

ARGENTUM

The Art &
Literary
Magazine of
Great Basin
College
2023

BALANCE



Balance

We tend to think of balance as perfection. A constant tension of just enough of this and just enough of that and then we will hit on the harmony of balance. This edition of *Argentum* focuses on balance, but as artists and writers, we get to play with balance as children do. An experiment of opposites and spontaneity, a teeter-totter of light and dark, shapes and colors, ideas and words. We hope you enjoy how these contributors have played with balance in their work.

A “thank you” to Angie de Braga for proofreading, Dori Andrepont for the continuous support, and Steven Hrdlicka for breaking the ties in the art category, as their assistance contributed to making this edition a success! Please enjoy this year’s edition and consider submitting to the 2024 issue.

Our website is www.gbcnv.edu/argentum and staff can be emailed at argentum@gbcnv.edu.

2022-2023 Staff

Whitney Zulim, *Editor*

Chelsey Pennell, *Assistant Editor*

Dr. Josh Webster, *Adviser*



Nature’s Tumbled Equilibrium

Medium: Digital Photography

Cindy Staszak



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Argentum Selection Committee



Kelly Stear *Artist*

Kelly Stear has a Bachelor's Degree in art from the State University of New York at Oswego and a Master's degree from the University of Rochester. After graduating from college, Kelly focused on researching, reproducing and teaching medieval illuminations using historically accurate tools, techniques and materials. She has won awards for her historical artwork.



Evi Buell *Dean of Instruction*

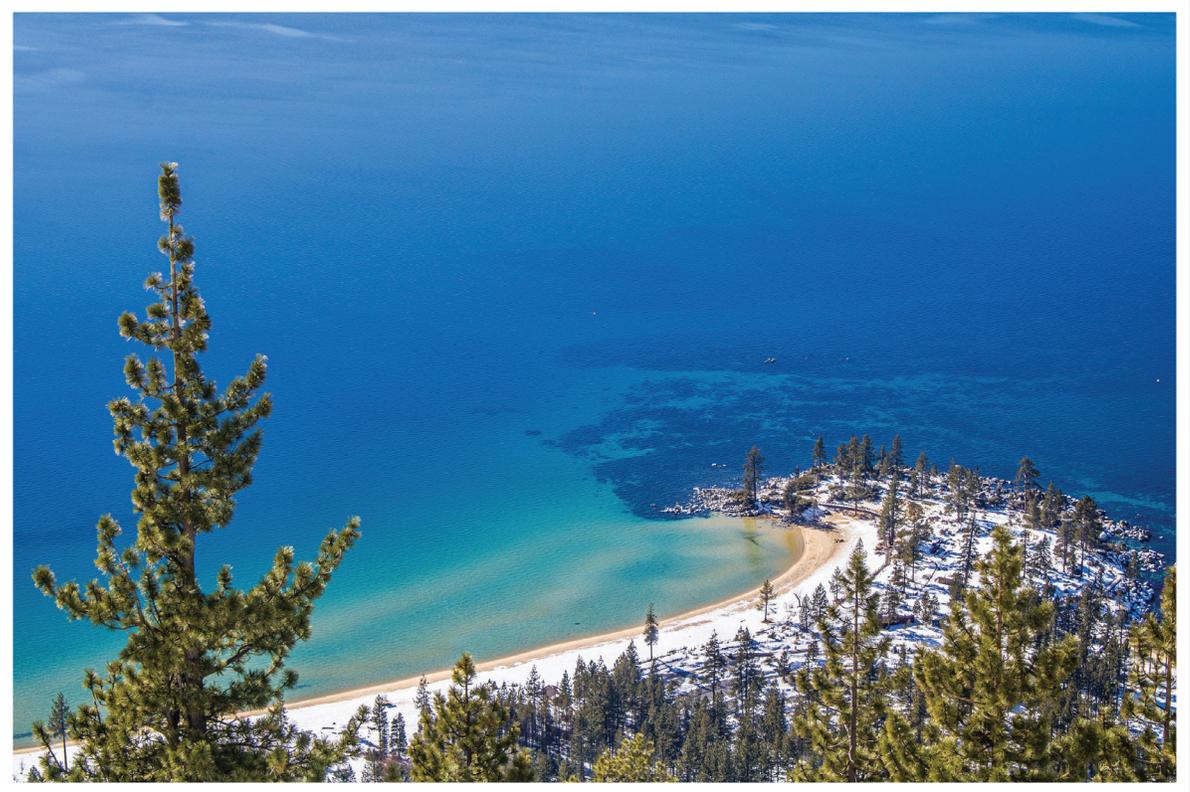
Evi Buell is a writer, musician, photographer, and office-dweller on Washington's central coast. She taught composition for 22 years in Illinois, Michigan, and Nevada. She is completing yet another round of edits on her second novel while writing a (much better) third one and is grateful to be home again in the Pacific Northwest.



