

ARGENTUM

The Art &
Literary
Magazine of
Great Basin
College
2022



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Aspen Leaf

Medium: Photography

Angela Hagfeldt

2021-2022 Staff

Whitney Zulim and Dori Andrepont, *Co-Editors*

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On the occasion of her retirement, we extend our thanks to Angie de Braga for her ongoing support of *Argentum*. She has acted as committee member, proofreader, contributor, and photographer for jewelry, ceramics, and art submissions. She always encouraged other contributors and made sure that everyone who stopped by her office left with a printed copy. Your support has been greatly appreciated!

We hope you enjoy this year's publication, and consider submitting to the 2023 issue. Our website is www.gbcnv.edu/argentum and staff can be emailed at argentum@gbcnv.edu.

FRONT COVER Debris Flow Detritus

Medium: Photography

Robin Wignall

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Argentum Selection Committee



Kaitlin Dempsey

Artist and Educator

Kaitlin holds a Bachelor of Arts in both History and Archaeology from Western Washington University. Currently Kaitlin teaches science programming at the Museum of Flight in Seattle, Washington. She feeds her lifelong appetite for art by developing science/art programs for the museum, and with a variety of creative extracurriculars. Kaitlin served as art editor for the illustrated poetry anthology *WHEEL: A Heart's Hike Through*. In her free time, she is working to hone her oil painting skills and has dabbled in the exciting world of printmaking.



Erin Jensen

Associate Professor

Erin is an Associate Professor of English at Belmont Abbey College. Previously, she taught English at Great Basin College. While she mainly teaches technical writing and digital writing, she also loves to read creative writing. Her focus is on encouraging students to write and to explore using their words to create meaning. She appreciates the opportunity to engage with student and community creative writing.



Janet Winterer

Artist

Janet is an artist, sculptor, potter, wood worker, leather worker, jewelry artist, and glass lamp worker. She has done metal casting, various types of weaving, spinning, sewing, fiber arts, lapidary and mosaics. She has produced thousands of works of art both large and small, been represented by an esteemed art gallery and won numerous art competitions. She served as assistant sculpture teacher at Antelope Valley College in California and is currently an active artisan member of the Society for Creative Anachronism. She plans to never have a day in her life without art.

We thank our 2022 Selection Committee as they took time from their busy schedules to review and choose this year's submissions to be included in this publication. Their willingness and effort is deeply appreciated.



Natural Mosaic
Medium: Photography
Angela Hagfeldt



FIRST PLACE IN STUDENT ART

Nywele Nzuri

Medium: Fabric Art

Curtis McMillian

A Need for Love

by Derek Burwell

VIRMEN STARED INTO the puddle of rainwater collected in a dip of the street's cobblestones. Floating there among the refuse and excrement shone a thin face with delicate mandibles, large eyes, and a fine dusting of brown and orange fur. He adjusted the cowl of rabbit skins down low over his head. The pathetic thing was stitched together from scraps he had managed to steal from a butcher's floor on Devon Street. He hoped to be mistaken for a cat or a giant rat between the pervasive patina of grime and dim oil lampposts. He had tried to capture both animals, but they were too quick for his malformed legs. The Master's forbiddance to be out in public burned like a hot coal of anxiety in the back of his mind. He should not be outside of the laboratory, much less in the street. Yet, he creeped out any chance he could to finish his work.

A wagon wheel splashed through the puddle, sending Virmen scurrying back to the alleyway. Hunching low against the chipped brick of an apothecary, he opened the small burlap sack he clutched tightly with his lower arms. Inside clattered a broken piece of porcelain, a bit of honeycomb wrapped in wax paper, a rag crusted with mopped up milk, and a broken child's toy made of wood. Looking down at them, Virmen smiled, his mandibles clicking softly with the movement. The Master had always used five items to focus his creations. *One more.* The sound of footsteps echoed down the street. He pulled the bag tightly to his abdomen. *They will take them from me!* He scurried deeper into the alley before calming down with the realization they did not even know he or his treasures were there. After a few moments, a man and a woman walked past, talking quietly and dressed in overcoats and furs of their own.

The scent of lavender drifted down from the couple's passing, mixing with the filth and reek in the alley. Virmen pawed at the air absently, like he was caressing an escaping thought. The scent jolted him back to being in a carriage with the Master on a trip through the countryside. He was not to be seen then, either. Through the gap of an ill-fitted shutter, he had spied a field of blazing lights in the sky, like the sparks that erupted from some of the angrier equipment in the laboratory, but so many! And, they twinkled. The fields across the country had been filled with lavender, and their scent stuck with the memory like the pleasant escape of dreams. There were no such lights

in the confines of the city. Smog, the Master had told him later when he had asked.

Virmen's heart turned to lead as he watched the couple continue down the street. Their long stride carried his longing further and further from him. He needed that scent. It would be the only thing to be his fifth focus, but he needed to think fast. None of his other escapes into the city had been so bold. The other items had been things he had found or could filch. This would risk exposure. *She is worth it.*

Struggling half out of his fur disguise, he started to rub his lower arm down the side of his leg. He could make all kinds of chirps and clicks, but if he angled the serrated edges against each other just right, other sounds could be elicited. The shrill cry of a baby's wail pierced the still night. *Come on.* Virmen played louder, trying to keep the couple in view. Finally, the woman stopped and looked behind her, then pulled at her companion's arm. He looked over his shoulder, paused, and then shook his head. The woman let go of the man's arm and gazed with confusion into the dark street. Virmen redoubled his efforts. He even made sure to pause at moments to make it sound like the baby was catching its breath for the next wail. Babies did that.

The woman started back down the street. The man's shoulders slumped, and he soon followed. He caught up to her and tugged at her arm, but the woman brushed his hand away and continued getting closer to the alley. Virmen felt panic start to claw up his throat now that she was almost upon him. What would he do next? He grasped frantically out with his upper arms for something more to cover himself. His left claw found a clump of soggy newsprint behind him. He managed to get it more or less over himself as she stopped in front of the alleyway with one ear cocked. Virmen lightly stroked down his leg. A faint murmur gurgled up from underneath the paper, stitched fur, and muck. The woman peered into the darkness of the alley and then leaned down for a closer look. The scent of lavender drifted down again to tickle Virmen's nose. A small sachet hung from a delicate chain on her coat's collar. A battle between wanting her to come closer and wanting to run away skittered under his skin like the spiders he used to collect as pets. His heart fluttered like the caught flies he watched in their webs.

She leaned closer, making little comforting noises of her own. Slowly, she pulled the layer of sodden paper off. *This is it!* The woman gasped and clutched her throat. Her little clucks choked off in an exhale of disgust. Virmen bounded up and snatched at the sachet with his spindly arms. The woman screamed and tried to pull away, but all of his weight was pulling down on the sachet still linked to her coat. His legs left the ground, and he swung midair as the woman continued to shriek, batting at him with her hands. With a metallic twang, the chain broke free. Virmen and the woman both sprawled out across the ground.

The man ran the last few steps to them and kicked out. Virmen launched into the air and hit the ground rolling, losing most of his fur covering in the process. He skittered up onto his legs and looked back towards the couple. Luckily the man seemed more interested in helping his date up than continuing the attack. Placing his hard-won sachet into the burlap sack, he hissed at the couple like a cat for good measure, and hobbled back to the lab.

Virmen carefully placed the wooden plank across the drain that provided access to the outside world. The iron grating that secured the sewer pipe from rats had been partially dissolved from years of exposure to the Master's discarded reagents.

"Be a shame if the Master knew about that little hole." Weavel's voice carried down from a nearby barrel. Virmen froze, hoping if he did not look up, it would not be happening. His little fists clutching his treasures started to ache with the strain.

"What have you got there, little brother? What have you brought me?"

Virmen's body quivered as he looked up at his fellow homunculus. Weavel sat perched on the barrel above him leering. The green glow from the Master's vats glinted sickly on his isopod frame. *I cannot disappoint her.* Placing his feet firmly, he stuttered out, "It's none of your concern. What, what I do is none of your concern."

Weavel leaped down, crushing him flat. "Oh little brother, I tell you what you think. And I think you should be thinking about keeping me happy." The salty brine of his brother's body stung Virmen's nose. Weavel's eyes darted down to Virmen's burlap sack. "What are you hiding here?"

"Please, don't. I need them. Please, not now." Virmen squeaked out; the exhale of breath causing Weavel's weight to crush him further.

"Yes you do. To keep me happy." Weavel ripped the sack from his arms and poured it out on the stone floor. Virmen watched in horror as his treasures scattered. Weavel poked at the porcelain and the broken toy. "This is worth the Master's wrath? Stupid." Virmen sucked in a

desperate breath as the bigger homunculus stepped off of him to reach the other objects. "Now, this is promising." He held up the waxy honeycomb in a pincer to inspect it. Ripping it open, Weavel dabbed it on his tongue, "Sweet." He looked back at Virmen, "You're lucky it's sweet. I might wait a while to tell the Master."

Virmen watched him scuttle away into the upper chambers of the laboratory. Gathering his treasures back into the burlap, he sat down sullenly on the steps leading to the Master's main vat. Electrodes buzzed around him, and cylinders of glass bubbled with noxious liquids. He only had tonight. The Master was gone tonight. *This was my chance, and I disappointed her.* He fumbled with the items in the sack. The porcelain was beautiful like she would be. The milk-soaked rag would be her nurturing nature. A broken toy would make her want to play with him and the honey so that she would be sweet. He brought the sachet up to his nose. Lavender to give her the best memory he had. He had worked so hard for them. He had disobeyed the Master and even stolen from him the words of creation. He wanted so much to have a mother.

