns to GILLIAN.)

Let's get out of here. I hate this place.

GILLIAN (slowly smiles)

Don't like coffee.

(GILLIAN leaps out of her chair, turns to MARY, and briefly points to her.)

Right.

(MARY and GILLIAN walk toward the door and exit the building.)

MARY

By the way, we're in Native America.

GILLIAN

Really...? ■■■■

## The Lizard, My Friend

✿ third place fiction

Jonathan Balaam



I've seen this place before, I know I have. But where? I can't remember driving here, or flying; but, I know I have been here. Wow, the majesty of this place! The grass is so... so... green. And, oh, is it strong! It doesn't bend beneath my feet as my front lawn does, and I can clearly see every drop of dew on every blade. But it isn't just the grass, is it? It's everything. There are no leaves on the ground, strange for autumn. Not even the leaves on the trees have begun to change color. There is nothing wrong here. Everything is so... so... pure. And this waterfall, why does it not make a sound? The water rushes down and creates a beautiful mist as it splashes, producing the most vibrant rainbows I have ever seen, yet, I cannot hear it. And it is right in front of me!

It is strange that my soul feels so easy right now. It is unlike me to not be worrying about something. But, I am at perfect peace! Surely no evil is here, I don't see how it could be possible for evil things to survive here. Oh, how long has it been since I've felt this way? And that loneliness, that dreaded emptiness which consumes me daily is gone!

What is this place? How did I get here? I remember who I am, but nothing else. That doesn't even seem to matter though, nothing does. Everything here is perfect! But what is here?

I'm starting to remember... There was a bus, a big bus. Small to look at, but huge to be inside. I don't remember where the station was though, that's odd. How far back can I remember?

"You were on the golf course." What was that? A voice... sounds... creepy. It gives me goosebumps, that voice. It came from the... left! That's weird, no one is there. I mean, there are people there, but no one is paying attention to me. Who said that?

"Look down!" There it is again, who owns that v-

What is this doing on my shoulder, a ghastly, disgusting, red lizard? What in the world, how did this thing get on my shoulder?

"I've been here your whole life," said the lizard, with an evil sneer on his face.

"You most certainly have not!" I exclaimed. "I think I would have known if I had a lizard on my shoulder! Now off with you!" I grab for the lizard, but he digs his claws deep into the flesh of my shoulder. Tiny spots of blood appear in 12 different places, soaking through the fabric of my Hanes

cotton t-shirt. Pulling still, the pain is agonizing, as if the claws are hot iron, searing as they pierce. Deeper and deeper the claws set into my skin; the harder I pull, the deeper they drive.

The lizard laughs, diabolical, yet small. He is after all, just a lizard. "Think about it, I had to tell you where to look before you noticed I was here. I have been here all along. And you cannot get rid of me. I am stuck to you, which is fine; you need me."

"I beg your pardon?" I ask, "How is it that I need you?"

He smiles that devilish sneer, and says: "I'm the source of all your good ideas, and you know how many of those you have had. I told you to marry Jane!"

"We were divorced!"

"Your doing, not mine. I taught you how to enjoy fine Scotch. Remember how you loved Scotch?"

"Until I nearly killed someone! I haven't had Scotch in years!" I said, angrily.

"Ah, but who was driving the coach? Not I, but you," the lizard said, breathlessly.

"And what would you have me do in this heavenly place, serpent? Set it a-fire?"

"No, but hunt. We came here to destroy."

"Destroy, but why?" I inquired.

The lizard began to pump his front legs, up and down, up and down, and as he did so, my sense of hunger rapidly grew stronger and stronger. The urge to find meat became intolerable. "What are you doing to me lizard? There is no need for food in a place like this! All of my hunger should be gone, my thirst quenched! What are you having me do?!"

"You will do as I say, without question!" The lizard extended his arms all the way out, and snapped, "IS THAT CLEAR!"

His yell was so loud, the drums inside my ears rattled away, but no one around me, none of my fellow bus passengers seemed to hear it. "I will NOT!" I yelled and reached for the lizard again, but he sunk his fangs into the webbing between my thumb and forefinger. I pulled my hand back as blood poured from two bite marks. A shadow passed overhead, a bird gently gliding through the air. The bird turned in my direction, and slowed his velocity.

"Yes you will!" The lizard demanded. "I liked your blood better when it tasted like Scotch!"

The bird drew nearer and I saw, by its long and skinny beak that it was a dove; snow white and glorious in its flight.

The lizard spoke, "I command you to kill that bird!"

"I will! I promise I will! But how?" I asked in desperation.

"He will land on your shoulder in due time. I have heard of these doves before. They prey on what I am. Wretched things!" The cynicism in the voice of the lizard was painstakingly

obvious, but the fear was more noticeable. "When he lands, you must grab him and wring his neck!"

"I promise... I promise I will." Anything to keep the lizard at peace, the more angry he became, the more miserable he would make me be. The dove landed on my shoulder, and said not a word. I reached for him, and he fluttered to the top of my head. I swatted at my head and he descended to my left shoulder, and next to the lizard he stood; triumphant over the crimson reptile.

"NOW, DO IT NOW!" The lizard commanded, "DO IT N—"

In two quick flashes, the dove had pecked the eyes out of the lizard's head. He screamed in agony, animated by pain. His legs went to his head, and the dove put his head against the lizard, and nudged him off of my shoulder. As this happened, the dove said not a word. The lizard fell head first to the ground, and was impaled by the perfect blades of grass. Before I could say thank you, the dove took flight again.

I watched as he soared in the sky, and landed on the shoulder of a young man some 50 yards away, only there for a minute before taking flight again.

—Based on a scene from *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis. ■■■

## The Drill Instructor Persona

✿ third place nonfiction

Jared Sorensen



Every now and then, we'd have parts of the day in which only one of the drill instructors were around to take care of us. It happened most of the time on Sundays, just to give these guys some sort of break. It might have been hard for us; you might even think a drill instructor would acclimate to the environment after a while, and you can tell that some do. But in reality, their job is their life. I had 10 days of paid vacation ahead of me; my drill instructors got only five days until their next platoon. And every time, the same group of kids show up in need of guidance. Always yelling, until they lose their voice, surrounded by the germs these kids brought with them, until they get sick; all the while, never showing an ounce of weakness or vulnerability. Something I did notice, even going back to my days in Hotel Company, is that even though a drill instructor wants to make themselves look like some robotic, evil, cancerous beast; trust me, deep down, they want to be liked. Or should I say, they wanted their recruits to like them more than the other drill instructors. A lot of the time, we'd see a slightly different side from these guys, when they didn't have anyone else around to notice.

Sgt. Salazar was a great example. Like I mentioned previously, alone time with him meant he probably threw back a couple tall cans in his car beforehand. I only saw him really fucked up a few times back at Pendleton; the first time, he hazed the shit out of us, so that was nothing new. This other time though, he got really nice with us. Seriously, he had us on the parade deck for drill, and put us in a school circle, spilling whatever profound thoughts he had running through his head. But, that didn't excuse him from mostly being a piece of shit with his downtime. Sgt. Salazar was pretty bad when it came to his cell phone. We would be in the middle of drill, and if he got a call, he'd platoon halt us, and take it. He always had the excuse. "You all know I got a bitch for everyday of the week. Well that was Monday on the phone," or "That was Wednesday I just talked to," when he could've just said "Hey, sorry, I had to take this call from my girlfriend, my one and only girlfriend, because I'm both a pussy-whipped bitch and a shitty drill instructor." We all kind of knew it was bullshit, yet we wanted to believe it; after all, the guy was basically a father figure. But, he left us during the Crucible, we didn't know why, we just knew he wasn't coming back.

In comes Sgt. Jones, a bald, moderately built, out-of-his-element white guy. His lack of experience immediately became crystal clear to us. Simply put, he was a substitute teacher. He smelled like a pack of Camels, and he did jack shit to scare me. But, we all knew he had a purple heart, so we cut the new guy some slack; and besides, if he thought we were bad, he'd be in for a surprise when he picked up his first real platoon. Needless to say, he didn't have what it took yet to babysit a platoon by himself.

Sgt. Jackson was the exact opposite of what we got from just about everyone else. Basically, you got the same Sgt. Jackson alone as you would've had if General Hagee was in the room. Sgt. Jackson was the perfect drill instructor. He had the capacity and the drive to put the entire platoon in the palm of his hand, and do whatever with us that he wanted. If I got I.T.'d by any other drill instructor, I could always assume that after a while, shit would get just as boring for the D.I. as it was for all of us; and that would be the end of it. With Sgt. Jackson, I screamed my loudest, moved my fastest, and never let up; because if he saw your 100 percent, then it was basically a workout minus the mind games. If he saw you fucking off, he made sure to bring you to a level so low, that it felt like hell. I knew that Sgt. Jackson loved to see us broken, and I didn't ever want to make him happy. If he ever found a good reason to fuck us all up, his eyes would brighten, and he'd hold back a smile; Sgt. Jackson made you believe that killing recruits was his favorite thing to do in the world.

Sgt. Sanchez was the most colorful of the bunch. Seriously, through good times and bad; I just liked basic training more

when he was around. He was the perfect example of how a drill instructor can alter his behavior when he's got the platoon to himself. We were only his second platoon, a lot of times he didn't know exactly what he was doing, and sometimes it would get him in trouble. We had that one time where he strangled Recruit Valencia with his own tent cover. I thought it was hilarious, kind of like Homer Simpson choking Bart Simpson. Valencia was just this goofy fuck with no street smarts, I mean; you have to really suck if you can't put up a tent efficiently. Sadly though, my own guys went to Sgt. Salazar and tattled on him a couple days later. Sgt. Sanchez was put in timeout for a few days. He said it best right before we graduated; we were allowed to ask some questions, and someone asked "Why did you decide to become a drill instructor?" He looked down for a moment, "I really don't know why, this is a lot harder than I thought." Sgt. Sanchez was the guy we could relate to the most, the most normal of the bunch. The only drill instructor I knew that would test our bearing by trying to make us laugh, and it only happened when he had us to himself. I could tell, despite the character he had to assume every day, the guy had a life outside of the workplace, which is uncommon in the drill field.

Senior Drill Instructor SSgt. Hagel ran our platoon like Julius Cesar at a gladiator fight. The man got to where he was because he was a veteran in the drill field. He didn't need to leave the duty hut in order to dictate the pace of training; most of the time, he sat back as an observer, channeling the madness through the drill instructors under him in a way that amused him the most. His philosophy was both sound, and relevant to the warrior mindset. I can remember specifically one moment with him that has stayed with me, and still holds true to my life today, which essentially read as such:

"Gentlemen, take a look at uniform you wear. Above the left breast pocket, reads U.S. Marine. Above the right breast pocket, reads your family name. Marines come and go; some are pieces of shit, and get flushed down the toilet and forgotten. You can fail training, go back home to your old friends, and the Marine Corps will live on without you. Your friends won't look at you and say, "The Marine Corps failed," they will say, "You failed the Marine Corps." And because of that, your family name will suffer."

And because of that speech, I realized exactly why I joined in the first place. It wasn't for my country, but instead for my family's sake. More specifically, for my cousin, Dane Carver; who may have not had a specific reason for joining either, if none other than to make his family proud. So as I considered that thought, I thought about my parents. I thought about what their expectations were of me; both before I joined, and what they expected to take home on graduation day. ■ ■ ■

# 1 NEIGHBORHOOD!

## ✿ third place poetry

Christopher E. White

Broadway seems to be the hippest place on the South Side. . .  
Where you can get the best deals for yo high.  
Four liquor stores within arms reach,  
And a church across and on the same side of the street.  
They say the preacher be pimpin, but that's above me

Bums and winos beggin for change to get they drink or fix...  
While the hoe's walkin the strip tryn to catch a trick  
And the drug dealer sittin on a wall of brick, collecting  
chips...  
Seven-eleven watch out cuz daddy's hot!

Block party's courtesy of big bro J-LOVE,  
Free food loud music, straight lady's and thugs.  
Hood meeting, we gather at Ayaya Park  
If you ain't from the block, stay clear away cuz it gets dark

Disciplines, first and requites talks about doin dirt  
Cussin and rap music is like a thugs rest haven...  
You know like a pacifier to a baby...  
Gang bang, gun shots, nobody cares... time don't stop.

27<sup>th</sup> street to 16<sup>th</sup> street  
Lulaks, Broadways, to the Roeser...  
You besta have yo strap and you betta be a soldier...  
You can lose yo life over a quarter...  
25 cent or 7 grams the statement still stands.

Park South, Broadway, I.B.G., Neighborhood, and  
Chocolate City

The sun might shine in the morning  
And the dayz could be haze  
But the nights are always gritty...