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 2023 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 are deeply appreciated.



Balance is Symmetry

Medium: Photography

Hillarie Lara

FIRST PLACE IN STUDENT ART



The Hinged Man

Medium: Welding

Duncan Morris



A Spirit Less Holy

by Derek Burwell



GRIM STRUGGLED TO OPEN a burlap sack of corn kernels. His wrinkled hands ached as he tried to manage the knots of rough cord. The constant groan of the millstones drowned out the sweet sounds of his river laughing. It was an odd contraption and an odd grain. The Plainsmen had insisted on trying to grow it where it didn't belong, where they didn't belong. They had changed everything they could, without respect for what had once been there. Cows grazed now in the valley where his people had bred goats. The thin tunic he was forced to wear to appease these people's sense of decency scratched at his skin much more used to the suppleness of fur.

Grim finally found purchase, and the knots loosened. He climbed the large stacked river stones which had once been his altar. In years past they had given him the space where he could breathe with the river and join her in the lost days of perpetual joy. He sighed to see them so dusty and silent, sitting there to serve a purpose they were not born to do. Much like himself, they lay trapped in an odd house that neither allowed them to feel the river's kisses nor the sky's warm caress. Shaking his head, he slowly poured the kernels down a chute to be crushed below.

The creaking of wood announced Ambar was coming back into the mill. The giant man paused briefly in the doorway to let his eyes adjust to the dark, a sack of grain over each sculpted shoulder.

"There are shutters to let the sun in Shengru," Ambar stated, his mouth stumbling over the foreign word for the flaps of wood built into the walls.

"You should not give me that title. There are no shamans here, only Grim, and my work is easier without the sun."

Ambar set the sacks down in the corner. Plumes of dust rose across the beam of sunlight coming in through the door. He reached for Grim's bag, not needing the stone steps, and finished pouring the rest of its contents.

"You're Shengru still. To all of us. People's faith does not die so quickly."

"He is not here," Grim said more forcibly. "A Shengru is only half a man with the spirits, no man without them."

"And the Plainsmen can kill them so easily?"

Grim sat down on the edge of the stone steps, the weight of years and sadness stooping his shoulders, "It appears so."

The burlap sack ripped easily in Ambar's hands, "Then are we to become Plainsmen?" Ambar tossed the ruined sack down, spitting after it in disgust.

Grim didn't rise to his anger. Looking down, he grabbed the torn cloth, "I will say that I dropped it in the mill." Grim rubbed his wrinkled brow. "We are still the People of the Mountain, Ambar. They cannot take that away from us. I am no longer a shaman worthy of the spirits, but I still feel your anger too. My blood, who we are, demands it. The Plainsmen have changed enough, do not let your anger do the one thing they cannot."

Ambar's face turned harder than the millstone, "If they do not let us have our gods, then you should give them our demons." Ambar spat again before stomping out the door.

Grim found his hands reflexively making a warding gesture. He smoothed them and stood there, listening to the millstone grind. For as just as Ambar's passion was, the man did not know what he was truly asking of him. Ambar knew demons only as stories, Grim knew their names. Every single one of them was a terrible burden to hold in his mind.

He felt tired. Ambar's anger spoke to his inner self. It called to a similar rage that burned within him. He breathed in deeply, tamping down his emotions. The embers in his chest must not be allowed to flare up and ignite into flames. He folded the torn sack slowly with his frail hands and tucked it into his belt.

A small voice spoke out from the dark corner of the room, "Would you really say my name like that, Shengru? Would you bring me to you in such a way?"

Grim wiped at the ground corn flour clogging his eyes to clear them. The river's spirit, delicate like tiny watercress blossoms, hovered there in the dark. He could barely tell she was there. Glistening spots of light outlined her features like sunlight playing across a waterfall. The river rarely showed herself anymore. She, like all the Mountain People's gods, had gone more silent with each setting sun. Grim might not call himself a Shengru, but the spirits still talked to him, and it was their voice that made him a shaman for his people. As his connection to the spirits waned, so did their voices. Only the river now spoke to him, and that faintly.

"I would rather hear your laughter." He sighed and

looked down to hide the shame that tore at his lower lip.

"And should I also get to laugh with you, it would be my joy," she soothed, "But to say my name now, I would be gone in one breath. Would you still call me then?"

"I would call you and hold my breath for eternity, my beloved."

"I would rather hear you laugh, however short my life." Her bittersweet tone cut at Grim. "How is your heart?"