The vat behind him gurgled. Its green liquid luminescent and pregnant with arcane potential. He only had tonight. He would have to make due and just hope that the four objects would be enough. She would know how hard he had tried to be the best for her. She would love him and protect him and take him away from the laboratory.

He hopped up the last few steps to the vat's edge and dumped the objects into it. They dissolved with a sizzle and created streaks of color that swirled within its depths. Sneaking one last look above to make sure Weavel was truly occupied, he turned his attention to the vat and held out all four of his clawed hands. Practicing the words had been very difficult. They were in a dead language and did not like to be pronounced through mandibles. It took him hearing the Master say them over and over before he felt like he had got them right. Holding an image of his mother in his mind, as he had always imagined her, he spoke the stolen words of creation.

The liquid in the vat rippled and reacted to his words. It faded to the deep purple of an overripe plum and then deepened into the dark black void of creation. He did not know how he knew, but something in the darkness of that churning liquid moved. It came alive. A tremor rolled out of the vat like an echo of an avalanche or the birth cry of an angel. A plume of viscous liquid shot up and tried to form itself into the shape of a large feminine form. Delicate antennae and four arms spun out of the figure, and a warm golden light started to emanate from her chest. Virmen looked up in awe of her. Finer details started to spread out, and through his mother showing the hint

of mandibles, the curve of a breast, and chitinous plates along her abdomen. *So beautiful!* The details quivered for a moment and then began to melt. Her mandibles lost form and rippled about her face as she started to scream. Virmen dodged out of the way as her bulk crashed down against the stairs. Pieces of her splashing and running down the steps like clotting blood. He cried out and tried frantically with his little hands to try and scoop her back together. It was not enough, and she slipped down past him and drained into a grating at the base of the stairs.

Virmen hobbled to the grating and peered down through the iron bars. “Mother!” he shouted out and rammed his arm down through the slots, bruising the soft bits of his shoulder.

“What is going on down here?” Weavel’s head appeared through a crack in the door above. “The Master will not be pleased if you have been playing with things.” Virmen did not respond. He just continued to stare down into the grating. He could hear him coming down towards him, but he did not care. Weavel’s briny musk announced his presence. “I will never understand why the Master made

something so bumbling and weak.” Virmen looked up, his eyes brimming with tears.

“It wasn’t because he loved me.” A single tear slipped off of his cheek, fell between the two homunculi and down into the grating below. A flash of purple light, barely visible and unnoticed, rose back up from the depths as the fifth component found purchase.

Weavel pushed him hard, making him fall and roll into the bottom step with a thud. “Well, unless you have more honey to save you, I think you should start thinking about what you are going to tell the Master.” Weavel took a threatening step towards Virmen. An angelic cry of anguish echoed up through the grating below his feet. His brother looked down in puzzlement. A clawed hand shot through the grating, catching an ankle and pulled him through with a nauseating crunch. Virmen gasped.

The grating lifted and clattered to the side. And she, his mother, rose through it. She was beautiful and whole. She saw him and reached out. Virmen ran into her warm embrace. She smelled of lavender. ■



Storytime

by Ariana Stadlander

I’m a restless child,
waiting for the next journey
to rip me away.



A Mosaic of Rock and River

Medium: Photography

Hillarie Lara

Grief and Glass

by Anonymous

SHE HISSED IN AGONY when the glass' edge punctured her palm, leaving droplets of blood on the wooden floorboards. Maya sighed, deciding that a break was in order. But not before making sure that her wound didn't become infected.

She hurried to the bathroom, where she grabbed a band-aid and some alcohol to treat her wound. She then walked briskly back to her studio, deciding that today was not the day to rest, especially since her work was halfway done. She needed more time and a little more effort. She could persevere, like her friend did when he had suffered from...

Maya paused, disheartened by her previous thoughts. She gathered her courage and entered her studio, sweeping her gaze across the disarray she had accumulated over the previous weeks. Glass dotted the floor and gleamed brightly beneath her LED lights, and she was certain her bare feet would be cut to ribbons if she wasn't cautious, so she put on shoes. There was only one area where it was clear, and that was where her unfinished mosaic sat, begging her to finish it.

Every shard of glass on the ground once served a purpose. The smaller details and smaller things were vital to making the bigger picture. They were meant to go on to one of her many mosaics, but her fingers were too slippery and hypersensitive, and they ended up miserable on the cold, hard floor instead.

She came to a halt when she noticed a glint in her peripheral vision. She took a few steps closer to it to admire the work. It was her very first mosaic of her friend that was long gone. All of the unique and brilliant glass tiles were painstakingly crafted and carved out by her bare hands. The background was made of hues of light blue tiles, which contrasted sharply with the pastel yellow of the sun shining down in the corner of the canvas and the white tiles that made up the clouds and distant birds. Warm and light brown tones were used in the mosaic's center, with a dark red tint added to make out a tongue reaching for the sky.

Her friend was a dog. A friend that was no longer here. His name had been Philly. Because when he had been a puppy, he had eaten Maya's entire cheese steak from Philly's Cheese Steak in the food court when they had both been at the mall. He was a doberman, and while he

appeared to others to be a vicious and mean-looking dog, he was actually a sweet dog who loved to sit on your lap and smother you in love and affection.

Maya examined the mosaic closely. The fluffiness of his fur was made of warm brown glass, and the sky was a dazzling shade of blue as he peered at it with his tongue hanging out in the open from excitement. Almost like he longed to soar with the birds and lick the fluffiness of pearl-white clouds that towered over his small body like the tallest snow-capped mountains in the distance.

Philly had looked so happy in this mosaic, so full of brightness that was now dispersed through the ground beneath an oak tree in the park where he had been buried.

Maya felt a heaviness in her heart.

It was the sloppiest of all the mosaics she'd ever made. It was, nevertheless, special to her. She walked on and came to a halt in front of another of her mosaics. This time, there were two dogs. The first had warm brown fur, while the second had dark black fur.

Maya's memory was a little hazy that day, but she had met another friend. A human one.

She and Philly had gone for a nice walk in the park, where hills were abundant and trees even more so. Maya had been too preoccupied mulling over her upcoming final exams in college, and she hadn't been holding on to the leash as tightly as she should have been. "Philly," she had gasped in surprise when Philly bolted in the opposite direction. She had followed suit, her chest rapidly rising after a few seconds. A minute or so later, she noticed Philly running around with a black-furred dog in the distance.

A woman, the same age of nineteen as Maya, with pale skin, dark hair, and dark eyes, had stopped next to her, figuring out that she was the owner of the other dog.

"I'm sorry about my dog!" the woman had said, her breath ragged. She beckoned her dog over. She, too, had clearly run a marathon to chase her dog. "Don't run off like that, Pickles!" Her gaze had shifted to Maya, a smile grazing her lips. "Do you mind if my dog plays with yours?"

Maya had fought the urge to snort. *Pickles?*

Maya had given her a friendly smile and said, "No, not at all. Of course, Pickles — I think that's your dog's name — can play with Philly. As long as they don't hurt each

other. Though, I don't believe that would be a big deal. They look like they like each other, don't they?"

The woman had shooed her dog away from Philly to play. "They certainly do! By the way, my name is Yekaterina!"

"Yekaterina? Are you Russian?" Maya asked.

"Yep! How'd you know?"

"Oh, I just noticed that you have a slight accent, plus I recognized that your name is Slavic. Though, I do remember that it had, like, a nickname of sorts, like all Russian names do." Maya had furrowed her eyebrows. "I think, uh, the diminutive is *Katya*. Right?"

"Right-o! Since you guessed it already, you should totally be my friend. Nice to meet you! Call me Katya."

"Well, uh, anyway," Maya had started giving an awkward smile, "my name is Maya. Nice to meet you."

Katya had looked off into the distance after introducing herself, eyeing the pair of dogs in the distance, chasing each other and nipping at each other's tails with playfulness. "Since our dogs like each other, do you want to set up playdates here in the park? Totally optional, though!"

"Sure," Maya had said, pulling her phone out of her pocket.

Then, she had dropped the phone on the grass.

"Ooh, look at you, Butter Fingers!" Katya had said, poking fun at Maya to the point Maya's cheeks burned a bright red.

"Shut up. You met me five minutes ago. How dare you accuse me of such *dishonoring* accusations," she had said lightheartedly, a small smile on her lips.

"I'm kidding!" Katya had said it with humor, then looked at her wristwatch and cursed in another language. "Well, me and Pickles have to get going. I have mid-term exams coming up, and I don't want to fail."

They had exchanged numbers quickly before shaking hands.

"Is it wrong for me to guess that you attend the nearby college down the street?" Maya asked.

"I do!" Then Katya, in a low and exaggerated voice, had said, "Are you stalking me?"

Maya had laughed. "Not at all! I also go there. That's all. I guess I'll see you often from now on, huh?"

"Guess so. See you later, Butter Fingers."

Maya had ignored the nickname and waved goodbye to Katya and her dog.

Philly had come running towards Maya like a wrecking ball, tackling her to the ground. They had stayed there, hugging each other, watching the clouds drift by like passing memories.

Maya remembered that day better than most days. But right now, there was no time for reminiscing, so Maya

shook herself out of her reverie and stopped by the last mosaic.

The incomplete one.