Passing over the gun shells, blunt smoke in the air  
As the homie hopes that I share...  
It's all gravey... I ain't actin shady, yea he can have a hit,  
Even if he ain't got five on it.  
I mean he do watch my back in case the enemy wanna set trip.

Don't get me wrong, kickin it with the wrong homies  
Can get you that final ride and that last sad song...  
Get yo face put on a t-shirt, while the hater gets stripes for  
putting in work.

In the hood lives get taken and the body's still walk the earth..  
Truth be told they just a victim of the turf.  
Some way, shape, form, or fashion, if you taste the  
forbidden fruit... you too will create a passion.

"Get out"? Huh... Some do and some wish they could,  
Others will live and die in the Neighborhood. ■■■

## Admiration

### ✿ honorable mention poetry

Myam Salinas

I admired you with a fear that woke ages of turmoil like  
war, when we seized it.

Even when you pushed my mother down the stair case,  
20 weeks pregnant with your son.

Admiration even when you destroyed the windshield of  
your own car with bare hands.

You beat it with clenched fists like blood was given and  
nothing was left to lose.

I admired how there was no lid to hold inside and contain  
man's strongest emotion.

It was anger that over shadowed the fear of a child.

And as you put on your uniform to contain a fire,

Save a little girl that didn't see it in your head, a murderous  
fever.

Ready to jump on us like a lion in the Sahara that kills the  
bastard children of the alpha female.

You dedicated yourself and discipline was a hand to the  
face.

You took names, like a street boy in the green lights  
perspective over something very miniscule.

I stood up to you to say, "Go to hell,"

The words back tracked and crashed into one another to  
get back in my mouth.

But I admired you because the aftermath was an, I'm sorry.

You swallowed your gut and saved room for a little lie,  
To be received as spit in our faces.

Like one day the words would cease to exist.

Little girls dirt streaked faces that tears formed oceans,

That's waves never reached the shore of a mother

That could have said enough was enough.

Feeding us to you like steaks and an ice cold beer.

But I admired the child inside you.

The size of a mouse, with the roar of a lion. ■■■



**Blue Mirage**  
honorable mention visual arts  
Kryshawna Mead

## Red Butterfly

✿ honorable mention poetry

Lisa Marie Cyr

Have you ever seen  
A red butterfly?  
Did you know  
They carry the souls  
Of the dead?

Probably not,  
Since you were never  
The superstitious type.

I thought I saw one  
In the bitter  
November cold,  
Just days after  
You died.

For a moment  
I saw the flash  
Of color against  
The stark  
White snow.

But then it was gone.  
With no warning.

So I have  
Been marked  
Permanently  
In your honor.

Now the red butterfly  
I have lets  
Me feel that  
Your soul  
Can continue  
To travel and  
See the world.

It doesn't have  
To be trapped  
In the sickly  
And pain-filled body  
I saw you  
Struggle with  
For years.

Instead, this  
Red butterfly  
Allows you  
Some freedom. ■■■



## Maps

Matthew Heavlin



Searching through the memories,  
Trying to find the images of maps,  
Where children play,  
People read,  
And lovers gaze up into the clouds,  
The human mind is too stressed out,  
So many worries block the paths,  
That are set out on this childish map,  
Take a timeout to breath,  
Take some time to leave,  
Clear the paths,  
On this map,  
That will bring you back,  
To the childhood past,  
You control your thoughts,  
Don't worry about getting lost,  
Take a second,  
Take a minute,  
Take a day,  
Soon enough you will find your way,  
On your way back,  
On this concrete path,  
Winding through the grass,  
Finding the "X" on the map ■■■

## Childhood Memories

Kirleska Canahui



One of my early childhood memories is the one of my parents, my sister and I riding toward church. I was maybe 7 years old; we would drive about an hour long ride. The red small car, with a broken window and a non-functioning radio was a place where I had my first attempts at singing. Since we couldn't turn the radio on, I would sing for my parents a song I was taught at church. The kid's Spanish song talked about how even though I was still a child, I could understand that I have to believe in Jesus. He came to the world to save us. He went up to heaven and he shall come back. I would sing this song every time we had to go to church. Even while singing, I would fall asleep and wake up in the middle of the service. The loud shouts of the preacher trying to make a point would wake me up in an instant. I look around and saw hundreds of people, some I knew, many I didn't, as I looked up I saw my parents listening attentively to the sermon.

As I grew up, church was always a great part of my life. It was

the one place we would always go and my parents would serve at was called “Rey de Reyes” or “King of Kings” in English. It was a big white church, and it had seats for 2,500 people. It had a kid’s church where kids would hold their own service. Kids led the praise and worship as well as kids would preach.

I remember we would go to vigils; there was a specific time that I have engraved in my memory. We were at home getting ready to go to one of these vigils. My mom yelling from the other room, “Mijas, hurry up, we are going to be late.” We had to hurry up so that we could eat something before leaving. At church, people would sell food but we didn’t have enough money to eat over there, and we were going to spend the whole night there. We might get hungry and we packed some sandwiches to go. My dad called us over to the living room. He said, “Girls, I don’t have money right now, so please once we are at church don’t ask me for any. I only have 7 quetzales.” That is roughly about one dollar and that was in case we had a flat tire.

My sister and I understood what he said. Although we never starved, we often saw my parents struggle to make ends meet. We got on our small red car; the same car that would take us to church and school. We live a bit far away from church and Guatemala is a country where it rains eight months out of the 12 in a year. The non-asphalted streets and roads would become muddy and ponds would form on them. We finally went to church with one dollar in my dad’s wallet and the hope of changing our situation. We arrived to church and my parents started helping setting up for the event. The vigil went as usual and in the midnight break everybody went out to eat the food they were selling. There were various stands around the church outside walls with different kinds of food to sell. One of them was selling fried food like fried chicken, french fries, fried plantains. The stand next to it was selling more traditional food like chuchitos, rellenitos, tamales, and mole. The line went on and the entire street was filled with the smell of the food and the noise of the people eating, laughing, and conversing.

My friends started to pull us telling us “come on lets go eat.” My sister and I said, “no it is OK, we are not hungry.” In reality, we were starving. My mom came and said, “Come on lets go to the car and eat the prepared black bean sandwich.” So we went and we ate half a sandwich each and my mom said, “Sorry girls, I know that you are still hungry, but let’s wait till the morning when we go back home and I’ll find you guys something to eat.” Still hungry, we got out of the car to see our friends eating with their families. We went to play at the swings while waiting for them to be done.

Everybody went inside the big white church that would at least host 2,500 Christian believers. The church band started playing worship songs that now are old hymns to

me that every time I hear they take me back in time to that era in my life. People were dancing, singing; some people had flags that they would wave to the rhythm of the music. I looked up to both my parents and I saw them clapping, singing, even jumping, just as if we weren’t struggling financially. We at least ate something they didn’t, and, even so, they had the energy to keep on praising someone that I didn’t know or had never seen.

The night went on and the dreaded second break was approaching, but before that, the pastor of the church took the microphone and said, “Ok, brothers and sisters, we will now receive the offering.” He read a Bible verse and said, “Maybe you don’t have enough money to give to the lord today, but look to your hands, whatever you can give him is OK.” My parents were crying. It felt as if he was directly talking to them, not even knowing our true reality. My dad, with tears in his eyes, took his watch that had been given to him for his birthday. He got up and went to the front and put it in the offerings bucket. I thought, “How can he do that? We don’t even have money right now, why is he giving it away?” After that, the second break came and we went to the car to hide, because we didn’t want anyone to know that we didn’t have money to eat. While we were there, my dad came toward the car and he was crying. The only time I ever saw my dad crying was either at church or when he would pray at home. We didn’t know what was going on. He told my sister and I, “Girls, come out of the car and go ask for anything you want to eat.” We were a bit confused. “I thought we didn’t have any money,” I said. He answered, “Well, we do now; so go ahead and go eat.” My mom took us to the food stand and bought us what we wanted to eat, with no restrictions. My dad came to join us and started telling us what happened. He said, “Remember how I gave my watch to the offerings?” “Yes,” we all said. “Well, as I was putting it in the bucket, I prayed to God and said, “Please God, I believe in you and can you provide for me and my family?” When the break came, a man from church that I don’t know came and told me, “I don’t know why, but I feel that I have to give you this.” He gave me a five thousand quetzales check. We saw it as an answer from God and someone who let himself be guided by God. That was an event that opened up my eyes to see what a kind person moved by God can do. ■■■

***Even while singing, I would fall asleep and wake up in the middle of the service. The loud shouts of the preacher trying to make a point would wake me up in an instant. I look around and saw hundreds of people, some I knew, many I didn’t, as I looked up I saw my parents listening attentively to the sermon.***

# My Faithful Shadow

Joshua Arambula

My shadow walks beside me  
The only one that will never leave  
No matter what, faithfully.

Not a way to live life,  
Not a way to start my demise,  
Tired of all the escalating lies,  
Excruciating fights,  
Exhausted of trying,  
Slowly losing air  
Can hardly take a breath,  
Would rather be slaughtered

Seems unreal  
Inhumanly possible,  
Like the only answers death  
Alone in a crowded room  
Just me and my shadow  
All I hear is silence  
The sound of doom

Speaking to my echo  
Telling me to end it right here.

Refusing to use violence,  
Refuse to be a volunteer,  
In that sort of atmosphere,  
But that will not last long  
When it happens I know it will be wrong  
But I'm not strong or tough enough.

Try to shut my ears,  
Can't stand to hear,  
Another voice  
Inside my head,  
It never fades,  
It all just leads  
To loud noise,  
Screaming death,  
Telling me to take my last breath  
Will not let tears fall down my cheeks  
Attempt to shut my eyes  
So they don't continue to leak  
Like the continuous lies





They run more  
They flow cold,  
And tell untold truths.

I need an angel here,  
Just to care,  
To be aware,  
Of the nightmare,  
And despair,  
And just send for me a prayer  
To ignore my past lies and be alongside  
Me for my last days  
And accompany me for my last night  
To say goodbye to this ugly world  
On my hands and knees asking God,  
For my work here to be done  
Asking God to take me home,  
And to not send me to the underworld,  
I wonder if I will only be missed by my faithful shadow....

## Almost Drowning

Sinead Brice



I could barely stand, I wanted to collapse. It felt as though I was being tortured, that someone was taking continuous stabs at my heart, I could barely breathe. I just wanted to disappear, not have people look at me and see the sadness and pity in the eyes that was aimed toward me. I did not want to have to feel this anger, sadness, grief – this pain. I don't want to feel anything at all. Anger, sadness, confusion, and grief were all that was in me.

With tears falling down my face, I felt a squeeze of a hand against mine. Anger flowed in me as I felt the hand that was against mine, as I knew that it was my mother's. How dare she try and be the loving mother, especially since I knew that it wasn't for me. It was for them, for her image. To make it seem like she was the mother that put her family before anyone else, that loved her family with all her heart, and the mother that would never cause any pain toward them. Behind closed doors it is just the opposite. If only people really knew then they would understand.

I looked at the woman who gave my brother life, but also destroyed it. Knowing that she tore him down to pieces and left him feeling selfless. I knew that's what killed my brother and that's why he did the things he did. He cried but my mother would not listen; he pleaded but she did not give. He searched for what he needed in all the wrong places and only she could give him what he really needed, but she denied him

again and again.

My brother and I were three years apart in age. I was the typical little girl who thought she was a princess. I spent my days playing with my dolls, attending dance lessons, and singing along to Britney Spears' and the Spice Girls' latest songs. My brother was the typical tough boy who got dirty, played way too rough, and spent his time playing sports and video games. I was my daddy's precious princess, but my brother was his pride and joy. I could get away with anything with a pout or a smile, but he always spent most of his attention and time went with my brother, which I was always jealous about. We grew up with what seemed to be the perfectly happy family.

We always fought like cats and dogs but nevertheless we shared a close bond. My brother would always say that we were twins but he came into life earlier. We looked so much alike and we shared a lot of the same strengths and weaknesses but we were different at the same time. I always looked up to him and wanted to be right in the middle of what he and his friends were doing. I was the little sister that would follow a bunch of boys around trying to keep up with them. I was always looking out of place with my braids with pink ribbons and my girly dresses on but he never minded nor complained, even if his friends would say something.

Once I reached high school, my brother became one of my very best friends. We would confide in each other and always looked out for one another, especially if my mom was involved. Once my mom felt that she lost control of him, it seemed like she lost all of her trust, respect, and love for him. If he got kicked out and wasn't allowed back in, I was always the one who would let him in through the front door. My mother would remain silent but every time she would look or even spoke to him you could see the anger and hear the coldness in her voice. She was a volcano and any wrong move that he would make, even the tiniest, would set her off. Once the eruption began the solution every time was throwing him back out on to the streets, because to her there was no place for trash in her home.