"Strong. Strong, but I am tired." Grim responded.

"Good. Be strong for us both, Shengru. I am also so very tired. You remember who we are." The glistening dimmed, and the spirit faded into the dust and shadows.

Grim stood there feeling like a kernel caught between the millstones. *How could he go on living this way if his life meant her death? What was he without her?* He did not want to admit that what he had told Ambar was a lie, but the Plainsmen were indeed changing them. They might die as People of the Mountain, but would their children?

With the day's work done, he headed out to the river to wash his face. The large water wheel squeaked with each turn. It was jarring to him as it pierced through the bubbling of the water—a discordant counterpoint to the river's song.

A small, plains boy played on the opposite shore. He threw a stick further upstream and then tried to catch it as it floated past him. Grim concentrated on washing his face. The cool water soothed and refreshed his skin.

"Hey!" the boy yelled across the river.

Grim looked up but did not answer.

"Mother says you can talk to the river." He laughed like it was a joke.

"Do you believe her?"

"No. It's just water."

"Then I don't." Grim readjusted his knees on the stony ground and went back to washing his face.

"But can you?" The boy lobbed the stick back up into the stream. "What does it say?"

"It is quiet today. Tell me, what do your gods say to you?"

The boy squinted at the setting sun, "Gods don't talk."

Grim remembered when the Plainsmen first brought their gods to the mountain, pitiful idols of straw and sticks. The Plainsmen laid fruits and other offerings at their feet. He had been disgusted to watch such offerings rot.

"How do you know them then?"

The boy scrunched his face in confusion, "What would a god have to say to us?"

Grim sighed and dried his hands on the bottom of his tunic. The boy's stick had drifted further into the middle of the river, and he started to hop from one stone to another in an attempt to get to it. Grim watched as the boy's feet grew unsteady on the mossy rocks. One foot slipped off

and splashed into the water. Recovering, the boy started to stretch out from his perch in a foolishly confident attempt to grab the stick as it floated by in the current.

"Careful boy! The river is generous, but she can also swallow you up. It is her nature."

"Why are you yelling at my son?" a Plainswoman shrieked, coming up from behind Grim.

Grim averted his gaze from the woman and mumbled, "The river is faster in the spring."

The woman loomed over Grim, her face bristling with indignation. "You're scaring him!" She beat at him with her fist, "Keep to your work. I can manage my son."

The boy flinched at his mother's tone, forgot the stick altogether, and started to jump back to the riverbank. The mother shot another indignant glance at Grim and then started towards the bridge further up. Once she had retreated, Grim stood and waved off the concerned glances from some of the other people of the mountain. Twilight darkened the sky, and he still had a walk to get home.

Grim took small comfort in watching the wooden buildings of the Plainsmen fade out into the natural stone huts of his people. While the Plainsmen claimed the land, they still did not like living so far up the mountain. Their homes, all sharp shapes and angles, did not fit among the boulders and crevices the mountain provided for protection. Grim continued up the mountain and tried not to look at the homes of his people. Despair leached into his heart after each hut he passed that stood empty. Cold fire pits and darkened doors greeted him where there had once been joy, and community. Only a few of the huts above him shown with the shifting glow of firelight. There were too few of them now. Sparks of light trying to push back so much darkness. The Plainsmen had scattered them. Many had died, but the Plainsmen had taken many more down into the lands below. His old joints ached, and the cornmeal dried his skin into raw patches, but he was always grateful to still be at work here in the mountain rather than down in the plains. His muscles ached with the day's efforts, and sleep tugged at him like heavy stones, but he forced himself to light his own fire when he finally found his way home. He then stumbled down into the thrush and fur bedding, and let sleep overtake him.

He awoke paralyzed and gasping. The room smelled of rank mildew. A damp mist covered his face, his bedding, and dripped off the stones around him. A clump of algae rose from the floor beside his head. The matted green mass materialized into thick strands of hair that flowed out across the floor like the surface of a stagnant pond. The top of a woman's face pushed up from beneath that hair, stopping once her nose broke the surface of the false pond. Her eyes, squirming pits of dragonfly larva, peered over the bedding at Grim.

“Would you say my name? Would you give to these intruders my laughter?”

Grim shuddered at the gurgled and fetid voice of his beloved river. “I am too weak. Your strength would not last long in these old bones.”

“I only require a vessel. Cast my name to anyone.”

“You would destroy us.” Grim’s paralyzed body knotted with revulsion, like water currents that flowed against their nature upstream.

“You are destroyed,” the spirit said coldly. “I am the only strength left to you. Do you not love me enough to let me flow?”

“I... I have...” Grim fought back tears.