A knock came on her door just as she was going to sit down to finish it. She hustled and opened it without even looking at the peephole, already knowing who was behind it.

"Afternoon, there, Butter Fingers!" Katya said. "Wow, this place *reeks*."

"Oh my god, Katya, shut up," Maya whined. "You make that comment every day you come by here. Don't you get tired of it? Also, I'm almost done with the last mosaic. Do you want to help with it?"

"Uh, yes, duh. Why did you even ask? I practically live here anyway. I might as well move out of my apartment, actually. It'd be a good idea," Katya said.

Maya rolled her eyes. "Whatever helps you sleep at night."

"It will help me sleep at night, Maya. Maybe I should do it because you said it like it was a challenge. Hm?"

Maya remained silent, just raising an eyebrow in response to Katya's teasing. "Just help me. Please? I'm almost done."

"Of course," Katya said softly. "Let's do it."

"How's Pickles, by the way?" Maya asked.

"All fine and dandy. Though, he's been pretty lonely since Philly passed away from... you know?"

"Kidney disease?" Maya said bluntly. "It's okay to talk about it. I'm okay with talking about it."

She stayed deafeningly quiet for a moment. "It's just... hard sometimes to remember. After my museum kicks off, I'll dedicate an entire section to Philly." A brief pause. "As well as Pickles, of course."

Katya giggled. "As you should."

There was minimal talking as they sat down on the floor, except for the passing and asking around of supplies and an occasional inquiry into the other's work and life. An hour and then some passed. The pair stood up and took a step back to admire the finished work.

"Thank you," Maya said.

"Of course," Katya said, giving Maya a warm hug.

The large mosaic gleamed and preened proudly underneath the lights of the studio, its bright colors popping out. It depicted a tall and wide oak tree with fading orange and brown leaves. Underneath it was the small, tiny body of a doberman dog, staring up at the leaves in melancholy. Maya's last tribute to her friend. One in three mosaics in total.

The first mosaic depicted a happy and curious expression, the second, excitement with a new friend. And the last mosaic, a final goodbye, with its fallen, messy

brown and orange leaves, was reminiscent of the smell of pumpkin pie and freshly mowed grass. A final illustration of the sad goodbyes and new tomorrows that came when spring hit.

Maya cherished every piece of art she had created. These three, on the other hand, were of the utmost importance. From the start, she had always loved to work with glass, with a shine in her eyes similar to what the glass gave off under the midnight moon on days of spontaneous inspiration. So, if people see the sadness

ingrained in these works — her feelings, her love, her joy, her happiness, her sadness — it was natural that they will feel it as well. They'd each interpret the art in their own unique manner, but over time, they'd join together and mold it into one cohesive whole. The main idea was that her friend brought joy to the world, just like so many companions had. Philly, her precious friend — his happiness, his joy, his excitement — was now preserved in memories and reflections of colored glass that displayed the heart of his soul. ■



Jeepers Jamboree

Medium: Fabric – Quilt

Tami Mette



Jewelry

Medium: Jewellerymaking

Martha Watson

They Call Me Momma

by Ariana Stadlander

AS I SIT THERE on the edge of the bed, anxiously fidgeting with my wedding ring, I can still hear him screaming. I shut my eyes so tight I feel like they're going to disappear into the back of my skull. My head starts to hurt from the strain. Well, hurt *more*. I seem to have a perpetual headache that never goes away, and this damn screaming only makes it worse.

A task. I need to keep myself busy, focused. I leap off the bed and begin to straighten the covers in the hopes of distracting myself from the screeching that's coming from the next room over, the bathroom. *You don't need to go in there to check on him*, I tell myself over and over, *He's fine without you. Just leave him*. I fluff the pillows and half-heartedly admire my handiwork. I don't even remember the last time I made my bed.

The moment I'm finished, my three-year-old rushes into the room, looking visibly distraught. She hates it when he screams like this... just like I do. "Momma," she wails, "Baby doesn't like the bath. Baby wants to get out." She notices that I fail to move and says with more firmness in her little voice, "Get him so he stops."

I groan. I can't deal with this right now. The headache grows stronger, as does the tangled web of feelings inside me. I take my daughter by the arm with as much gentleness as I can muster, and I lead her toward the door. "Mommy needs a moment," I say in a quiet, shaking voice. *Don't lose control, don't lose control*. "Brother will be fine," I lie, "Go play in your room." I can tell by the look she gives me that she doesn't quite understand, and maybe part of her doesn't believe me. But she's only three. Surely, she can't sense when I'm lying to her... or can she? I push the thought from my mind as I push her out the door. A moment later, I hear her bedroom door slam shut, and I know that she's been obedient. I breathe a sigh of relief and then realize something...

Silence.

The screaming's stopped. Suddenly, the weight of overwhelm lifts, and I feel calm. The tangled web of feelings untangles itself, and I feel almost normal again. Whatever 'almost normal' means. It doesn't feel good, and it doesn't feel bad. It just... doesn't feel. Which I guess is fine. I'll take it over feeling bad.

Now that it's finally quiet again, I can think, and now that I can think, I can evaluate the situation. The

screaming has stopped. It's over, and I don't even come close to knowing how to react. The numbness I felt just seconds ago is quickly replaced by dread. I don't want to go into that bathroom. I don't want to turn the doorknob, walk across the tile floor to the tub that I purposefully filled too high, and look inside. I don't want to see him...

But someone has to.

Summoning all the courage I can (and believe me, it's not much) I reach for the doorknob. But before my fingers can grip the cool metal, the knob twists, and the door opens wide. My husband stands in front of me. His face is pale. His eyes hold an extreme look of worry, more so than they usually do. The long sleeves of his t-shirt are soaking wet all the way up to his elbows, and laying there against his chest, is our four-month-old son, drenched from head to toe. He drips water onto the carpet. His face is red from screaming, his eyes bloodshot, and his nose drips an endless supply of snot.

I avoid my husband's intense stare as I take our son from him and quickly wrap him up in a stray sweatshirt that's been dirty and laying in a heap on the floor for probably the last three weeks. The baby's shivering subsides as he curls up into me, and slowly, his breathing becomes more regular, and his sniveling stops. I wish I could tell you that in that moment I regretted my actions or that right then I hugged my baby back and allowed myself to enjoy all the cuddles my little son could offer me... but I can't. Instead, I place the baby back into my husband's arms and coldly walk away. My husband's learned not to chase after me when I get this strange, vacant look in my eyes.

I'm glad.

IT'S TWO HOURS LATER when the kids are finally asleep in their beds, and my husband and I plop down on the couch. I still feel numb from the events of earlier. Dinner was mostly silent; the constant chitter-chatter of our daughter seemed so distant, stifled by the uncomfortable quiet that had settled between my husband and I. Even now, I sit next to him in silence. My shoulder brushes his, and I feel him flinch. I can't tell how he's feeling... *Angry? Sad? Hurt? Confused?* Maybe all the above. I don't dare look at him to find out. I don't dare move.

We stay like that for what feels like forever and a day. My grip on the remote becomes relaxed as I find myself

caught in a flux. All I want to do is cuddle under my favorite blanket with a bowl of burnt popcorn and watch the latest episode of whatever's on. But I'm too afraid to move. Moving would upset the silence. To move would be to invite conversation. Besides, my husband just can't understand why I love burnt popcorn, and we'd probably fight about it. Given the amount of tension between us, we'd probably fight about anything right now.

My mind darts to a new topic. *When was the last time we had sex?* I close my eyes and try to think back to when that might have been, but I have zero recollection. We're never in the mood at the same time anymore. Let's be honest... I'm never in the mood. And I'm just too damn exhausted at the end of the day to even think about taking my clothes off. Most of the time I don't even want to be touched. At all. Anywhere. He doesn't seem to get that. But, come on. Who would want to be touched after a day full of touching? After a day of little arms wrapped around your legs. Of beady eyes staring at you while you're just trying to pee in silence. Of hair-pulling, tugging, slapping, kissing, pinching, hugging, endless games of patty-cake, handholding, bum-wiping. And let's not forget the breastfeeding. Every three hours, a babe to the boob. I mean... why the hell would I want my husband to come anywhere near me after a day full of my newborn son sucking on my cracked, bleeding nipples? No, *thank you*.

But he doesn't seem to get it. He doesn't seem to get me. And we don't seem to get each other. Not anymore.

My perpetual headache seems to worsen, so I close my eyes. Oh, to sleep...

"Are we going to talk about it?" His voice is so quiet beside me that I second-guess whether I even heard him speak in the first place. I feel him shift, and out of the corner of my eye I can tell that he is looking at me. I refuse to return his gaze. He repeats, "I said, are we going to talk about it?"

I close my eyes again. I know exactly what he's referring to. Of course, I do. "I don't think talking about it's going to solve anything."

He sighs. "So, you admit that there's something that needs solving?"

I shoot him a quick glance before looking away again, but not before I see the frustration and sadness in his eyes. A lump forms in my throat that's impossible to swallow. I try anyway.

My husband shakes his head and then looks at his hands. They're folded as if he's praying. "We can't keep living like this," he says at last. "It's getting too scary, and something absolutely terrible could have happened tonight if I hadn't come home when I did."

"Would it have been so terrible?" I mumble, more to myself than to him, but he hears me all the same. I look at him and see the shock written oh-so-plainly across his face.

"You don't mean that," he whispers. "You can't."

Shrugging, I reply, "Life would be so much simpler."