"You are such a disappointment. I gave you everything and you go out and run around like you are trash, which is what now you are. You think you are so cool running around with your friends but you are a piece of shit and everyone knows it. I will not have this here in my home; take all your shit and leave," she yelled.

"Please mom, I'm trying for you, all for you why can't you just see that? I am trying to get my life together and you are ruining it for me," Sean said.

"You're a liar and a drug addict. Get out! Leave! I don't want you here! I don't want you in my life, just leave!" she screamed out.

I would listen to this from my bedroom and I would just cry for him. I knew that he could no longer receive help and there was no hope for him. That our mom took that away from him without even ever trying to help him. I knew when she had kicked him out where he would be running to the moment he stepped out of that door. It made me feel worse and more helpless that I couldn't have stopped him. I knew mom could help him but simply didn't want to. To her, her son was not worthy of her help nor even her time. But my father and I would always find a way for Sean to come back in and giving him faith that maybe this time things would be different.

The more frequent that he was in and out of our home the more Sean would wear that on himself. You could see that he was angry too, but at himself. He was digging himself deeper and deeper into a hole that he could not get out of. Not even his loudest cries for help would get him, only bury him deeper.

I remember the very last moment I saw my brother. I remember every last detail from the hard expression he wore on his face, down to the shoes he was wearing. They didn't know I was watching but I was, from my bedroom window. I watched him get into that white truck and drove off for the last time, for what he thought would be toward a better opportunity. Which it was, but things with him never lasted. Pressure and the disappoint or thought of failure would always get the best of him. Once that job was gone, once he could no longer provide for himself or his fiancé, he slipped and dove right back under to where he started from.

I got a text in school from my mother asking if it was OK to come and get me. I remember instantly getting a terrible feeling deep inside; that something has just went terribly wrong. I asked her yes and was everything OK. She replied back with a no. I sat frozen in my desk till my teacher got a call saying that I would be going home. I walked down to the office and the assistant principal told me to go to my mother's car. As I walked toward the car I saw my mother talking on the phone frantically. As I entered the car, she got out and finished her phone call. She got in and started driving with tears rolling down her face, saying nothing. I asked what's wrong and she nodded her head. I asked if it was dad and she nodded her head no and then I realized it was Sean. I asked her if Sean was alright and she again nodded her head no and began crying out saying he is gone. Feelings of complete anger, sadness, and confusion flooded into me. When we got home my mom got back on the phone calling or talking to whomever, while I ran to my room and sat in front of my window looking out while crying all that I had out. I remember secretly hoping to see that white Toyota truck come pulling back up and seeing him getting out and

coming home. But he didn't and that was even more surreal to him than if he did.

The priest gave his final words, the bagpipes started to play, everyone stood up. The nightmare would soon be over with. I felt mother's eyes giving me a cold stare while I just sat there; she was expecting me to get up when it was cued, just how it was supposed to be. My father held my hand and helped me up. He guided me toward the exit and I followed grateful for feeling the warmth and comfort of my father's hand, but knew that feeling would soon be gone as well. As I got up and walked past my mother, I felt her eyes glaring at me. I ignored it and walked past her without even looking at her or acknowledging her. She soon followed after us and everyone was staring like we were the stars of the show, the show that no one would ever want to be in.

People came up, gave their sympathies, I smiled and nodded thank you and told them how much it meant to me and my family that they could be here for us. Trying to make it seem that their words would make the slightest difference in how I felt. But putting on a show with a sweet and sincere smile when inside all I really wanted to do was scream. This is what I knew best. Of course, I learned from the best as well. I watched as my mom did the same, not only today but every other day when our lives were breaking down. I thought to myself, how much as I hated it, I knew I was my mother's daughter. I watched as my dad wore his feelings on his face. He was crushed, and everyone could see his pain.

I myself didn't understand it at the time at all. My brother was supposed to grow old with me, I was to see him get married and have kids and tell them all the crazy stuff that their dad did. Then our kids would be as close as we were to each other. To make it even more plain and simple, 19 year olds were not supposed to die. It was just wrong. What was worse was that my parent's way of gently telling me of how he died was cardiac arrest. Meaning his heart stopped beating, they thought that I was stupid enough to think it was natural causes, but I knew that it was the drugs that had made his heart finally stop beating. I also knew that he could no longer help himself and no one could help him, so he did what he knew how to deal and escape from it all, I knew that he didn't want to escape it all forever.

Days passed after the funeral and silence grew in the house. Dad was back on the road for business and it was unknown for when he would be back. It bothered me a lot but I didn't let it show. Mom and I tiptoed past each other, barely exchanging a few words. Never discussing anything. When the night crept in is when I would get to step out. Mother would look with disapproving eyes but never whispered a word. She knew if she tried to keep me caged in, all I would do is find a way out. I knew I need to find comfort and I knew that there was no

place for that in my house.

Sitting in my room, I heard a car come and slow down outside my window, followed by a honk. Quickly, I gathered my things and rushed out the door. I climbed into the shiny black Lexus and Brittany nodded over to our very good friend Jack, in the back. I smiled knowing that my best friend and I were going to have a long night ahead of us.

Brittany was the type of girl who other girls hated, but desperately wanted to be. She was mature but wild, she was classy but promiscuous, she took things seriously but she knew how to let things go and have a good time. She was an attention whore and got jealous when the spotlight wasn't on her but she was my best friend nevertheless. We were partners in crime, thick as thieves that nothing or no one could separate us. The best thing about our friendship was that we knew how to have a good time and together things would get wild, and no one could deny that.

"Where to tonight?!" she asked.

"How about we just go kick it at the apartment tonight, I'm not really into the whole bar scene tonight." I said there was one thing that held the tie between our bond, the fake ID. Brittany was already 21 and I was just shy of 18. We met in our communications class and we just hit it off immediately. It was like we knew each other our entire lives in that one conversation. But I knew without the ID, it just wouldn't be the same. She would not have her partner in crime or her wingman.

"I'm getting sick of the guys though. Like if hear one more stupid thing come out of CC's mouth, I will slap that tool."

"Yeah, but I don't have any money to blow and you know that they got us covered if we decide to go anywhere."

"We can't go anywhere with them. They're young'uns, remember little girl!?" Brittany said jokingly.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Let's go there till we think of something better then."

Radio turned all the way up, I grabbed Jack and starting downing my half before we got to the apartment. But I made sure not to drink my half at once because I knew Brittany wanted to drink together. When we arrived we put the car in park and checked our faces for any flaws, grabbed our buddy Jack and off we went. We walked right into our boy's apartment. There we saw Seth, Jeremy, Alec, DJ, and CC. Those boys were like brothers and with me and Brittany, it seemed like we were all a family. We always ended the night together no matter where we started out at.

"What's up fools?!" I said happy to see them.

The guys all said what's up. CC's eyes were all on me, got up and walked right up to me and gave me a big hug. He was holding on to me a little bit longer than he should have, but that was fine by me. His big blue eyes, curly blond hair, and

big smile always got me. For a second in time it was only CC and I and the world felt right. Every time he looked down right into my eyes and shivers went up and down all over me. I wasn't sure if it was either from him or Jack, but I did not care at the moment.

"Stop being a creep to Ashley CC! Both of you need to come over here and help me finish this bottle!" yelled Brittany.

Brittany didn't know about me and CC. I knew I should have told her but it would have been a big joke within the group. I was glad to have him a secret though; it made everything twice as fun.

The rest of the bottle came pouring and time was flying by. My limits had been crossed and everyone and everything was moving so fast till into a blur, then everything turned black. I opened my eyes the next morning and took me a second to realize that I was in Brittany's bed. Taking the time to process what had happened and how I got there, I realized that I should just get up and talk to Brittany about it. I walked out and all the boys and Brittany were gathered around the kitchen table discussing something. They all stopped talking when they discovered I was walking out. Laughing I said...

"Did we have a good time or what?!"

They all just kind of looked at me while I stood there awkwardly. Until CC broke the silence.

"Yeah we had a good time, but you got a little emotional last night till you passed out. Then your mom called all of us wondering where you are..."

"What do you mean... emotional about what?" I asked.

"Just stuff about your brother and then your mom..." he said.

"What did you guys say to my mom?" I replied, trying to avoid the subject.

"Just that we didn't know where you were and then she told us if we see you that to not even bother coming home."

The words took a second to sink in, I felt numb to it. The feelings of last night's effects were starting to sink into my skull. I felt them all staring at me when I walk past them to the fridge to pour some juice. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the bottle of vodka on the counter next to Brittany and figured I might as well start early today because this day is going to be long or I could make it go faster and better, just avoid everything all together. I glanced at the phone at all the missed calls from my mom and dad. I didn't even take a look at the text messages so pressed delete on all of them. No sense

*The feelings of last night's effects were starting to sink into my skull. I felt them all staring at me when I walk past them to the fridge to pour some juice. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the bottle of vodka on the counter next to Brittany and figured I might as well start early today...*

in putting more of a downer on my day when I could turn it right back up.

“So what do you guys say if we start early today and kick it poolside with some drinks?!”

I looked around at everyone who was seated at the table and waited for their reaction. I saw everyone get a big smile across their faces.

“That’s my girl!” he yelled.

The guys all yelled in excitement and Brittany picked up her keys and decided that margaritas were a must. We ran to the store got our drinks, and our tanning oil and came back to the house. The music was blasting, boys were in the pool, and we were pouring the drinks. I thought to myself how life could not get better than this moment.

I woke up and saw it was pitch dark outside and wondered where the day went. As I turned to the other side and looked over at CC and realized what had happened. I pulled on my clothes and gathered all my things. I felt like I needed to go home.

“Where are you going babe?” asked CC.

I was startled that he was awake. I was hoping I could slip out without being noticed.

“I just need to get home,” I said awkwardly.

“Oh well, I think Brittany went out and won’t be home till tomorrow.”

“No, I meant my home.”

“Your mom doesn’t want you there, remember? So you can just stay with me.”

I forgot all about that, I was sure that if I called mom that she would let me back home. I got voice-mails and text messages from my father pleading and begging to come back home. Why, though? He wasn’t there anyways and what really was home? Some place silence where you tiptoe around everywhere avoiding everyone. Hearing distant screams from a mother and father who no longer loved each other, and watch as my father desperately try to win my mom back, to hold all of us together. Would I really want to go back to all that?

So I crawled back in next to him, I didn’t get the feeling that I belonged there, though. He put his arms all around me and started kissing me but all I wanted to do was to be left alone and not even be touched. I scooted away from him hoping that he would get the hint and fall back asleep.

“What’s wrong with you?” he asked angrily.

“Apparently a lot of things are,” I answered not caring about what he thought.

“It’s me, isn’t it? You think that I’m not good enough huh, only when your drunk is when you want me. But when you’re sober is when I’m not good enough for you.”

I was completely shocked that he said this out loud. CC was a good looking guy, he was super funny and always had to be the center of attention wherever we were at. I realized

now that he had to be like that for a reason. I never thought I was better than him though.

“What are you talking about?” I said.

“You know exactly what I’m talking about, you would never do any of things that you’ve done with me unless you have been drinking and I’m sick of it. I am really into you but I know you will never feel like that toward me.”

“No, it is not even like that.”

I started feeling really uncomfortable; he wasn’t as cute anymore or funny. His insecurities took away everything that I thought was good about him. But I knew I was stuck and I had nowhere to go.

“Prove it” he said.

Weeks have passed and they all seemed to all blur together. They were neither bad nor good. I simply just felt nothing, like I was there but not really. I would smile and laugh at the right moments and said the right things. CC was always by my side, I was barely if ever left alone. One morning I awoke and was actually fully aware of where I was at and actually what had happened the night before. CC was already up and getting ready for school, he looked over at me and smiled.

“I’ll be home at 1, so don’t go anywhere, I want to see you when I get home!” he said.

I just said OK and watched him as he walked out the door and picked up my phone. I had text messages and missed calls from the boys, Brittany, and my mom. I immediately dialed her number and listened to the phone ring till it went to voice-mail. I thought to myself about how I should just go over there, that I couldn’t stand being stuck here at this crappy apartment with creepy CC who was constantly there. I haven’t been anywhere outside this apartment since the night I decided to stay. Brittany has stopped by and tried to bring me over but CC refused. There was nothing I could say because without him, I wouldn’t have anyone or anything. But I wanted to leave and never go back. I was miserable here.

I gathered my things and walked out the door and got into my car. I drove up to my house and put it in park and really thought about whether or not I should step into the house, knowing that I would be entering the battlefield. But I knew that I couldn’t live like this any longer, I could not stand the emptiness that was inside of me. I wanted a way to where I could be full again. I knew CC couldn’t fill me, or all the alcohol in the world.