Angry, my husband leaps from the couch and stands in front of me, towering over me. It makes me feel uncomfortable, but I try not to let on. "That's what you think, then?" He says in a harsh whisper so as not to wake the kids. If it were just the two of us in the house, I know that he would be screaming at me right now. "You think that a dead son is better than what we've got? You think that life would be easier if he had just died tonight, drowned in the tub? Is that it? Can't you even hear yourself?" He grabs my face and forces me to look up at him. I see the rage in his eyes, but also so much sorrow, a flicker of failure, and hopelessness. "I don't know what to do," he says simply. "You need help, and I can't give it to you. But we need to find someone who can."

I shake my head. We've had this conversation before, several times actually. But it's always ended the same way. With these words: "I don't need help."

But this time, in a surprising turn of events, my husband doesn't back down. He shakes his head and shakes me a little at the same time. "That's not the truth, and you know it. You -" he stops short, not wanting to say what we both know is true but are too afraid to admit.

"Say it," I choke out.

"You tried to kill our son," he manages to say through clenched teeth.

I don't know if it's the words that he says or the way that he says it, or if the stars have aligned in some unforeseen way, or if my ears and brain have finally gotten on the same wavelength. But when my husband says those six words, the horror of my actions and of what I almost caused really sinks in. In fact, it hits me so hard I feel whiplash.

I force myself to repeat them. "I tried to kill our son." *I tried to kill our son.*

It's only then that the tears come, and they don't stop. The sobs rip through me, breaking me apart, tearing into my skin, revealing the mess of who I am underneath. Despair hangs over me like a cloud of doom. It threatens to release its heavy downpour, though I doubt it will be any heavier than the river of tears that is falling down my face.

My husband just holds me as I cry. We've found ourselves in this position many times since the birth of our son, but it's never been like this. It's never been so intense, and it's never brought such a strong feeling of change, change like the shifting tide.

I know what I need to say. But the words won't come. They are nearly ripped away by the ferocious current of my tears, but I fight to hold onto them. And I fight to say them.

"I need help," I finally force out against my sobs.

"I know you do, Baby," my husband whispers against my hair as he holds me tighter. "I'm so happy to finally hear you admit it."

"I didn't want to," I whine into his shoulder.

"Why?"

"Because... because it means I'm weak." And the sobs come even harder.

My husband grips my shoulders so hard that it hurts, but it grabs my attention and halts my tears. He pulls

away from me and looks deep into my eyes and soul. "I think it means you're strong." He wipes my wet cheeks. "It means you want to do what's best for you and for all of us. Feeling like this isn't normal, and it isn't your fault. We've both done enough research to know that. Your brain needs help. Let's get you some. OK?"

I sniffle once then force the tiniest of smiles. "OK."

For the first time in a long time, I feel like there just may be a slight bit of hope for me, for us. And all because I had the courage to push past my fear of weakness to admit what I need the most. ■



The Kingdom of Hearts

Medium: Digital Artwork

Jaiden Abrille

Poems for Alex 8 Poems Telling the Whole Story From Half the Perspective

by Yaro Severn

Sandal-wearing man, self-assured.
I kept a neutral face when he said
Masters in Astrophysics.

He placed a lettered tile,
And swept back his hair —
I felt his gravitational force.

Sometimes two stars orbit each other,
Otherwise I'd happily be a planet
dancing and twirling 'round his light.

I draw lines in the imaginary sand
on his back.

He's a long canvas, reclining —
An almost fully-formed piece of art.
I brush finishing touches,
Touches.
This moment, our creation.

I thought it was just me and you and the stars,
that day on the deck.

And I was the sun and you were the moon
and we were a kinetic sculpture.

I thought your shoulder was your rib
but I knew the apple of your cheek,
and when you were a frog I
climbed underneath
to get warm

And then I was a stone
and you rested your head on me.
And the tears streamed down your face
and I asked, what is it?
and you said
"It's love...
it's love."

Being near you comes with the inevitable
risk of loving you.

Choosing you,
Losing you

Tenderest fruits bruised by you,
Juices dripping down your chin
I hand you more
And you say,
Sure.

Even a goddess mourns the loss of a man.
He was beautiful and imperfect
And I released him from my hopes today.
My dance teacher said let go and hang
And I let go.
And I hung my head between my legs
And I let my tears roll up.

Maybe food won't taste the same
when he's gone but you have to
try.

Maybe your heart and your body
are doing different dances but you keep
moving.

Getting to know this new version of you
that doesn't have him but has his
influence.

And for now,
you dance
with his shadow.

It must have been a dream,
me and you —
we were one and I was two.
It could only have been a dream;
over suddenly.
hazy memories.

I bathe in hot abundance,
my life full and supple
behind the sheer curtain
of my longing for you.

HE HAD GIVEN HER SOMETHING. Crushed it up in the food he gave her — a cold, boiled potato and some grape jello. Grape was her favorite; she would never tell him that. He had tried to talk to her, usually when he tied her back up or wiped the dirt off her face. He would mention the snow outside or that another skunk had dug its way under the chicken coop for eggs.

“I’ll have to shoot the old bastard,” he’d said — he was chatty.

It had been nearly a week since she had been outside, a week from her tire blowing out on the highway, forcing her to the side of the road near dusk. This would be her last meal. She knew this because he removed most of the cables from her wrists and ankles and let her feed herself. He watched her scoop each spoonful of cold gelatin into her mouth and looked down at the floor when she had finished; he was finished too. He spoke to her gently now, smiling too much and avoiding her gaze.

“Damn skunk was back this mornin’. Chickens were riled, all huddled together in the corner of the coop. Nothin but broken eggshells all over the God damn place,” he sneered, folding his arms tightly over his chest. She looked out the small window near the ceiling, trying to imagine the scene. She had never seen a skunk before. He leaned forward and swept a piece of jello from her bottom lip. She didn’t flinch and felt a strange sense of pride well up in her chest.

He stood to leave her, huffed on his way out of the splintered wooden door. Snowflakes blew in through the opening as he struggled against ice in the doorframe. He left the space heater off this time. She could hear the metallic scraping of the bolt sliding into the curved hole where it rested. She was alone again. *Finally*. It was coming fast now. The warmth spread through her muscles and relaxed her joints, touching the tips of her ears and lips. She sank into the chair he had bolted to the floor let her head float back to rest on the rim. Her thoughts drifted to her father. The smell of iced whiskey and wood, spiced chaw caught in the rough twists of his beard. How he held her against his barreled chest, burly warmth. She could hear him whisper now,

“Stick your finger down your throat, baby.”

She lifted her head from the back of the metal chair at the sound of his voice. The room was empty but spinning.

Again, he spoke,

“Don’t make this easy for him. Stick your finger down your throat.”

She willed her arms up, but they hung heavy at her sides. Her whole body felt heavy. Immovable. She couldn’t fight anymore; he had hollowed her out. She thought she heard the wind blowing through her, a high-pitched howling through the rungs of her ribs. She wouldn’t struggle for this part. She craved the numbness creeping around inside of her, the gentleness of it. She let her head rest again on the back of the cold chair. He could do what he needed with her now, let it end. She just wanted out of this room. She needed to see the sky open up before her, billowy clouds drifting away from this place. The thought sent a rattle down her spine.

“I don’t want to die in this room.”

She lifted her head again and blinked, trying to clear her vision. She closed them tightly and shook her head. It was grueling to get her hand to her mouth; the focus it took was almost too much. Almost. Her father sang in her ear.

“Blue skies, smiling at me, nothing but blue skies do I see...”

A wobbly arm lurched up and clumsily pushed two fingers far down into her throat; her body heaved. She retched plum-colored chunks of potato out of her nose and mouth. Her mouth was bitter cotton, but her head was clearer. She needed to cover the mess. Her waist was still strapped to the chair, but she could stretch her leg across the dirt floor and scuff dust over the heap. She wiped her dripping mouth with a shaky hand and wondered how long he would leave her in here. When he did decide to come back, she would need to pretend. That part wouldn’t be hard; pretending came easy for girls. It was the waiting, the possibilities. She was afraid of this ending.

Darkness had cast shadows on the wall to her left when she opened her eyes. The sound of scratching, nails against wood, woke her. The sound of the man whistling reached her, and she quickly crumpled into the chair. He jingled the keys before he stuck them into his pocket, an attempt to rouse her if it wasn’t time. Satisfied, he opened the door wide and stuck a chair in front of it to keep it ajar. She felt a sting of sorrow deep in her chest that it would be dark out there. Of course, he would never attempt any

of this during the day, no matter how secluded they were. She prayed silently for a full moon and a clear sky. The stars would have to do.

“Here we go, miss,” he chirped, brushing back her soiled black hair. He was braiding it. She was surprised at the nimble fingers tugging at each strand and humiliated that it gave her comfort. He placed a rubber band around the end of her hair and clasped his hands together when he finished. He had done this before. He undid the rope around her waist and hoisted her up onto his shoulder. She almost let a sob escape her throat at the movement toward the open door. He laid her on the icy ground once they were outside then turned away from her to lock the door.

She opened her eyes to the moon directly above her, it glowed large and looming against the dark velvet sky. She drew in a silent breath as tears stung in the corners of her eyes. She pinched the snow cautiously beside her then began to scratch it away with the nail of her pointer finger. She wanted to feel the soil, crumble it in her hand. She closed her eyes again and smelled the wind rushed pines, pictured them capped with snow, glowing like spirits under the moon. He turned and heaved her onto his shoulder again and lumbered forward. She could only see his rubber boots and the white snow sticking to them as he walked.