I rang the doorbell, moments have passed and the door slowly opened. Mom slowly opened the door and just took a look at me. Suddenly she just embraced me and hold on to me. For the first time in a long time I felt her love pouring into me and I immediately broke down. Not so long ago my mother’s touch was something that I could not even bear but for right now that was all that I wanted. For that

moment it was all OK.

I walked in the house and everything was all the same. The house looked immaculate and spotless as usually. I smiled at the cleanliness and realized how much I miss coming home to a clean and precised house. I walked in the living room to realize that my father was home, he wasn't expected back for another couple weeks or so. Realization that something was terribly wrong set in. As I looked at my dad and knew that something wasn't right with him, and looking at my mother with the saddest expression on her face.

My father started to explain to me that all what has happened since I was gone. That he had been diagnosed with cancer and wasn't expected to live much longer. That he doesn't want to do the chemo or radiation, that he just wants to live the last few months of his life with his family and that what he hopes the most is that when he does die that he would be surrounded by his family. As he was telling this I sat there in complete shock, tears were streaming down my face and pain took over my entire body. I felt helpless that once again I would lose one of the people that I loved the most, and there wasn't anything I could do about it.

The only person that could make any of this pain go way was the man who would hold me as well as my entire family together, he was my support system, my motivator, my confidant and my best friend. The one who loved me no matter what I did, my father. But he was now gone and along with everything else. I need my daddy to hold my hand and help me stay afloat but at this time all I wanted to do was drown.

I gave him what he wanted though; I was there for when he passed. Moments before I was telling him how sorry I was for everything how I promise that I would make a change for the better, that he doesn't have a reason to worry and to let me go because he was my father and that I was going to take everything that he had taught me about life and to put it to good use. That I was going to be there for my mom the best that I can and put our differences aside because I knew how much he loved her and how he always taught me to value family. I told him I didn't like to see him in this much pain and if he was holding on because of me that it was OK to let go, I will be OK. But for him to come and visit me in my dreams from time to time because I have heard my mom's dad visits her in her dreams sometimes too. That was the hardest thing I ever had to do but it was the best thing that I ever did.

Shortly after the nurse ran in and told us that this is what she thinks is it. The family rushed to the room and I ran to my father's side holding his hand. I was staring at him with what I can manage to put a smile on my face because I didn't want the last thing my father to see was me crying over the deep sadness I was feeling. He was staring back though and focusing at me and my mother and then we all saw him take his last breaths. ■■■

## Summer Jasmine

*Shashi DeHaan*

While a glorious, marble-white moon  
Shimmers across a sky of the deepest purple,  
And as the night crickets sing sweet rhythm,  
Refreshing thoughts of renewed faith  
Enliven my ready soul.  
I lie in spiritual silence, in absolute wonderment.  
Complex creation of all nature,  
Proudly heard, simply seen.

As graceful as she is pearly white,  
A confident creature crosses  
The cat-tailed swamp,  
In tonight's secretive, saving moonlight.  
Remember the tall, elegant egret,  
Forever in the corner of my eye,  
The most powerful beauty,  
Their return to permanence.

His bare, muscular arms tighten around me,  
And a sweet, satisfied sigh escapes me.  
A breeze lifts the scent of summer jasmine,  
blooming outside of our window,  
Eases me into a no longer resistive slumber,  
Where I drift into the delights of Eden. ■■■



## Beautiful

*Arik Hart*

Beautiful?  
Certainly, chase you earnestly; hope you throw some  
action like a verb with me, swerve with me.

Your curves would prevent Lucifer from committing  
perjury so swear in.

In all of humanity I just want to dance with thee; errands,  
can't even stop the pace I race just to see your face so grace me  
with your presence.

Been thinking bout' you so I sent this message, read it,  
accept it, leave it, neglect it, feelings erected so I can't place  
you second, test it.

Bass is as deep as the cleft so I'll strum the strings under  
your jeans I fiend hefty, so heavy I could have broken New  
Orleans levees.

Love juices flow through the streets drowning pedestrians;  
you couldn't escape in a Chevy or equestrian.

Beauty, suicidal in a black dress, I'll follow you to the  
gallows affixation till last breaths.

Hold my hand tighter, the universe's up next. ■■■



# Stupid Cupid

Ariel Banuelos



“Hey, hey... Why don't you set me free..? Stupid Cupid stop picking on me...!”

It all began with that petty imitation of a cherub in a diaper, his weapon in hand looking for his next vulnerable victim. Most people welcome his presence, engulfing themselves in his energy, but I had refused to. As I stared at the hallmark card with his picture imprinted on the cover, I sneered in utter disgust. He is praised in many religions and is the icon of celebration every February. Lonely hearts worldwide pray to him each night in hopes of him granting their wish for a significant other. I couldn't seem to comprehend the concept of it all or why they do these actions. The arrow was shot from the silver heavens with its target intact.

Ever since I was a child I was always aware of the actions that had surrounded me. The conversations that took place between the women of my family as they had discussed their marital problems and relationship status. They believe I was naïve in my innocence, using codenames to explain sticky situations that they were involved in. I was there for every failed relationship, which was always the same in result. Men were either deceitful in nature or abusive. In one case, my uncle had a secret family my aunt didn't know about. It happens. So why do they dare try again? Why do they continue to set themselves up for another disappointment? The arrow seemed to be getting a little closer. I still didn't seem to understand.

I sat outside my English class underneath the shade that protects me from the blazing sun, and noticed a young couple in the distance. They walked past me hand in hand while

exchanging coy smiles along with small glances. This is the very first stage of this incurable disease they have been victimized to.

It's a sick cycle that involves five stages: We start out with the butterfly stage. You meet him or her at a first glance and you're struck with one of stupid cupid's arrows. There is absolutely NO escape. You can officially say you're doomed. Next we have the dating stage, which everyone is sucked into eventually. You go out for a romantic dinner or perhaps catch a movie, but either way you know you're under their spell. After a few weeks or so of dating you decide to take them home to meet the family. Just peachy. This is the climax of the process called the serious stage. Now of course by this point your family just adores your partner and wants to recruit them, yet they are oblivious to the reality of your relationship at the moment. There has been no spark between your kisses and the arguments have increased. You treat each other harshly for the simple fact that you blame each other for the boredom that has merged. We can call this the boredom stage for now. It is all spiraling downwards quickly while you hang on helplessly. Once you have tried everything in your power to save this relationship, a thing called heartache is waiting at your door. There is absolutely no way around it. You can run, you can hide, but it will find you. Once it has grasped you into its clutches, it's all over. That's why it is named for its infamous title “The Heartbreak Stage.”

“I give them six months.” I muttered under my breath. I heard the metal door being shoved open. When I turned my attention to it, out came a voluptuous woman with short dark hair and mocha skin. Her striking resemblance reminded me of my aunt, Neicy, which took me by surprise. It wasn't the fact that they looked so similar in appearance, but the irony that I was thinking about this topic and happened to come across her long lost twin. My aunt and I have had many debatable arguments on this particular subject. You can probably tell by now that I wasn't the average girl who dreamt of prince charming, glass slippers and a fairy godmother. For years she would try to convince me that romance isn't only a fairytale, but she never seemed to get through. This “love” everyone speaks about wasn't logical in my world. The arrow is close.

At a time I had believed that love had only consisted of two substitutes: lust and pleasure. Lust was that instant we see that ideal person walk through the door, and we want to stop at nothing to receive their attention. That is where pleasure comes into play. Once we have them within arm's length, we use them to satisfy our needs. It is always the same temporary release which brings no real satisfaction or warmth. We surrender to our true nature by using them in any way that we please, until we get bored with them and toss them aside for another. We are continuously looking at someone new, someone better, someone more attractive. In the depths of our mind we know the very truth. We sprout lies each day to our



Jimmy Fike's Models

Matthew Aragon

partners by telling them that our existence was only created to revolve around them and there could never be another. But we all know that isn't true. So why do we allow those words to leave our lips? What do we truly gain? When we are too fast to say those three words without really knowing the meaning behind them. The arrow is right behind me now.

I could hear footsteps making their way toward me; the sound forcefully pulled me from my train of thought. Black Doc Martens make their approach, so I had slowly looked up to make eye contact with the stranger. He looked down at me with chocolate eyes and his left dark brow arched. "Is this seat taken by any chance?" He asked with a small smile played along his lips.

I felt that traitorous blush start to consume my cheeks and sighed in frustration. I had taken a peak at the man dressed in black and given him a slight smile. "Not at all." I managed to respond.

I watched as he took the seat next to me and I couldn't help but look over at him in curiosity. Who was this guy? Why was I so intrigued by his actions? He is just another guy yet there was something about him that isolated him from the rest. He tilted in his chair while meeting my gaze with the same inquisitive look; his head cocked to the right, he narrowed his eyes challenging. It had become a game between us. Who dared to turn away first? Who would end up the sore loser in this soundless battle? Before either of us could beat the other to the punch, life seemed to slow down for a split-second. I had no time to react when I saw his chair slip from underneath him and watch as he started to fall backward. BOOM. The sound echoed throughout the stilled silence.

As I stared down at him from my seat, I blinked once, then retreated my attention from the scene. He moaned in pain from the fall and I refused to show him any sign of concern while holding in a stifled laugh. I tried my best to keep a straight face, but before I knew it, I busted out in hysterical laughter at his idiotic actions. Soon after he joined in along with me, although he was in aching pain, and got himself up taking his place right next to me once more. The arrow had pierced its target.

I had begun to collect myself when I noticed his smile. It wasn't the usual lazy grin men portray on their faces time to time, no, it was something else. It was almost sincere. BA-DUMP. My eyes had widened at the strange beating inside my chest. What's this? Puzzlement must have shadowed my face as I started to silently panic. Was I going insane or did I actually feel that? No. It must have been a mistake. An honest mistake, that's all. BA-DUMP. I felt it again! My cheeks burned with a strong blush and I realized that I couldn't make eye contact with him any longer. What's wrong with me? Why am I reacting this way? No. It couldn't be. Not that. Anything but that! Sigh. Stupid Cupid has done it again. ■ ■ ■

## Always Mine, Dear Husband, Mine

Kasidee Haymore

I see you, Husband, through your window  
You're funny when you sleep  
You toss and turn and flip and flop  
Like your two gold fish

*(Two goldfish, male, both 1.5 inches long,  
Three flakes each morning and night)*

You seem troubled, husband  
Is there something wrong?  
Nightmares? Stress at work?  
Is it your new promotion with the fancy office?

*(Thirteenth floor, Room 518B, view of the parking lot)*

Do you miss me? Is that it?  
I can come to you anytime you want  
I still have the key  
The one to the garage  
The only door whose rusted lock you didn't really change  
Because you knew you would want me back

Didn't you?

I can see you do  
I can see it in the way you look at her  
The slut I see in your bed sometimes

*(Nurse in training, blond, met at work,  
No close family, sleeps around, never married)*

You shouldn't see her anymore, Husband  
She is a thief  
She stole you from me

You were mine-  
You are still mine-  
You always will be mine-

Mine, dear husband, mine

She stole my ring  
The one you bought for me  
*(14-carat rosemary gold, 1-carat black diamond)*



But you don't have to worry about her  
The slut, the thief  
Anymore  
Tomorrow she won't be there to taint your house

Our house

Tomorrow she won't be there to trick you  
Make you think you love her  
She will be gone

And we will be free  
And you will love me  
And you will be mine

Always mine, dear husband, mine ■■■

## I Could Never Find You

Payton Vargas



I've looked for you in books. But although the turning pages held sensitivity in between the lines with meaning that made you familiar to me, the taste in the poetic words had never left the tip of my tongue to meet somebody else's.

And so I looked for you in movies. Hoping that viewing the emotional sensations between cinematic lovers could somehow bring my lonely eyes to recognize your face. But by the end of the show I know little. I lay my head to rest as my mind stays right awake.

I've seen you in dreams. But not long enough to hold your image in my mind so that I could maybe find you with eyes open. The sequences ending just as I'm about to ask your name.

So every day I search for you. I trip myself for you and fall for someone wearing your mask. I've done it five times.

What I'm saying is.

I've been at a miss.. True love, I've fallen. . Fallen victim to fault in inadequate bliss. I could never find you. I guess I've been searching for your kiss upon the lips of people who could never become you. ■■■

## One Life to Live

Denysa Hale



Red sharpener and a yellow Phillips screwdriver. All I had to do was take the Phillips to the screw and the razor will pop out. It will take no more than 45 seconds of twisting of the wrist. The looser it gets from the red confinement, the lesser I cry and my visions begins to clear. Pleasure, the sweet pain of happiness was just around the corner. One more flick of the wrist and my way to ecstasy will drop into the palm of my hand. It hasn't even touch my skin, hasn't even made its first incision and I'm smiling. This pain I feel in my heart will soon be transferred and focused somewhere else.

Blood. On other people and in the movies, it usually grosses me out but on me... Watching the red blood cells ooze to the surface before spilling like a glass of cranberry juice was a relief. One more. Just need one more. There. I sigh. It does the same. Another glass spills and I am in no rush to clean up the mess I have made. My bedroom door is closed. No one will come in. Mama is asleep in front of the television and Daddy is gone into a deep slumber wonderland. I'm closed off to the world. No one but me knows of this pleasure that I put myself through. Only the sound of my sniffles gives symptoms of what is happening. This wasn't a movie; there was no sad music playing. Green Day was turned off long time ago. The meaning of walking down a lonely road with only my shadow on the "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" was losing its appeal. There was just the three of us: me, the razor, and the crimson leaving my pour, tormented soul.

Call somebody you say? Ha! What am I supposed to say to the person on the other end? "Yes, I have a razor in my hand and I'm bleeding. I was wondering if you can make this feeling go away." No, thank you. No one at school knows what I do at night when I'm in my room. This side of me was hidden. Never to be told or spoken of. No one needed to know that I was in this battle for seven years and I've succumbed to the yellow Phillips to set me free once again. Of course not. This was Never to be told or spoken of. No one needed to know that I was in this battle for seven years and I've succumbed to the yellow Phillips to set me free once again. Of course not. This was *my* secret. This was one of the few things that I've kept from the world and my family. I made sure to leave no fingerprints, no scars, or any type of evidence at the crime scene. There was no reason to cause alarm or suspicion.

Since middle school, everyone just thought of me as being depressed and a Debbie Downer. Back then, that was true. I didn't know how to hide my emotions back then. I didn't see the point in hiding them at all. I can still remember



taking a metal paper clip to my forearm and carving a “D” into my skin. The crime scene is gone, nonexistent but I know where I left the mark. I didn’t need the bracelets and heavy wrist bands like my fellow peers to hide the pain. I learned, I *taught* myself how to be “normal” to the outside world and keep the pain alive. I didn’t shout at the top of my lungs, “I need help! I’m cutting myself!” No, that wasn’t me. I didn’t want the help. I didn’t want people to feel bad for me. Sympathy was something that I wasn’t looking for. I wanted the razor against my flesh. I wanted the blood to rise and fall.

Even when I got to high school, things weren’t so different. The thought of winning *The Ugliest Girl in the Universe* was still a victory of mine. I didn’t care who said differently. I knew the truth and I knew they were lying. I didn’t want their attempts of comfort. I had all the comfort I needed with my razor. One friend of mine told me I shouldn’t do that. And for a while I believed him. But I only made things worst.

Cough medicine and allergy pills took over. Nobody saw the difference or sensed foul play. I was simply taking a nap... for six hours. I didn’t want to wake up sometimes. I wanted to find that endless slumber and dreamless closed eyes. Something, I couldn’t say what, always made me relieved that I woke up. But in the back of my mind, the thoughts never faded away. I was smiling and joking with everybody. Letting the ideas fade into the background until it was nighttime and my door was shut. They always came rushing then. And I knew there were only two things that I could do to satisfy my scarred soul.

I can still remember the last time my soul cried to take the pain away. I was more hesitant than ever. Before that day it had been over a year since I gave in to the feeling. I sat on the floor longer. I stared at the red sharpener holding the razor and the yellow Phillips ready to unlock the code longer than I’ve ever did. I was proud to have passed a year when it usually was two weeks to six months at a time. But the feeling was unbearable. I couldn’t stand it. I needed the release that I always craved for. Less than 45 seconds, the razor falls in my palm. Less than 20 seconds, three lines are made. Three glasses of cranberry juice tip over. Three tips of pleasure make me close my eyes and lean against my bed. I let the tears fall but there are no sniffles. I’m like a drug addict who just got the hit they were searching for.

That last hit was almost two years ago. I made a promise to not give in to that feeling. I can’t let it take over and win. I may have lost all those battles but I am finally winning the war. There still isn’t one scar that can tell my story of my broken heart or damaged soul. There is still no proof at the scene of the crimes and I am a criminal set free with a new

attitude. I may still experience the eagerness to let everything go and say my final goodbye. But with how things are now... There’s a different plan for me. I have to let it go and move on to bigger things in my life. Give up on the negative and turn things positive, be optimistic.

Red sharpener and yellow Phillips screwdriver. They’re put away. Put up for good. No more will the sight of blood coming out of my skin will put a smile on my face. I have given it all up. It took me a long time to move forward but I’m pushing. That’s no longer the answer. Do people still know about it? Only a select few. Do I feel like an inspiration? Like a savior? You can say that. I still look back at when I was 13 and say, “Cutting wasn’t the way to fit in.” And I’m glad I tore up that suicide note when I did. I only have one life to live and I’m living it. ■■■

## Tribute to Charles Bukowski

David Mendelsohn

Charles Bukowski and Jack Daniels.

You’re so old and ugly.

You’d probably fuck a cocker spaniel.

Your liver is so shot,

And your skin is so wrinkled.

Your sorrow made you world famous.

It made you a ton of money too.

But who really gave,

A good God damn about you? ■■■

## My Experience in Iraq

Steve Marquez

As we stand cold and tired in formation, a silence was lingering. I was in deep thoughts and running possible scenarios of war in my head. That was until my Gunnery Sergeant “Gunny” Raffle came out and pulled us around him like a coach does with his team and started giving a speech. One thing he said that will be etched into my memory was, “Gentlemen, we are modern day Spartans. We will fight to the death, we were bred to fight... and if a man is down we will not leave him behind.” To say the least, this motivated everyone. Grunting, barking and OohRah’s were being yelled by everyone. Any doubts I had in my head had been erased by Gunny Raffle’s speech.

As a Marine, I served with Kilo Battery 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 12<sup>th</sup>

## Solitude

Scott Bryson

Marines Regiment 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. I was enlisted from July 2003 to July 2007. While with K 3/12 we deployed to Iraq in September 2004 through March 2005. Originally K 3/12 was an artillery firing battery. We fired 155mm rounds out of the M777 cannon. However, when we deployed to Iraq, we went as a provisional military police company, which is like an infantry unit, except we were mounted in armored Humvees with machine gun turrets.

We left our wives and families around 2 a.m. to stage on a basketball court and prepared to catch the busses to the airport. Leaving my beautiful wife Shilo was very hard since I had only one day to be with her before I left. My wife is five feet tall, has big beautiful hazel eyes and is physically fit. She was a Marine as well and graduated training two days before in North Carolina and I was stationed in San Diego, California. The last time I saw her was two months prior on her vacation leave before she started her (MOS) job training. The company we were replacing had some injuries and one death. This weighed heavy on me because I wasn't sure if I was coming home ever again. We spent that day at the pier in Oceanside, California, walking around talking about unnecessary things, just trying to keep our minds off

me leaving in less than twenty-four hours. She took me back to my Barracks room and we slept until I had to leave to stage for formation. I walked her to our car in pitch darkness with a cold ocean breeze and the smell of the ocean, which was just a few miles away. I gave her a long kiss and hug and said "I love you" and "I'll try to call as soon as I can." She got in the car and drove off. Not knowing if I'd ever see her again, I watched as she left the parking lot to drive back to Phoenix to see her mom before she left to Japan for a year.

March Air Force Base was our next stop after formation, which was about a one hour bus ride. By the time we left Camp Pendleton to March Air base, the sun was coming up. The trip was boring so I slept. We waited a few hours in the terminal for our plane. The terminal was also pretty motivating. It had Vietnam, Korean and WWII veterans shaking our hands and giving us words of encouragement. As we sat around waiting for our flight, most of us troops hung out with each other. More so the troops in my team hung out together. My team consisted of five of us. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant "Captain" Jack Farley our platoon commander, HN "Doc" Cooper our corpsman, Lance Corporal Couch our navigator and forward observer, and Lance Corporal Kennon our



machine gunner, later replaced by Lance Corporal Janke due to Kennon being a Red Sox fan and Lt. Farley being a Yankees fan during the 2004 World Series. The time came to board the plane and we did it in old military fashion. We marched in a single column onto the tarmac to the portable stairs. As we got in to the plane I had that sense of “This is it. No turning back now” like when you board a roller coaster and the safety bars latch down. We flew from San Diego to Maryland with an hour layover then we landed in Ireland but weren’t allowed to leave the terminal to even look past the lights of the airport. Considering it was dark, I didn’t know what time it was, nor did it matter. After Ireland, we flew straight to Kuwait; again I could only guess what time it was being that it was dark. As the door opened to “debarck” I felt the rush of heat and humidity smack me in the face. After getting off the plane we got on busses that took us to a different part of the airport for military flights. We came upon a C-130 cargo plane and a sense of excitement came over me because I’ve always wanted to fly in one since I was a little kid. My father was in the Air Force and I used to see him off when he would go on training exercises all over the world. I felt like this is my time, I’m like my father now. We sat on netted “jump” seats that were less than comfortable to say the least. The sound of the propellers drowned out any attempt of conversation with the people around me, so I slept.

I woke up to the intercom on the plane telling us we were about to land but we needed to get off as soon as the plane stopped because we were receiving “Incoming.” We touched down in Al Asad Airbase Iraq. We ran off the plane as best as we could with over 80 pounds of gear on us, a flak vest, kevlar helmet, duffle bag with all our clothes and cold weather gear. I felt like a kid trying not to get tagged in a game of hide and seek. I felt scared, excited and invincible all at the same time. We ran into some mortar resistant hangers for protection. After the mortars stopped we boarded 7-ton cargo trucks and headed to Camp Ar Ramadi Iraq. We sat in the back with half inch steel walls and an open top so we could face out with our M-16’s incase we had some enemy contact. The welcoming party the insurgents gave us at Al Asad was a show of things to come.

Our first couple of weeks were pretty boring. We did work up drills, practicing infiltrating houses and clearing them of enemies and practiced detaining enemy and potential enemy combatants. While on camp or “in the wire” we ate three meals a day, worked out at a make shift gym that had a few weights and a couple boxing gloves to practice fighting. It was about three weeks before we got to go “outside the wire.” This was exciting, considering we were getting cabin fever and getting on each other’s nerves. Our first couple missions “out the wire” were pretty routine. We were tasked with picking

up people and supplies and escorting them to different camps throughout Iraq. We traveled to the counties of Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. I can say even trying to stay alert got pretty boring driving for hours on end. We would stop to investigate potential Improvised Explosive Devices (IED’s), “piss breaks” or occasional vehicle breakdowns. Chain smoking Marlboro Menthol Lights became a regular thing trying to stay awake for hours on end, in all hours of day and night. We would sing childhood songs such as “The Mickey Mouse” song, the Bingo song and popular songs of our day like “It ain’t no fun if the homies can’t have none.” You’ll be surprised the type of crap you do out of boredom. It stayed like this for the first two months of our tour until November.

Operation Phantom Fury started 7 November 2004 through December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004. The action we were hoping for finally came when we were escorting Iraqi troops and US contractors from Baghdad to camp Fallujah to prepare for our offensive on the city of Fallujah. The US Contractors had more armor and armed more than any of us could ever hope to be. What made it bad for us was they drove a black H2 Hummer. To me that meant “Big Ass Important Target.” I escorted these guys twice and both times were pretty action packed. While half way to Fallujah the day that my life changed, happened. A “BOOM” that I only heard for a millisecond came from my rear right side, then nothing but ringing in my ears. Slow motion kicked in and my truck lifted from the back and into the air, with what felt like forever. As the truck came down, I tried to maintain the vehicle by holding the steering wheel with white knuckles. As the vehicle landed violently I smacked my head into my door. I fought to stay conscious; blackness started squeezing my head that made my vision look as if I was looking through a straw. I kept the vehicle on track and my lieutenant started yelling for everyone to “Roger up.” “Roger Sir, Marquez still here.” After we “rogered up” LT Farley got on the “Hooks” which is what we called our radios, and expressed to everyone else that we were alright and checked to see if anyone else was hit. Only two of the trucks in the convoy were hit but no major damage. One of the other trucks got on the “hooks” and said it looked like the blast missed “3/6,” which is our call sign, by about 50 meters. 50 meters was still enough to send shrapnel and blow out my tire, but failed to kill any of us. We made it back to an Army camp with three wheels and a run flat tire. A run flat is a thick rubber molding inside our tires that act as a last resort way of getting out of dodge. Once in the Army camp we had to replace the tire. Our platoon didn’t complain because the camp had a Burger King and a Pizza Hut in it.