She fought the heaviness of sleep, its constant pull like a current being called by the sea. The blackness would overwhelm her, and she would sink into dreams of falling or flying. She opened her eyes to darkness, vast and endless. She thought she was dead. That her spirit was traveling the sea of some dark universe and hadn't

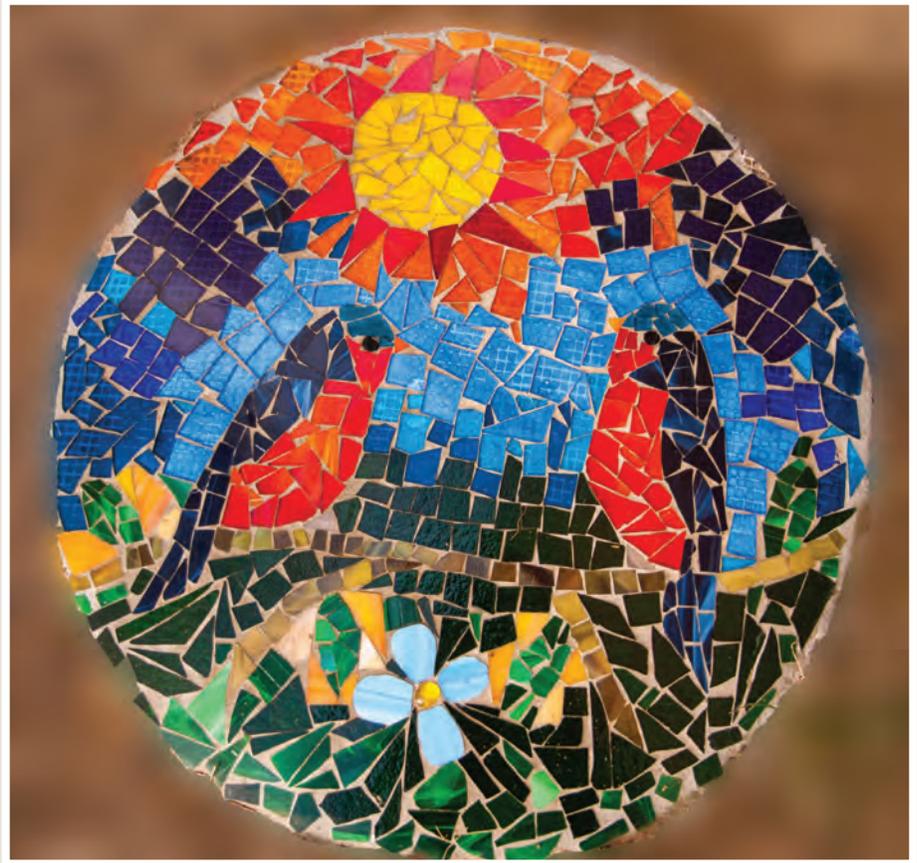
found shore yet, the next time she opened her eyes, she saw the familiar shimmer of stars above her, the shadow of mountain ridges against the horizon, and she could hear the trickling of water somewhere close by.

“Get out of here, go on, get!” he barked, flailing his free arm out in front of him, her limp body jolting against his. He lurched at whatever he was yelling at and lost his footing, sending her body up and over his, she landed a few paces in front of him on her back. He continued shouting and now cursing, grabbing at his eyes; he began to stagger back. She sat up from her landing place and saw him, hands tearing at his face-slip — an innocent slip. One a child would make, running too fast on icy pavement. Only he fell and hit his head against the corner of an old steel beam lying on its side in the yard. He immediately went still. A kick of adrenaline echoed through her ears as she scrambled to her feet. She looked across from where the man rested and saw a skunk with yellow yolk on its snout.

It sniffed at the air, and looked straight at her, claws dug deep into the snow. It held her gaze, cocking its head to one side as she moved to her feet. The smell hit her. The rotten odor of defense wafted in the bitter air, and she laughed. There was an exchange between them, a blowing over of protection. The skunk turned to leave her, but looked back at her once more, sniffing high on its hind legs before shuffling off into the darkness, the moon shining brightly down the white stripe on its back.

She turned toward the old shack where he had kept her, then out toward the clustered pines leading away from this place. She took a breath and ran. ■





SECOND PLACE IN STUDENT ART

Happy Bird Mosaic

Medium: Glass Mosaic

Martha Watson



Fallen Leaves

Medium: Photography

Angela Hagfeldt

I WAS HOLDING my wife's hand when they brought our baby back in. She was clean, new. No blood covered her anymore, just a swaddle and a cap. I gently moved the still sweat soaked hair out of my wife's face. The baby breathed gently in her mother's arms, her eyes still closed. It was good for her to rest. I thought about how big and scary the world was, and how she would have to learn from it. She is our future, she could be the president, or she could be that one teacher that changes the life of a student. Right now, she is an infant, sleeping against her mother's barren chest.

"Here honey, why don't you hold her? Bond with her a little," She smiled as she lifted our newborn towards me.

I held my daughter close to me. She was so small. She felt so fragile. I understood immediately that with little difficulty, I could kill her in so many ways. Of course, I'd never want to hurt her, she was my own flesh and blood, but I couldn't help the flood of images that pooled into my brain. If I dropped her, she would die. If I shook her, she would die. If my hand, that I was using to hold up her head and neck, closed, I could easily squeeze the life out of her.

I blinked the thoughts away, and saw my child. I was so happy to be a father. I had always wanted to be a dad, and I knew that I would do anything to protect her. I unbuttoned my shirt and leaned her against my chest. Skin against skin. I wanted her to feel my heart and know that it beat for her.

Between my wife and I, the baby's room took a month to finish. I had only finished building our Rhiannon's crib a few nights ago, and I felt terrible that I cut it so close to her birth, but she came a whole two weeks early. I was just grateful that I had it done before she arrived.

Rhi was awake for all of two hours when we got home. As soon as her eyelids fluttered shut and her breathing regulated, I knew it was time for her to try out her new sleeping place. I brought her to her room and laid her down in the crib. As her small body touched the surrounding area, I saw the whole crib falling apart. The shattered wood splintered through my baby's body. I blinked, confused and worried, but everything was all right. The crib was fine and safe, I had tested it out before she arrived on the earth. It was just these damned thoughts. I bent to kiss my girl on the forehead, before returning to her mother, and had to fight back the urge to bite her.

"How are you feeling honey?" I asked my beautiful wife.

"I'm sore, exhausted, but I'm doing okay. No post-partum depression just yet, but I'm sure that'll hit me soon."

"Well, just let me know if there is anything I can do for you. You did great, our daughter is perfect." I shot her a smile and tried to mask my unwanted thoughts.

I sat in the nursery with my baby. These thoughts aren't new, I know. I've always had this innate idea of pain, or failure, undesired as it is. I hated driving because I could only imagine smashing into other cars, or turning the steering wheel ever so slightly to derail off the road and crash into a tree. Even when my wife was growing our child, her stomach protruding more and more, I thought of what one solid punch would do. I thought of all the different ways that my baby would cease to exist, like if my wife fell onto her stomach, or if I pressed down on her stomach and the unborn baby just shot out of my wife. I even thought about how deep a knife would have to cut through my unborn baby to get to her mother.

These thoughts had always come as a plague. I wasn't a serial killer, even if I may have thought like one. I would never harm anyone, even if I thought of doing so just about every time I saw someone. I knew that I was different. Not everyone thinks of how quickly a ceiling fan needs to be to chop off their hands as they stretch in the morning, I understand that, nor did they have an intense urge to bite the fingers off of the dentists working inside of their mouth. Not everyone thinks of crashing their car into a tree anytime they are behind the wheel, even though they have no death wish, and I understand that. They likely didn't have perverse thoughts about anyone that they looked at, regardless of if there was any attraction (which there hardly was) and I understand that. I also understand that I was just an everyday guy, I never acted on any of my thoughts. I would like to say that I was a good, moral man, who was unfortunate enough to deal with devilish thoughts. I worked in the materials department at the hospital (and boy did I get some intrusive thoughts there). I had married a beautiful wife, the love of my life, brought up a beautiful daughter, and two small dogs. I was no different than many people.

I looked down at my daughter, sleeping peacefully. I thought of how quickly she would die by suffocation, how peacefully she would look dead in the crib. I wiped

away the thought. Both my wife and my child were finally sleeping, getting some much-needed rest. All I had to do was sit quietly and not disturb anyone.

There was a chair sitting next to the crib, so I decided to sit and rest a while too. From my bag I retrieved a worn, dog-eared copy of a book about mastering the mind that my therapist recommended years ago. Jen had me see a therapist because I was terrified to drive with passengers in the car. Dr. Morgenstern assured me that there were many people who experienced intrusive thoughts, we just have to keep them in check. I didn't continue with him much longer, since I had the book.

Just as I finished a chapter, Rhi began crying. I jumped out of my seat to pick her up and soothe her, but as I reached down, my mind kept playing and replaying grotesque images involving my daughter. I attempted to follow the steps in the book, taking deep breaths and convincing myself that the thoughts are just thoughts, they can be pushed out of the way just like any normal thought. I grew frustrated with my inability to concentrate because of the baby wails. Within a few moments, Jen rushed in and bent over the crib to grab our child.

"Why are you just standing there? Can't you see she wants to be picked up?"

"I'm sorry honey, I was just sorting through my thoughts."