Our second time with the US Contractors, a day which will be burned into my memory and the last time escorting the contractors, we had our first major casualties. Our platoon

of eight Humvees picked up the contractors from Baghdad International Airport and was supposed to escort them to Camp Fallujah again. I remember it being a sunny day but in November, so it wasn't hot. You could say a perfect day. Not far from the previous IED blast, a white streak appeared in my peripherals out the left side about 30 meters. A loud pop that sounded like a paper bag being filled with air then popped, came from behind me. My LT started yelling at my machine gunner LCpl. Janke who replaced Kennon "what was that Janke?" Janke responded in a super high pitched voice "Their dead! They're all fucking dead!" Lt. Farley yelled back "who's dead?" "The H2 Sir," Janke said. A sense of sickness came over me with a thought of "shit." I started sweating and felt adrenalin kicking in. This all happened in a matter of seconds, then we started receiving small arms fire from AK-47's, RPG's and other weapons I don't know of. I asked my Lt. "What do you want me to do, sir?" Being the driver of the truck I still had to do what my LT said, even if I wanted to do something else. He said "Get out of the kill zone." What I didn't know was the H2 was still moving forward swerving from left to right slowly. I saw it swerve left in my left side mirror and started bouncing off the median barriers in the center of the highway. When the H2 stopped, it stopped about 20 meters from my vehicle. I backed up to it and we rushed out while my gunner, Janke was suppressing the enemy fire with his 240G machine gun. I look back and everything was rushing slowly and tunnel vision settled in and I could only focus on one task at a time. All the firing and explosions around me, I wasn't conscious of.

"We got to get these guys out," my LT said as we ran to the vehicle. The H2 doors were locked and the glass was about three inches thick so we couldn't just break them to get in. So I ran back to my truck to get a tire iron to try to pry open the door. The tire iron wasn't working. One of the other contractor vehicles was an F-350 up armored pickup truck that had a breaching kit. It included a heavy-duty pry bar, some door rams and other items. I turned away to engage the enemy with my M-16, popping 28 rounds then reloading. I was shooting in a general direction everyone else was shooting, not knowing what or if I hit anyone. One of the contractors that came to help open the door was a beast. Standing over 6 feet tall, an easy plus 300 pounds and had a huge beard. We named him "Bear." He started ripping and tugging at the door with his gloved hands and the door started coming open on the driver side back door. The reason we started for that door was it looked the easiest to open since the explosion from an RPG pushed the metal and windows out into the shape of a bubble being blown from a child's bubble stick. When the door was opened, the contractor that was sitting in that seat fell out. "Doc"

Cooper ran to him, as did I. Since I was "Doc's" battle buddy I went wherever he went when on foot. What I came up to, nothing in my 18 years of life had ever prepared me for this, a gargling heap of blood, bone, flesh and grey matter from the driver that was decapitated lying on the floor. My "Doc" was trying to check his vitals but couldn't because the guy was in fight mode and kept pushing my doc off. "Marquez, hold him down," my Doc said. I'm holding this guy's arms down and kept trying to assure him he was going be OK and we were here to help. I really didn't believe what I was saying to him but were trained to say such things to keep the injured in higher spirits. Half of his face was ripped off with his teeth showing through what used to be his cheek, his left nostril and left eyeball was blown off as well. I was unfazed during all this for what reason other than training and shock, I don't know.

After my Doc stabilized the guy he told me just to cover his back so I turned and faced where the fire was coming from. I was scanning the area trying to find the enemy in tall grass about 4-5 feet high. As I was scanning, there was a clearing about 100 meters out and I saw a guy running through this clearing. Assuming he was an insurgent, I shot about 5 or 6 rounds at him through my ACOG scope and down he went. After I had shot him my gunner shot in his direction and I assume that was it for him. All I wanted from that point on was to do it again. "Doc" Cooper yelled for me to help him and load the injured guy into another truck to take him to the closest hospital which was located about 15 minutes in the direction we were headed to Abu Ghraib Prison where we took detainees or caught/injured combatants. We loaded him up and "Doc" asked me to help him get the other guys in the front of the H2 into body bags. As I ran up to the driver side all I saw was red as if a can of red paint had exploded. The driver and passenger were both decapitated. The RPG had entered through the driver side window and went through like a knife into butter. My doc asked me to grab one side of the guy and help him set him down into the bag. As we laid him down I couldn't get passed how clean his body and clothing was considering the rest of the truck was full of flesh and blood. We loaded him up in the back of the F-350. As we were running back to the H2 to get the other contractors we found they had been worked on and bagged. I didn't know when my doc and I were working on the injured guy, my other doc from another truck and my navigator LCpl. Couch had been trying to save the other passenger in the H2 back seat.

After everyone was bagged and loaded we were still receiving "pop" shots from the enemy and I ran to the right side of the other team's vehicle that came to help with the

evacuation of the injured guys. As I ran to my fellow troops a couple little rounds hit the road not far from me. That was the first time during that ambush that I felt slightly fearful. I leaped and dove next to a 249SAW gunner which is a smaller machine gun that you can carry like a rifle. He's laying down fire toward a house which I assume we were receiving those shots from. As I was lying there all I could think about was "where is the next guy I get to shoot." We saw a goat "herder" and we all had a gut feeling that he was a scout of some sort. No one else was around that area and he only had three or four goats which, was not too common from what I was used to seeing. Usually the herders have a larger amount. I wasn't the only one that had those suspicions. The guys I was lying next to I heard say, "Just pull out a gun fucker, I dare you." All this happened in a matter of about 20 minutes or so. Those 20 minutes felt like hours.

When all the firing stopped we had to destroy the H2 so any technologies that were in there couldn't be used against us. One of the other trucks in my platoon poured fuel all over the H2 and dropped a few incendiary grenades which we used to cause fires for instances just like this. We left the wreckage and drove to Abu Ghraib to check on the injured contractors and pick up the other team that drove those guys there earlier in the ambush. As I was waiting for word outside the hospital, my mind started trying to process what the hell just happened. I wasn't the only one. I looked around and noticed my team was all quiet with their heads down. We left a few hours later to complete our mission of taking the remaining Iraqi troops to camp Fallujah. We later found out word that the two injured contractors and a couple other Iraqi troops that I didn't know were injured during the ambush were all stabilized. We continued to do missions for the next two months that also had other close calls during the Battle of Fallujah. Our unit helped other infantry battalions with fire support when bottled down, bringing in supplies to the Marines camped inside the City of Fallujah and picking up detainees from Fallujah to Abu Ghraib Prison.

My unit K 3/12 left Iraq March 2005 changed forever, some hardened, some mentally and spiritually broke and some looking for more excitement. I will look back and know that my life will differ forever from those who have not seen combat like I have. I have a great appreciation for my life and those in it due to my experiences in Iraq. I will carry the strength and courage my fellow comrades showed with me in everything I do in my everyday life. It takes a lot of courage to sign your life over to the military, for you never know when your time may come but, you put it in the hands of the Marines to your left and right, front and back, fighting the fight with you. ■■■

## Life Boat

Angela Nagle



I'm sinking fast  
 It is all from the past  
 Lost lonely ghosts coming to claim what was lost  
 No one cared that I would pay the ultimate cost  
 I am a living ghost with nowhere to go  
 A lost soul who has always been told no  
     No you won't amount to anything  
     No you aren't good enough  
     No you aren't worth saving  
     No you can't ever do anything right  
 These words sting like a burning skillet to the face  
 The pain and torture don't flow at a steady pace  
 Instead they come in unmeasured intervals  
 Weeks, months, even years of pain build up to be released  
 on one day  
 This day becomes the day of a new beginning, but not a  
 better one  
 It just gets worse; I should just quit and say I'm done  
 I'm broken beyond repair  
 I don't know why I feel the need to share  
 My world revolves around a bunch of no ones  
     No one cares  
     No one sees the tears  
     No one senses the fear  
     No one knows the pain  
     No one feels the emptiness  
 It's just me to deal with it all  
 And I guess that means it's my call  
 I should give up and surrender all hope  
 There is no way I can begin to cope  
 It's gone on longer than it should have  
 I'm too far beyond the limits of being saved  
 I'm sinking on this boat called my life  
 And it's going down like the Titanic ■■■

## The Enflamed Field

Taylor Rhoton



Flames engulf the field  
 Burning flesh and plant alike  
 Metal whizzes through the air  
 Those it meets do not rise again  
 Treads take care to tear through what plants the fire spared  
 Treads attached to machines designed solely to kill  
 Their artillery screams across the sky  
 Leaving craters and debris wherever they choose to land  
 Ceaseless screams are muffled only by the violence that has  
 so abruptly ensued  
 Many eyes will close against their will, never to open again  
 Other eyes will wish they could have closed sooner than  
 they did  
 Suddenly, the roars of aircraft become all one can hear  
 Swiftly, this noise too is muffled, by the payload its creators  
 have loosed  
 Then, unnatural silence ensues  
 Nothing but a ringing in one's ears can be heard  
 And, even if their hearing remained,  
 Only dying flames and screams of pain would greet their  
 ravaged ears  
 For the machines have moved on  
 There are other fronts to fight upon  
 And so the men now lay forgotten  
 Along with the very field for which they fought ■■■

## Evergreen

Melissa Barney



I made a left turn into the driveway and headed to my dad's place. As my tires crunched the gravel, spraying the loose pebbles around, and as the finches swooped out of the evergreens lining the road, singing a welcoming song, I start to get nervous. This conversation should have happened years ago, I should have said so many things. So many wrongs I should have righted. I put the car in park, and rested my head on the steering wheel, with my hands at ten and two. My hands tightened around the wheel to the point of cramping. Why was I so nervous? It was my dad; he was going to love me no matter what I said. I was his little girl, and he always said I could tell him anything. Well now was as good a time as any to test that. It was not as if he was expecting me, much less the conversation. I get out of the car and am apprehensive. As I walk across the grass, trying to avoid the puddles left from the morning sprinklers, I give a smile. It has been a while since I

have stopped by to visit, and that is the first thing I am going to apologize for. I don't live very far away, but it's hard to find time to get down here. He knows it isn't because I don't love him or that I don't feel the necessity to visit, just everyday life gets in the way; becomes a roadblock. Between school, work and the kids, I barely have time to breathe; much less take a mini road trip.

It is a nice day out, fall has finally settled in the desert, bringing a welcome gift of cooler temperatures. I should have brought a jacket with me, as I am not sure how long I will visit, and I am sure that later it will be chilly. I'm only hoping it's from the night air and not from my father's disposition. But right now, that is neither here nor there. Again, the nervousness rises to the top, and I bite my lip. I planned my speech on the two hour trip, changing it up more times than I can remember. It never sounded right, always sounded like I was making excuses. I have gone this long without apologizing, so why have I chosen now? The past will still be the past, and nothing will be changed, but I know it's the right thing to do, I know that telling him 'I'm sorry' will make us both feel better. For me, because I need to own up for the mistakes I made, and for my dad, I think it will show him that he taught his little girl right from wrong, and it will show him that he raised me right. Then maybe he can let go a little, knowing that I am an adult, and one who, although it may take a while, owns up to her mistakes, her misguiding.

"Hi Dad, sorry it's been a while since I've been by to visit. I hope you're not disappointed that I didn't bring the boys, but I wanted to have you to myself today." I take a deep breath, "Dad, there have been some things that I have wanted to say to you for a while, but never did. Something always got in the way. Not enough time, not the right time, or I chickened out." "But today...today I want nothing to get in the way. Don't worry Dad; everything is OK with me and with the kids. I just want to talk."

It's peaceful outside, just the soft flow of traffic in the distance, and the sound of a back hoe to my far right. The quietness surrounding my dad and I seems so loud, so it's nice to know that there is life going on around us. Now I really wish I had brought a jacket, not because a chill has crept in, but to occupy my hands. Time to take the plunge; no dipping my toes in the water any longer.

"Dad, I am sorry. I am sorry for some of the mistakes that I made growing up. I am sorry for letting you down. Was I young and stupid, and thinking of no one but myself? Yes. Did I worry about the consequences, or the feelings I was hurting? No." "I was selfish, and I was only thinking of what I thought was best for me at the time. I know that I let you down, and I know that there were times that you may have wanted to turn your back on me, and wash your hands of

me, but you didn't. I know there were times where you shook your head at me, and asked, based on the decisions I made whether I was your daughter, but you never vocalized them to me, and for that I thank you." "Thank you for the hard realities that you showed me. As weird as it is to say this... thank you for punishing me." "There were times you turned your head away from me, and it pained me. Trying to get you to look me in the eyes again was a goal I set for myself. I didn't want you to look through me I wanted you to look at me. I wanted you to be able to look into my hazel eyes, the eyes I got from you, and see the daughter that you knew I could be, the daughter that you would be proud of again."

"Having you look at me with anything but pride is something that I never want again. When you yell at me, I can tune that out. That can go in one ear and out the other. But when I close my eyes at night, seeing the hurt and betrayal in your eyes seeps into my subconscious; it stays with me, a painful reminder that I have hurt you." "I am not perfect, and I know that throughout my life I will make mistakes, and I can live with that, I can learn from those. What I have also learned is that having you on my side, having you proud of me, is important. I know that you will not always approve of everything I do, and I can accept that. I am not always going to make the decisions that you think are best for me, but what I know is that you will let me make them, because you know I will learn, I will grow. As much as it may pain you, you know that being a good father is letting me make those mistakes." "But what I can't handle is making mistakes that make you question that. I do not want to put any doubts in your mind; I never want to make you think that my mistakes were your failure. You never failed me."

I don't expect him to answer, I just want him to listen, and I want him to hear the emotion in my voice, to hear my sincerity. I'm not looking at him, which makes it easier. The tears in his eyes or the furrow of his brow would throw me off. It took me years to muster up the courage to have this conversation; I don't want anything to derail my focus. I exhale, feeling a rush of emotion. I start smiling, not only because I finally did it, but because I know I said what I wanted, what I needed. Even without words, I know that my dad is proud of me, and that he has forgiven me. He has to know how difficult this was for me, and maybe that will explain why I didn't do it years ago. I had the words; I just needed the maturity to say them.

I visit for a bit longer, catching him up on how school is, how the boys are doing, and what our plans are for the upcoming weekend. Evening arrives earlier during the fall, and with it brings a drop in temperature, and without a jacket, it feels a lot colder than it really is. I take that as a sign, and regrettably decide that it is time to head home. It was nice

to visit my dad solo, where I can have him uninterrupted, and share my thoughts with no distractions. "Alright Dad, it's time for me to go. I wish I could stay longer, but I promise not to stay away as long next time."

I remember that I brought my dad something, so I run to my car to get it, careful to avoid the flowers on the ground. As I walk back to my dad, I notice the sun starting to set, and realize that this has been a good day. No matter how bad traffic may be as I head back west, nothing can replace the feelings that I have, a mixture of relief, accomplishment and love. I reach down and set the orchids on his headstone, pulling a lone weed as I do. The evergreens lined next to the curb stand tall and erect, proud of their role as protector of the land. So even when my dad is alone, I know he is safe, and that comforts me. I straighten up, brushing the dirt from my palms and tucking a lone strand of hair behind my ear. As I turn to leave, putting an end to a very emotional yet successful day, I tell my dad that I love him, and as I hear the coyote howl off in the distant wash, I know that my dad loves me too. ■ ■ ■



**Youthful Native**  
Terrance Rowe

## Poet Ai of a Private Investigator

Joseph Rodriguez

Ashes burn and fall as I take a drag from my cigarette; it's raining, always raining; there's really never is a dull moment in this city. I've got enough cases on my desk I shouldn't worry about the next. You see, some broad came into my office the other day and slammed me the address to her cheating husband's secret place. Me being the nice guy that I am and not having enough time to react, sat there and listened to this dames sad love story that's just going to end up in a whole mess of tears. They all cheat and lie; I just make sure they don't get away with it. I'm just a guy with the right camera at the right time; I could be anything I want, that is one of the perks of my job. I could very easily be a ghost, I could be the guy in the background reading the paper, I could have been that guy that bumped into you on 3rd street, or maybe just maybe I'm the guy drinking coffee two tables away; that's the beauty of it, I'm always watching and odds are, you don't even know it. ■■■

## Reincarnation

Carmen Chacon

When I die?  
 Will I come back,  
 As a new human being,  
 As a animal,  
 As a tree,  
 What to believe  
 When I die?  
 Will I come back,  
 As someone else's child,  
 As a horse running wild,  
 As a blooming apple tree.  
 What to believe  
 When I die?  
 Will I come back,  
 As a crying child for what I have lost,  
 As a horse being tamed,  
 As a small apple tree,  
 What to believe  
 When I die?  
 Will I come back  
 If so,  
 What will I be? ■■■

## The Beginning

Glenda Muckleroy

My first memory of words and their impact goes back to pre-teen years. In those days girls use to make what we called a "jive book." In this book were pages of questions that we answered. For example, "if you were on a deserted island, what three things would you take or how many times have you been in love" etc. Sometimes you would start out writing only what you wanted people to know and ended up going deeper. Sometimes you lied (smile). When some girls got stuck on what to say, they would come to me saying – help, you are good with words. I always got A's in English but C's in math or arithmetic as we called it. So, I guess my interest in writing started a long time ago. Now and then I run across papers, poetry and writings from years past and wonder what was I thinking about or going through when I wrote them. Before I get too far, I want to back up.

I was born at General Hospital in Los Angeles, CA. I woke up to beautiful sunny days and I remember hearing birds chirping and seeing the grass glistening from the morning's moist dew. I can still smell the breakfast my mom prepared. It consisted of boloney (yes, fried boloney), buttered toast, and oatmeal or grits. I went to several elementary schools because we moved a lot, but now I don't remember why, except every place was an upgrade. The elementary school I chose to remember is LaCienega elementary school. It was located in West L.A. off of Adams and LaBrea streets. I didn't live far from school, so I usually pocketed the bus money for after school goodies. My best friend and cousin Dee Dee and I used to go to the Taco Tia and get tacos or taco burgers. I graduated from LaCienega elementary school and the memory that stands out and still haunts me to this day is my graduation picture. Yes, some 52 years later, I remember it was a bad year financially for my single parent mother raising three kids. I was always neat and clean, but sometimes nothing matched. That was the case for graduation pictures. Not only did nothing match, but my red shoes were worn and it showed clearly, because, being short, I was in the first row and they didn't match my pretty pink dress. Again, this has bothered me so that I always wished every picture would mysteriously self-destruct.

The next phase was junior high school and I went to Mount Vernon Jr. High for a small period of time, but we moved and I ended up at Berendo Jr. High. I was a late bloomer and so my transition from "girl" to "young lady" came at 14 years old. My girlfriends all crossed over



in sixth grade and they kept saying something “was wrong with me” and that “I wasn’t a woman yet.” I remembered that I didn’t care and I felt lucky. I loved sports and played most of them. Even though I was short, I was always picked first or second on teams. I also ran track, so being a late bloomer in that respect was OK by me. I don’t think there’s heavy emphasis on that rite of passage for girls today, but more pressure from other things much more evasive – I think.

Berendo Jr. High was predominately Hispanic and they preferred to be called Chicanos. The next large group was “orientals” and the cool group and even some of the non-cool group of them preferred to be called “Buddha-Heads.” I got along with everybody and I felt special to be embraced by both cultures. African Americans, our new name at the time, were a small group at Berendo, so there was a melting pot of people to draw from. The music of the day was the Motown sound, like the Miracles which later changed to Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. Their hit song out was “Shop Around.” Then there was the Supremes which later changed to Diana Ross and the Supremes with “Baby Love.” there was The Temptations with “Ain’t To Proud To Beg.” To round off the list there was Ike and Tina Turner, The Beach Boys (who I loved) with “Little Surfer Girl,” and, of course Elvis Presley (I loved Elvis movies). The Beatles were soon coming up to bat.

Anyway, the ninth grade is where the “Jive Book” began and went on to high school. We would buy steno pads and on the first page you list your name, age and school. The next page would be your boyfriend’s name, if you had one, and how long you have been going together. It would go on and on until you had just about spilled out your whole short life. I don’t think we realized but that could be considered early journalism and definitely therapy sessions. My junior high school had a dance band and I was the singer. I remember trying to sing “Summertime” in a too high soprano voice, and not being appreciated by my peers and another song “Just in Time” which nobody would dance to. My music teacher loved the Big Band era, so... But I truly enjoyed the experience at such an early age. I remember running track, the 50 yard dash in almost record speed and my gym teacher Mrs. Garnier having visions of me one day becoming a track star, while I had visions of “boys.”

I remember meeting John Everett Muckleroy at Berendo Jr. High, my name being Glenda Evette Muckleroy and we weren’t even relatives. We called each other “brother” and “sister” and were friends until he died in his twenties from cancer of the lungs. We always felt we were related somewhere down the line and with a name like

Muckleroy. Our families are both from Texarkana, Texas and his mom, Pinky and I became very good friends. John and his family were all very light complexion and had a Hispanic flare, but they were black. My father told me the history of our name. There were two German brothers with last name Muckleroy who lived in Kansas City, Kansas and they had indentured servants instead of slaves. They spelled Muckleroy – MUCKELROY, German. One brother married a black lady and the other one married a Hispanic lady and they moved to Texarkana, Texas. So we probably were related somewhere down the line.

My years in junior high were also changing years in America. Elvis Presley was now in the Army and made a movie called “GI Blues” with Juliet Proust. Rock and Roll was now really growing, like Ike and Tina Turner “Fool in Love” and the Marvelettes with

“Mr. Postman.” Here’s a footnote on the Mr. Postman song. The song writer was really a postman and the rumor was he sold the song for peanuts and it took him 40 years to buy it back at a big price. Anyway, the changes in the world also included a pending war. My friends were then and still are to this day are my cousins La Tanya (June) and Delores (Dee Dee). There were many, many more that rounded my life off but these two were consistent. My best male friend and confidant was Clarence Spurlock. The movie star Omar Epps reminds me of him. All this reflecting also reminds me of how Clarence and I used to stay up all night on the phone trying to explain the world, figure out our relationships, and everything else in between. Between the two of us, we always solved the world’s problems.

I remember the gang rivals of the day when I was in high school and some still exist today – the Crips, the Bloods, and the Rebel Rousers. I used to hang with the Rebel Rousers and coincidentally the girl singing group the Sherells had a record out called “He’s a Rebel.” The girl part of the gang were called the Rebelettes and that was our song. Each area had their version of each of the gangs. It was the beginning of wearing colors to proclaim your loyalty. Every now and then, there would be a war with the Chicano gang, the Clantons, and that was serious because they used knives. Sometimes when thinking back, I don’t know how I survived living in that fishbowl. I remember being in a car at the wrong time in the

*I remember the gang rivals of the day when I was in high school and some still exist today...Sometimes when thinking back, I don’t know how I survived living in that fishbowl. I remember being in a car at the wrong time in the middle of a gang fight to backing up on the freeway all the way to the entrance.*

middle of a gang fight to backing up on the freeway all the way to the entrance.

Back to safe Junior High days and the most excitement was “there’s going to be a fight after school”! I finally graduated, finances were better, clothes were more stylish for me and my shoes matched my clothes. I remember feeling very sad leaving my comfort zone of junior high. I felt in control and the uncertainty of the next chapter in my life was scary. Los Angeles High School (L.A. High) was a large school, in fact too large for me, I always felt that I could never really find my niche. I had graduated from junior high with honors and so my high school classes were filled with very smart people that I would never be mistaken as. My so called friends used to laugh and point at me as they walked by my class ditching school for the rest of the day. Some days I would go with them, which of course, soon cost me my esteem position in honor class status. I know-I submitted to peer pressure from my “friends,” friends from that time in my life--to think on

that now is sad to me because so, so many of them are now gone! The person I miss the most is my favorite boy cousin, Romel who died too early in both of our lives from Leukemia. It is still hard to think about him.

The Beginning, The Good Old days...The cliché about the “Good Old Days” is just that. When you are going through those so called good old days, you don’t know that they are and so you don’t bask in them. I really lone for my good old days. I was in my hometown of Los Angeles recently, and being born and raised there, I can see the changes when I go back to visit. In the last 35 years of my life, areas have changed so much that you can hardly recognize them. While I was there, my brother took me to an area where we used to live around my junior high years and it was still exactly the same. It was a strip from Jefferson and Crenshaw to Jefferson and La Brea. The buildings are still there, but are empty. It was strange with no graffiti on the walls and the property has been kept up. I immediately went back in time for a moment until we quietly drove through... ■■■



# Differences

Annisha Thomas



Canada  
Born & Raised  
The struggle  
Leave my mother  
Leave everything I knew

U.S.A  
Land of the free  
Found my freedom  
So I thought  
My house like a jail cell  
Can't see my future

Trinidad  
The jungle  
My true home  
My spirits here  
White beach  
Palm trees  
My love ■■■

# Rebirth

Sonya Rodriguez



My sins have surfaced and now they see.  
The demon has been caught.  
Freedom has been stripped from me.

The shocking coldness of steel around my wrist stings my skin.  
The stripes on my back proves good always wins.

Locked in the D hole, concrete seal,  
I pray to God,  
This cannot be real.

“Unsentenced Inmate” branded on my chest,  
“591448” they call out.  
Now, I have a name like all the rest.

I refuse to fade within these concrete walls.  
I will not be statistic!  
My faith will break my fall.