"Okay, well now that you've sorted through them, take Rhi. I'm going to take a bath."

With my daughter in my arms, I sat down and bounced her cradled body in my arms. She began to quiet down and I stared at her small fall, cheeks stained with tears. My smile grew as she began to giggle. Almost immediately after, the visions returned. Moments in a distant universe where I let the thoughts dictate my actions, and I broke my child against my knee, or I drop-kicked her. With the new onset of images corrupting my mind, I set my daughter back in her crib and sat down on the wall opposite of the crib.

Why were these thoughts so difficult to push away? I was terrified that the stress of the thoughts would bring me to actually harm my child. I don't know if I could live with myself if I ever did anything to physically harm her, or my wife, or anyone for that matter. I just wanted to be the father who I never got the chance to have. Someone to love and care for the family. The man to play outside with his children, the man to influence their music taste, the man to take them hunting and fishing, even though I was terrible at both because blood made me woozy.

Rhi began crying again and I panicked. I didn't want Jen to have to run back, soaking wet, in only a towel. I crawled to the crib and through the bars I tickled her and made any silly noise that my mouth could produce,

but the crying ensued. I shushed her as sweat formed on my forehead and tears formed in my eye. Maybe she was hungry. I picked her up and, while carefully bouncing her in my arms, and resisting the thoughts of infant homicide, walked to the bathroom where her mother was wrapped in a towel, still preparing her bath.

"I'm sorry, she needs her mama. I think she's just hungry."

Jen unwrapped her towel and Rhi latched onto one of her breasts. She smiled, as she realized that I was connecting to my daughter. I knew what she needed, and I was able to do what was needed to protect her.

"Did daddy know you were hungry? He's a good daddy isn't he?"

As the weeks passed by, Rhiannon grew bigger and bigger. I was shocked by how much hair she was getting and how expressive she was with her emotions. Sitting in her room reading stories was my favorite pastime, though I was growing less comfortable with my ability to be around my daughter without hurting her. As her body grew, I realized she would be less fragile, and I would be able to handle her more without fear of accidentally killing her, but the thoughts of purposefully killing her were still there. And without death, there were still so many ways to harm her. If possible, I let her mother handle her.

"She has no teeth John, she won't bite." Jen joked, though her eyes screamed that she needed me to interact with my daughter.

"I know, but I do." I chuckled back, trying not to let her hear my torment. I was crouched beside the crib poking Rhi's little feet.

"Oh John," she crouched beside me. "You wouldn't hurt a fly. Besides, she's a resilient little thing. Takes after her dad in that way."

I smiled at my wife, an attempt to ease her consciousness, knowing fully well that her resilience wouldn't save her from the deeds in my thoughts.

Jen grew angrier and more distant with every diaper that I failed to change, or every opportunity to burp my daughter, missed, leaving Jen to deal with her baby barfs. I felt terrible for the neglect, but I couldn't trust myself.

Many of my nights were left sleepless. Not because of the crying, like many parents face. Rhiannon was a very happy baby. She rarely ever cried. Anytime I laid my head on a pillow, I thought of how Jen grew apart from me because I thought more for my daughter's safety. Jen wouldn't even sleep near me, so I would take my pillows and sit in my daughter's room, staring at her as she slept peacefully.

Maybe I was crazy. A normal man wouldn't see their child, their own blood and kin, and think nothing

more than how they would die. A normal man wouldn't visualize someone that they loved dearly... dead, by their own hands. A normal man would brush those thoughts away and lock them in some area, never to be uncovered again. But there I sat, watching the child that I loved deeply, the moon in its entirety illuminating my daughter through its spot in the window. I sat there, watching her chest rise and fall, rise and fall... then it stopped rising. It took me a second to realize that there was something wrong. Rhi wasn't crying, but she wasn't breathing anymore was she? I jumped to my feet, smashed the light switch on and ran to the crib. It took a second for my eyes to adjust to the bright light, but there lay my daughter. Her face was losing color.

I didn't know what to do. I started picking her up and was bombarded by my abusive visions, so I placed her back down in the crib. I thought I should do some kind of CPR on her, to get her lungs pumping again. As I reached down, I imagined pressing my fist into my poor baby's body, crushing her still-forming bones. I slapped myself, to try to pull myself back into reality. Tears streamed down my face as my baby was losing her life. I couldn't bring myself to do anything to help, because anything I could do would just hurt her. What would my wife think if she came into the room and just saw a bloody mess, instead of the child that she laid down to sleep.

That was the answer. I cried for my wife. I didn't hear footsteps, so I cried and yelled as I ran through the hallway into our bedroom... my wife's bedroom. I turned the light on and immediately irritation grew on Jen's face.

"What?? What?" She jumped up startled as she saw my tear streaked face.

"It's Rhi, baby. I don't know what—" She ran out of the room before I could finish.

I made my way back to our daughter's room and Jen was bent over the crib. She was using two fingers and gently, but firmly pressing into Rhi's chest.

"Have you called an ambulance?" She screamed over her shoulder. She studied my face and screamed, "Oh for Christ's sake, John! Call 911!"

How could I have been so dumb to not call the authorities? I pulled out my phone and screamed that my baby was dying to the operator. I gave her our address and names, and every other ridiculous bit of information that they asked, even though the emergency was time sensitive. The ambulance came within 15 minutes. The EMT's brought my baby into the ambulance, continuing the CPR that my wife had started and Jen climbed into the ambulance.

I tried to step into the ambulance too, but I was told only one passenger was allowed at a time. Jen stared at

me, her eyes glassy with tears, through which, her anger and sorrow peered deeply into my own wet eyes.

"Meet me at the hospital," was all she could say before the ambulance shut their doors and drove away, leaving me alone in my driveway. I climbed into my car and headed off towards the hospital. I had always hated driving. Jen had been really understanding of that, so she primarily drove. As I started the car, the many lights for gauges and the radio and temperature all illuminated my face. My eyes had to readjust to the brightness of the lights, and the clock showed 2:38 AM.

I didn't mind driving at night as much. The darkness, as disturbing as it was, actually helped my mind to keep more focus on the road and what was around me. I didn't have to worry about others, either, as the traffic usually cleared up after 1:00 in the morning. The hospital was only 20 minutes away. I just needed to get there. They would put everything to rights. My baby girl would be alive and well. Jen would be happy to see me. Tragedies always pulled families closer.

My phone pinged over the speakers of my car. I wasn't listening to any music, so the tone shocked me. I glanced at the screen of my phone.

Wifey: Rhi is on oxygen. She should be fine tho.

Me: Thank God!

Wifey: We need to talk...

Me: I know. I'm trying.

Wifey: John. You are not ok. Maybe you should see Dr. Morgenstern.

Me: Jen...

Wifey: No, John... You need help. I can't be with you if you can't touch our child. She needs you to protect her! A real father would do whatever they could to keep their child safe.

Wifey: John?

Wifey: Just get here, we'll talk about it later.

Wifey: John...

"John, you're going to be okay." Jen was sitting next to me as I laid in bed. My head ached and my ribs felt as if they were stabbing my organs. Maybe they were. I gazed around at the room around me through swollen eyes.

"It's okay John, you're in the hospital. Rhiannon is doing okay. We just have to keep a close eye on her when she sleeps... why did you drive into that tree John?"

"I..." It hurt to breathe, let alone speak. "It was an accident."

"An accident? John, I wasn't going to separate from you. I just need you to talk to Dr. Morgenstern." Jen sounded sympathetic.

"I will. I promise. I was just texting you back. I didn't mean to."

“It’s okay honey. You will be okay. And Rhi will too. We’ll all get to go home soon.” She cracked a smile at me, and I didn’t realize but she had been softly crying. Within a few moments, a nurse entered the room.

“Mr. Hadley, I just received your X-rays and it looks as though you have a few cracked ribs, and a possible concussion. We’ll need you to rest overnight, but you can check out tomorrow if you would like. And about Rhiannon, she will be fine. We will send you home with a sleep apnea machine, so be sure that she sleeps with it on. We will schedule a check-up for a month in advance. As for right now, I’m sure you both have had a very long night,

Mrs. Hadley, feel free to go home, or if you’re comfortable resting in the chair in the corner, you are welcome to.”

Jen leaned across the railing of my bed to kiss me on the forehead. I could feel the tear stream, now cold on her cheek. She smiled at me, relief and guilt shared on her beautiful face.

“The car is in the shop, so I guess I don’t really have a choice.” She pulled an extra blanket over her frame and sat in the chair. I would have given her the bed, if I could move easier. She wouldn’t have accepted it anyways. I closed my eyes and let the pain subside as I drifted into sleep. ■



Desert Moments

GOLDFIELD TONOPAH

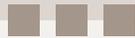
by Alison Matulich

Ice cold sodas: orange cream, rootbeer,
give me a coca cola
Lizards looking at me
Roadrunners skirting around
Antelope in the distance blending in
Smoke pouring in from western fires
Braying donkeys fighting and making
love at night
Turn on the fan
Garden potatoes
Chipmunks eating the bird seed in
the back yard
Paint on my hands
Sleeping under the star-studded sky
It’s so hot
Drive to the Lake Tahoe to swim in
the fresh water

Live in the desert to think in the
open spaces
It ain’t ever gonna get cold again and then
it does
I saw the bobcat lurking around
Chop up the fire wood
Hot drinks: coffee in the morning,
hot chocolate at night
Warm up my hands
Pull down my hat
Bunnies scurrying into the bushes
Wild horses climbing down the steep
mountain side
Dump out the salt melt so I can walk
in the walkway
Life is somewhere between all this
hot and cold



Alpine Mosaic
Medium: Photography
Hillary Lara



Moth

by Chelsey Pennell

I dreamed while dead or dying,
Four eyes fluttered in through my door.
Black dust shook from their glower,
Disguising the scales on the floor.

They hovered just so near a candle,
Blushing in radiant hue,
Casting winged shadows on the mantel,
Delicately laced with berries of yew.

Suddenly, with a whisper,
The eyes then flickered with ash.
Scooped air in strokes of flurry,
Caught fire, started to thrash.

The embers floated like snowfall,
Resting on slumbering lids.
Melting through an alabaster husk
Then drifting, cautiously, to my ribs.

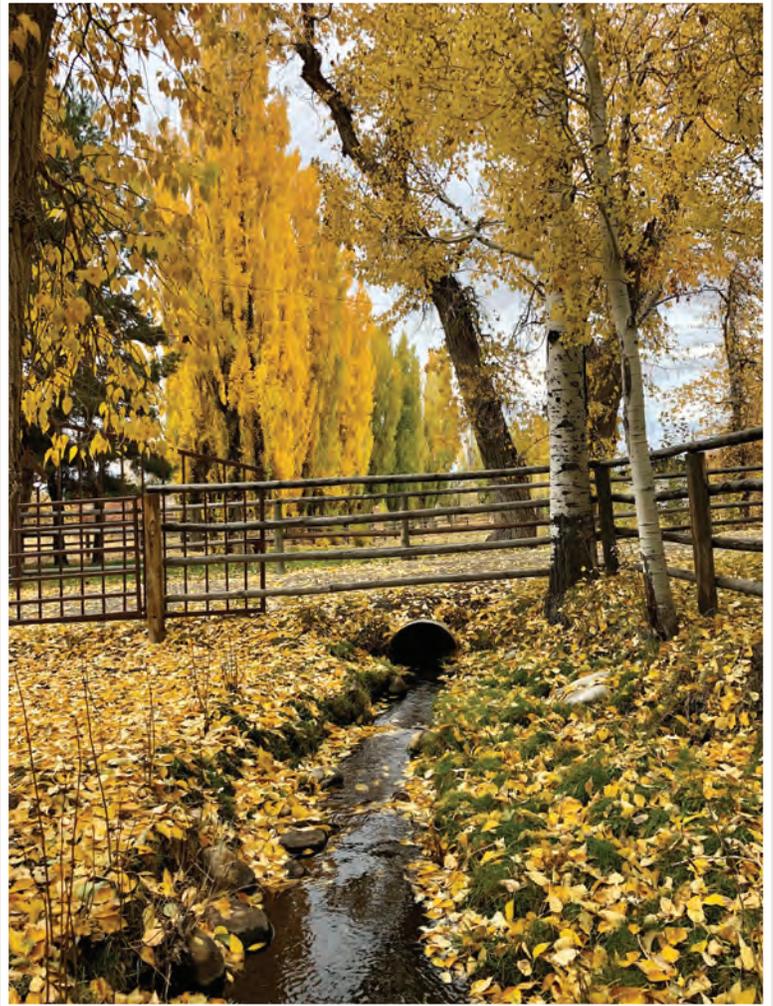
It is there where I felt the quiver
Of a smooth and dainty seed,
Reaching its roots to silken heart,
Swelling each chamber with need.

The sprout crept through my tangled heart,
Shot forth to feel for the light
Pressed, quite tenderly, beneath my breast
Broke skin against the moonlight.

My skin wept mead, golden and sweet
At the base where the stem took a stance.
Feeding the golden petaled head
Growing from some expanse.

I opened my eyes to darkness,
Enclosed within a strong grasp
That bloomed at once beneath a clock
ticking against a rasp.

I turned four eyes against a shell,
Pallor and withering rot,
The flesh that held my thirsty soul
Limitless, carefully wrought.



Autumn Mosaic
Medium: Digital Photography
Angie de Braga



Lizard in the Grass

Medium: Glass Mosaic

Martha Watson

Like All the Others

by Raeanne Dickson

I SAW HIM SITTING on the back of the bus, earbuds in and eyes staring blankly ahead. Our gazes met for just one second — man, did he have such *beautiful* brown eyes — he smiled politely then looked away quickly. I saw this as my chance to make my move, so I (somewhat nervously) crept onto the empty seat next to him. After sparking up a conversation, I asked for his name and eventually scored his number. I didn't wanna seem desperate or clingy, so I got off the bus at the next stop and started walking home. I could tell he was the one, he was *really* the one this time.

WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION, I gave him a call later that day, telling him all about myself; my interests, pet peeves, what I look for in a man, and so on. We only talked for about 30 minutes before he said he was busy and had to go. So I said goodbye longingly, then sent him a single text and waited a while, eagerly awaiting his reply...

No response.

So I sent another text — still nothing. I repeat this a few more times — why isn't he responding? Did I do something? Say something wrong? I start panicking, nervously chewing my nails when with a buzz of my phone:

FINALLY! He texted me back!

"Holy crap, I'm like, at work right now, calm down." He adds a few sweaty and worried-looking emojis to the end of his sentence.

I let out a sigh of relief before I text him again. There's no way he'll be like those other boys, the ones that ignore me unless they want something from me, right? There's no way he'll end up like all the others.

AFTER WEEKS OF persistence, he finally invited me over to his apartment! It's about time, honestly. I was so excited I couldn't even sleep the night before. I just wanted to make sure that he'd be into me, so I sort of stalked his Facebook to see what kind of girls he likes. I noticed he has a thing for brunettes, so I decided to make a big transformation — just for him! He would love that, right? He loved those girls so he'll definitely love it... Right? So I went ahead and turned my naturally reddish-brown hair to an angelic blonde and chopped it to shoulder length, just like his most recent ex-girlfriend. Just so he can love me easier! I think it's very thoughtful of me, truly.

Eager to see his response to my makeover, I got to his apartment a little earlier than we agreed on — about two hours earlier. I'm sure he wouldn't mind. Once he sees how good I look, he'll forget all about that! I knocked on the door excitedly, waiting for him.

No answer.

I knocked again, a little harder this time. Still no response. I started to get antsy, scared even, that he gave me the wrong address and made me look like a fool. Oh, would he pay for that... Before I could knock again with all my might, he answered the door, groggy and half-dressed. How dreamy!

"Hey, uh... You're like... Totally early," he said, rubbing sleep from his eyes and glancing at his phone to check the time. I told him that I was just too excited to wait, and since I'm here anyway he may as well let me in, which he did.

"Your hair, it's different," he noticed! He sort of let out a little laugh and told me I looked pretty, but also a little like one of his exes. Mission accomplished — he thinks I'm pretty!

The date went well, I composed myself as much as I could; walked and talked and held my hands and crossed my legs a certain way so he'd believe I was just a regular girl. I've had so many men run off on me, saying I wasn't good, wasn't normal... It made me incredibly sad, what do they even mean? So to ensure his adoration, I did everything I could to try to seem normal. Just for him — normal.

NOW THAT I KNOW where he lives, I love to make frequent visits to see him. Now, he doesn't always see me, but I love to see him. I just love to spend nights under his bedroom window in the bushes — I dream of lying by his side, feeling his hair and breathing his breath... Sometimes I like to join him on his days out, following him to and fro, always maintaining a proper distance. I have to make sure he doesn't see me EVER, that's scared guys off before, you know. I followed him from his home to the bus stop, to his work (a cashier at 7/11), back to the bus stop, and finally back to his apartment. When I wasn't spending time out with him, I liked to call and text him frequently. Sometimes he wouldn't respond for hours — even though

I knew he was at home, doing nothing! So I'd have to call him until he answered, which usually took up to four tries. I don't mind being persistent, though.

Eventually, it seemed he began to distance himself, using lame excuses like he was too busy or his phone died and that's why he couldn't call or text me back. I *know* he's lying and I *know* he's trying to escape my grasp. Why would he do this? Why do they always do this? With every day that went by, he became more and more distant.

He was ending up just like all the others.

IT HAS BEEN MONTHS since we've met and he still hasn't made a single move on me. He invited me to his apartment just that one time and still hasn't officially invited me back over. Although I may feel a bit heartbroken, I must remain persistent! So I had a great idea to show up at his apartment and surprise him after work. I snuck in through his bedroom window — don't tell! — and gave his room a little clean-up. Then I showered the room in rose petals and glitter, changed into my nicest lingerie, and posed myself nicely upon his bed. It was a quarter past five o'clock, which, if I knew his schedule (and I did) meant he was almost home!

Finally I heard the jingle of keys in the door and had to stop myself from squealing and ruining the surprise. I heard him close the door, throw his jacket on the table and make his way towards his room. My heart was beating out of my chest — I was so excited I thought I would die! At last, he turned the knob to his bedroom door — the anticipation was killing me. As he opened the door, his jaw completely dropped. I started giggling with anticipation, I knew he was going to love it!

"What the hell is all this?" He shouted and I felt my smile drop.

"W-what do you mean?" I stuttered, surprised at his unexpected (and loud) negativity.

"Did you break into my house?" The boy yells — I start to feel a prickle behind my eyes. Did I do something wrong?

"I thought we were in... In love!" I tried to reason with him.

"In love?!" He lets out a mean laugh. "You're so totally crazy! I know you've been following me around, you're not as sneaky as you think. You are completely freaking psycho!" He thunders, gesturing wildly.