I accept the twenty-three hours a day you take from me.  
Break myself down piece by piece

And build a better me.

I have seen the truth,  
I have fought the thunder and survived the storm.  
December 31st,  
I return to the world in new form. ■■■

# Romance of the Dead

Gabriel Hernandez



“Rob!” a male voice exclaims. “Stop!” he worries as his friend gradually shuffles toward him as a snail stalking its prey... if a snail ever had prey to stalk. “Please, Rob. It’s me, Fred,” he stumbles as his friend menaces closer. “I’m your longtime pal. Your buddy from all the way back in high school!” But all of his pleading is futile. Nothing can stop the inevitable as Rob inches ever so close. A once brilliant accountant, he would be calculating his moment to strike, if he could still calculate. “Come on! You have to remember! You used to call me Fab!” Instinctively, Fred reaches to his left and pulls the table holding a red flower vase between him and his once close friend, smashing the vase on the floor as if attempting to create a barrier between him and his destiny of becoming a not-so-Happy Meal.

He has no idea how to handle this situation, how to survive a zombie attack. It never entered his mind that anything like this could ever happen. If he had just taken it into consideration this outrageous possibility, he would have watched all of those zombie movies as a form of training for this moment. He would have paid attention to the rules listed in *Zombieland* when his wife asked him to watch it with her, even listing the rules to him as she joked about how they could maybe one day save his life. Where was his wife, he suddenly wonders. She’s not here. A good guess is that she’s alive somewhere, brandishing the .38 she always had strapped to her leg, putting to good use Rule #2 Double Tap, Rule #1 Cardio, and Rule #3 Beware of Bathrooms.

Fred quickly looks behind him. The door! He made it to the door! He never thought there would be an instant in which he would look back at all of those times he took for granted the amount of space in his dream house. He just hopes and prays that this is not his life flashing before him as he nears his end. Backing away from the kitchen, where he first encountered his now undead friend – a sandy blonde haired, brown eyed, chisel jawed man who is as tall as he is handsome... and now dark... literally – Fred found that the journey through the living room leading to the front door, to his getaway, seemed to take forever.

Unfortunately for Fred, as he turns the knob and yanks

open the door, almost in a nervously hurried unison, a crowd of walking dead flashes into sight, rushing the door. For Fred, on tonight's menu would not be escape, it would be Fred. He turns to run away as the friend he somehow forgot was behind him pounces, taking a chunk out of his neck like a vampire on steroids. Violently breaking this reunion is that crowd of undead bursting into the house, tackling both Rob and Fred to the floor in a deafening hungered panic, tearing into Fred's flesh, desperately trying to satiate their appetites. It may not be McDonald's, but they're lovin' it.

They rip into their meal. Fred screams through the intense pain of being eaten alive. Rob looks up for just one moment, noticing her. She looks up for just one moment, noticing him. The screams fall silent to them as they are somehow able to focus in this flash of strange clarity. Their bloodshot, yellowed eyes lock while their jaws gradually drop, dripping blood and small pieces of half-chewed Fred from their chins. She angles her head as if to express genuine curiosity. He stares in wonder, marveling at the fact that he's never seen anyone so beautiful... gory, decrepit, and slightly decayed... but beautiful.

What was it about her that had just now fixed him into this yearning trance? Was it her death-stenched outfit; a tattered pink blouse matched with a dark purple skirt torn above her scraped knees? Was it her long, silky, raven colored hair now matted with dried blood and other undetermined bodily

juices? Was it the soft features of her face that made her look so young, despite skin not being present around more than a third of her jaw? Was it the gaping hole on the mid-right side of her head, exposing her brain in a way clearly showing that on her mind in that moment literally is fifty shades of grey?

Staring longingly at one another, there is a very distinct possibility that they are hearing the same Whitesnake song playing in their heads:

*Is this love that I'm feeling?*

*Is this the love that I've been searching for?*

*Is this love or am I dreaming?*

*This must be love 'cause it's really got a hold on me*

He glances down at her ring finger to look for a wedding band, something Rob would do whenever he met an attractive woman. If he were still capable of having a joyous look in his eyes, it would now exist as he notices that her ring finger is one of the two fingers missing from her left hand. Apparently, she's not married; at least, not anymore.

Gently rising to a stand, each cannot help but to gaze at the other, studying every feature, being captivated by distinct qualities no matter how seemingly insignificant. They begin moving toward one another, him with his achingly suave shuffle and her with a limp because her right knee is kind of bent out of place... but in a cute way. They come together to talk, an instinct from when they were still considered to be alive. She lets out a deep, "Grrrr." He responds with a long,



Traffic  
Larissa Simpson

“Aaaaarrgggghhh.” Obviously he’s trying to impress her with big words, a tactic he normally applied in his life when attempting to romance a lady.

Moving his gaze downward, Rob takes in the magnificently horrible sight of this enchanting woman—everything that remains of her to be seen below her eyes anyway. He notices the white roses lying on the floor with shards of the broken red vase scattered around them. Shuffling the short distance over to them, he bends to pick up one of the roses.

Turning back to the corpse of his affection, he brushes her matted raven hair back and gently places the flower over her ear. If she still had lips, he would be able to see that she was indeed smiling. That is, until her ear suddenly detaches from her head and falls to the floor, the flower along with it. They look down at the rose and the decayed ear, look back at each other, shrug, and turn to shuffle and limp out the door. His hand debates taking hold of her hand in a loving gesture; he does not want to risk accidentally pulling her arm off. He wraps his large fingers around her frail palm anyway and as she closes her hand around his, he is comforted by the fact that her arm remains attached, and that now he is attached to her.

It is a lovely night to be out for a walk. The moon peeks through a sky filled with dark clouds illuminated by only a splash of moonlight; the wind whispering of the day’s chaos to the fires subtly crackling through the leftovers. Dimly lit vehicles pepper the street and sometimes front yards, displaying obvious signs of the destruction that has taken place recently, with those vehicles being smashed or abandoned or both.

One car, however, has grabbed the attention of Rob and his lovely lady; a car in the distance uttering the sound of someone trying and failing to start it. Slowly looking over at his love after death, Rob makes eye contact, one of her dark set eyes barely visible through a string of lengthy hair draped over half her face; the half with skin still attached.

He motions toward the car as he lets out a groaning, “Uuuuurrrrrggggggggghhhhhh.” There are those big words again.

Rob and his date quickly shuffle their way toward the car, in a menacing way, sizing up what’s on the menu. Will they have the Bill? The Susan? Or, hey, the Tom looks especially tender and juicy tonight.

They draw nearer to the unsuspecting teens while the boy panicking in the back seat turns to notice the terrifying sight, yelling out, “Jesus fucking Christ!”

“Shit!” the girl echoes, slamming back against the inside of her door.

“Hurry up and start the goddamn car!” the boy screams.

The guy at the wheel responds, “Would you stop taking

the Lord’s name in vain, we fucking need him right now!”

Sounds of Rob’s fists beating on the window of the back door reverberate through the entire car. The boy turns to the opposite back door, only to be met by the terrifying face of Rob’s beloved as she blocks his only path of escape. Shattered glass sprays into the back seat over the boy; Rob’s left arm now reaching in through the broken window as the boy frantically kicks at Rob’s attempts to grasp his leg.

With Rob sufficiently distracted, the front door opens in front of him as the guy and the girl both scurry out. The boy looks up yelling, “Don’t leave me!” He sees them jump into the next car up. Irony fills what he knows will be his final moments as the sound of that car’s engine quickly roars to life over the dead silence of the night, allowing his friends to speed away to safety. At least, he thought they were his friends.

The boy willingly gives up, breaking down into tears of not wanting to die. Rob sees an opportunity to impress the rotting woman of his dreams as she looks on. One would think she would already have been impressed by his smashing the window simply by punching it, breaking every knuckle in his left hand. Considering this, Rob feels she may not even care if he ripped the car door from its metal hinges. So he does something that can only be described as astounding: he reaches in, unlocks the door from the inside, and opens it. Well, it’s astounding for zombies that usually just dull-headedly smash through everything.

Rob lunges into the back seat, grabbing the cowering boy by his legs, forcefully yanking him out; dragging the victim to the pavement while he uselessly pleads for his life. Rob’s undead lovely makes her way back around and together they ferociously dig in; the boy feeling every bite and tearing of his flesh until he loses consciousness... and life.

Now finished with their meal, they look up at each other, look over to the back seat of the car, and stare back, each knowing what the other is thinking. Assuredly, they are hearing the same Jason Aldean song playing in their heads:

*Don't you wanna stay here a little while?*

*Don't you wanna hold each other tight?*

*Don't you wanna fall asleep with me tonight?*

*Don't you wanna stay here a little while?*

*We can make forever feel this way*

*Don't you wanna stay?*

They stand and shuffle and limp to the car. Facing each other, she takes hold of his shirt and tugs him into the back seat; him first. She wants to be on top. He enjoys her forcefulness.

She meets him eye to eye. He places a gentle kiss upon the tip of her nose, hoping to not suck the skin off it. She pulls her head back to meet his intense gaze. He forms a smile on his lips, the very lips that sprinkle gentle kisses onto the cold, lifeless flesh of his beloved; cold, lifeless flesh now alive with the

warmth of the deep passion they had breathed into each other.

She lovingly brushes her left hand along his torso, stopping to undo the button on his pants. He reaches his right hand down, caressing over hers, taking hold of his zipper. Pulling down the zipper, he notices that there seems to be something missing where there once was not, something that, while living, he had taken for granted would always be there. It must have fallen off sometime during his undead life without him knowing it. Perhaps it slipped down and fell out of one of his pants legs, and is now just lying who knows where. Maybe he could find it if he retraced his steps. That is, if a dog hasn't buried it.

She lets out a confused sounding, "Uuuuhhhh?"

If there's one thing he now knows, it's that... she now knows. He cannot hide this fact and might feel ashamed of it, if it indeed mattered to her. But it matters not.

She lays her head on his chest and they nestle into the comfort of their tender embrace. It is certain that she is with her love and he with his. They would wish to have the connection that living lovers have, if it indeed mattered to them. But it matters not.

For they are now together. Together forever.

Love can survive anything... Even the zombie apocalypse. ■■■

## Suburbanites

Alesha Blauer



Pack them in rows of identical apricot houses  
Addict them to High Definition TV  
Upon which are broadcast the terrors on the other side of  
their doors

Give them motorized metal boxes  
In which to traverse the arteries of their city  
Then expect them to navigate those projectiles with  
deference to each other

Overlooking, they have never seen one another before ■■■

## The Storm

Jeremy Weidner



This my world, my hood  
Inside not everything's all good  
No matter what goes on around  
I find myself staring at the ground  
Inside all these thoughts are swimming  
In my eyes the tears are brimming  
Walking with the black clouds over head  
Can never shake this feeling of dread  
So many regrets, so many mistakes  
These burdens I just can't shake  
Then the wind comes and the storm  
Engulfed in its wrath I am reborn  
Now I am one with the weather  
For good or bad, which is the better?  
So much has changed from inside  
But a lot was lost with the tide  
I am forced to accept this destiny  
Even if it isn't the best for me  
For it must be embraced by us all  
If we don't we are sure to fall

Emotions hidden behind the veil  
Only a few remain as they swell  
So I can no longer withhold them  
Dealt shitty cards but I won't fold'em  
Because I will play my only hand  
For in the end it will all be grand  
So look to the horizon what do you see  
See that storm that's coming, you see me

Walking back down the beaten path  
Those that interfere will fell my wrath,  
Throwing you around inside the tornado  
Leaving cities destroyed everywhere I go  
Having you beg and pray to your God  
The reason of why, that reason is odd  
So let me ask what do you believe in?  
Is what I do considered a heavenly sin  
Feeling that fear you start to flee  
Refusing to stay and be in misery  
The way I rule call me a tyrant  
Start calling me a psychotic giant  
I be like fee, fi, fo fuck fum  
Running in terror because here I come  
About to smash on your little dynasty  
Destroying you with no amnesty  
As I rain this fire over the earth  
In ashes the world will rebirth  
To bring in the era of my time  
Now wait for your clocks last chime ■■■



# mariposa

Estrella Mountain | Literary Review

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Thank you to everyone who participated and assisted in the creation of this year's Mariposa Literary Review journal. Special thanks to our creative and technical contributors.

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Lee Barnes

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#### About Lee Barnes

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. *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.

Dancing  
Megan Seyfert



# mariposa

Estrella Mountain | Literary Review

Estrella Mountain Community College is pleased to announce the sixth issue of its literary journal, *Mariposa*. Featuring the creative writing and visual art of students from a variety of disciplines across the campus, *Mariposa* captures the collaborative spirit of students, faculty and staff and provides a creative outlet for the voices of our students.

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