"Don't call me that..." I warn him as I raise myself to my feet.

"Call you what, crazy? C-R-A-Z-Y! You're crazy!" The boy shouts again. He turns away from me for a second, checking out what I did to his room.

"What did you do to my place? What even is all this shit? Just get ou—" he wasn't able to finish his sentence

before I struck him over the head with his desk lamp.

"I told you not to call me that, honey."

I WATCHED HIM slowly regain consciousness. His eyes were sort of dull for a while, cloudy with pain and confusion. It took a few moments for him to realize that his arms and legs were bound to the posts of his bed — once he did, he began bucking around wildly — as if that would help! I watched him writhe around for a while, admiring how his muscles twitched and flexed as he tried to escape his fate.

"Now, now, my love," I started, slowly raising a knife to his throat, "Let's all just — just calm down, okay?" I whisper and give him a quick kiss on his forehead.

"I know you were only mad that I showed up here without telling you. Would you still have been mad if I told you first?" I asked, climbing on top of him. He grunts and groans loudly, his words muffled by the balled-up sock taped into his mouth.

"Oh, I knew you wouldn't have! You love me more than you'd care to admit," I giggle, giving him more kisses. "Now," I clap my hands together, "let me show you how much I love you. I promise I won't hurt you as long as you promise to listen. Sound fair?" I can't help but giggle again.

I went ahead and put my knife down so I could take off my own panties. After, I started taking his underwear off too and slowly leaned down, opened my mouth and closed my eyes to give him a passionate kiss.

I HEADBUTTED HER as hard as I could — square on her nose, between her eyes. Even though it hurt like hell, it seemed effective. She immediately fell off of me, nose bloodied, onto the floor. I kept expecting her to hop right up or run off or something, but she didn't. I could hear her breathing, now whistled, through her damaged nose. I must have knocked her unconscious.

Now's my chance — I fought against my constraints, shaking wildly until I felt exhausted. I went ahead and looked around the room to see if there was anything, *anything* I could use to help myself with. Looking beside the bed, I saw her knife. If I could stretch my hand *just a few inches*, I think I could reach the knife and begin my escape. My skin quickly got irritated and bloody from fighting against my restraints, but I managed to get the rope loose around my wrist. I'm so close — so close to getting out of this. She's starting to stir. Oh god, oh god, *OH GOD*... I can hear her move around on the floor, her breathing becoming faster with each moment — her breath a forced wheeze. I'm so close, so close to grabbing this knife, almost... Almost...

SHE STANDS UP, DAZED. It takes her a few moments just to stand upright, unsure of what happened. She groans,

touches her nose and cries out in pain. How could he have done this to her? She turns sharply to face him;

“What did you do to me, my one and only...?” She asked quietly. He laid there, motionless, staring up at her with wide, panicked eyes.

“I said *what did you do to me?!*” She screamed in a piercing, shaky voice. She had done *everything* she could think of to get him to love her — why didn’t it work? Why does it never, ever work? The poor boy lunges his now-loose hand towards the knife, ready to attack — but it was too late.

She swiftly snatches the knife first, jumps on top of him and begins wildly stabbing him in his chest and neck. The whole time she is screaming ferally, cursing him and his heart for making her love him.

“This!” *squish.*

“Is!” *squish.*

“All!” *squish.*

“Your!” *squish.*

“Fault!” *squish.*

She cries with each thrust, blood spraying in every direction. Then she just sits there, his dark red blood dripping from her hands and face, tears streaming down with it.

He ended up just like all the others.

SOME TIME HAS PASSED since my last heartbreak. I don’t even remember what happened — I guess he moved out of town because I haven’t seen him in weeks. His apartment is closed off too, no one’s allowed near it. Deeply hurt yet again, I swore off men and promised myself some solid me time. I went to the Starbucks down the street to people-watch for a while (one of my favorite pastimes) and enjoy a latte. As I walked up to the register, I noticed the cashier — a very handsome young man with *gorgeous* brown eyes. Maybe things will be different this time, right? Maybe he won’t be like all those other boys, the ones that run off on me and I never hear from again. Those mean boys who ignore me and push me away, the ones who deserve it... No, things will be different this time.

I introduce myself. ■

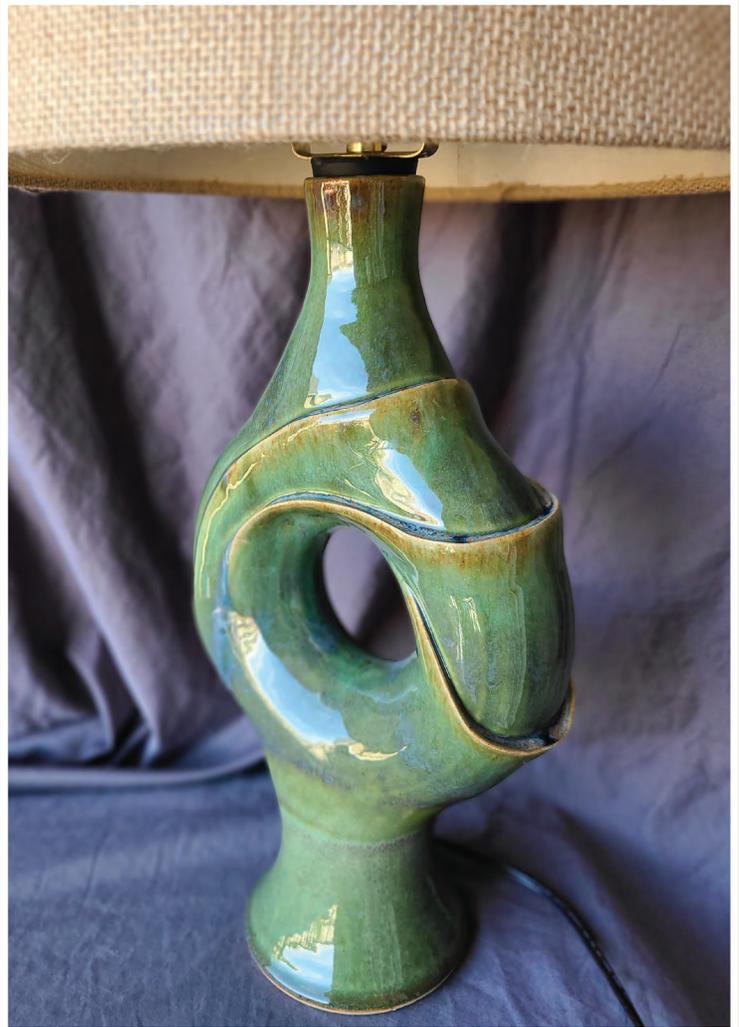




Ruby My Heart

Medium: Photography

Hillarie Lara

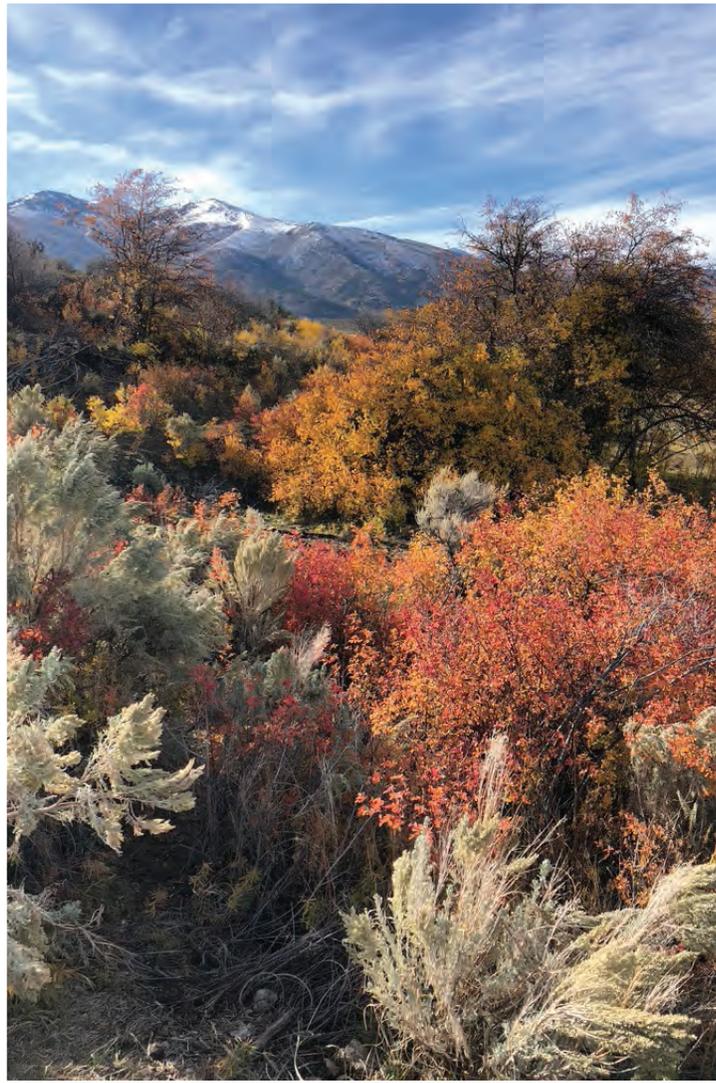


THIRD PLACE IN STUDENT ART

Green Lamp

Medium: Ceramics

Lillian Lueck



Fall Mosaic of Colors

Medium: Digital Photography

Angie de Braga

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