“Give me to these people. Say my name, Shengru, and I will overflow my banks. We will laugh as the flesh bloats from their bones in my waters. The pestilence from their rot will carry down into the plains and fester in the hearts of all that drink from the sacrament of my joy.”

“If I release you like this, if I say your shadowed name, will that save our people?”

“No, but you will be able to die as what you are. This is my mercy.”

Grim shook with tremors, and he lurched with the sensation of falling. With a gasp, he sat up in the darkness of his hut. He ran a hand across the hard-packed dirt of the floor. It was dry. The air was chilled with the depth of night right before dawn. The fire pit had been smothered.

His eyes stung, but he knew better than try and return to sleep. He started a small fire and pulled a skin up over his shoulders, enjoying the warmth. He started the cycle of breathing taught to him by the Shengru of his youth. The cycle calmed him and let him focus on the dark things that tried to crawl around in his chest. His mentor’s memory always came to him after such episodes. It was the most important lesson taught to all Shengru. *When a man first hears the name of his god, he is forever bound to the responsibility of its shadow.* Walking the path of a shaman demanded a careful knowledge and balancing of one’s own heart. To deny the god’s shadow was naive, but to let its darkness control your heart, was to be consumed in disaster.

Slowly, so very slowly, he tried to breathe the anger, despair, and hurt that roiled in his chest to quiet murmurs. The spirits were greater things than men were meant to, or could, know. That should always be on the mind of a wise Shengru when they invited them to the earth with their tongues. It always shook him to see the dark reflection of the river spirit, to know that with a slight change in the emphasis of her name that he could call the demon, and not the god, into being.

Sunlight crept slowly into his home, and his reluctance would not lessen the day’s work. He pulled on his tunic

and shuffled outside. The morning rays warmed his back, but walking among the others of his people who joined him on the path down to the mill warmed his heart. Ambar fell in beside him. The man kept his silence but offered strips of dried meat as they walked. Grim took the food gratefully and steadied himself occasionally on the man’s arm as they descended. He did not know the future of his people. Perhaps in a generation or two, they would be no more. Perhaps they would hide among the Plainsmen, so similar that they could no longer tell themselves apart. Feeling the strength in Ambar also gave his tired soul strength. He did not know the future of his people, but that morning he walked proudly among them.

Grim walked over to the river and cupped some of the water in his hand before heading to the mill. The millstone’s continual grating welcomed him as he stepped into the wooden building. The sacks of dried corn kernels waited silently in the corner. He sprinkled the water across the stone steps. He and the river could use comfort this morning. He listened for a moment but could only hear the grind of the wheel. With a sigh, he walked over to the sacks of grain and started his work.

The afternoon heat made the mill stuffy, and Grim’s sweat mixed with the cornmeal on his skin, making muddy tracks down his neck and brow. Undaunted, he continued to scoop the milled corn into a bag for storage. A woman’s cry broke his concentration.

“Help! Help! My baby!”

Grim dropped the sack in an explosion of powder and rushed as best he could to the door. Outside, people clustered around the river bank looking down at the ground. The woman, who Grim recognized from the day before, tore at the tunics of anyone close to her flailing arms.

“My son! Someone help!” She continued to scream despite multiple other women trying to calm her down.

Grim shuffled over to the crowd and pushed through. The woman’s boy, legs still submerged in the water, lay there. His face was pallid, and even to Grim’s poor eyesight, his chest did not move. He dropped to his knees beside the boy and pushed the hands back from the men who were dragging him out of the water. Surprisingly, they let him. Grim picked up the boy’s head in his gnarled hands. Water dribbled out from the boy’s small mouth. The boy needed to get the water out of his lungs, to breathe again—just one breath. Grim could give him that. *Would he give him that?*

The shouts and questions that clattered above him like swarming insects faded out. His heart flashed ice and ashes. Life still lingered in the boy. The child’s connection with the river thrummed through his slight frame. With a word, Grim could cast the river’s shadow into this

vessel. The image of those few bright spots glowing in the mountain homes of his people amid the darkness flashed across his mind. He looked away from the boy's blue face and caught his reflection in the water's edge. How tired and old he looked. The dust from the mill deepened all of his wrinkles, and sadness swam in his rheumy eyes. *What sort of a man was he? What was he now?* Did he say the

spirit's name lightly and give this boy his beloved river's final breath, or did he say it darkly and turn this boy into the instrument of his final vengeance?

How he longed to laugh again with his beloved.

Grim looked once more down at the boy, and he said the river's name.



Nature is Balance by Ava Preslan Aldridge

We rise and we fall
Breath is what connects us all
Balanced we all are





Balanced Breeze

Medium: Digital Photography

Angie de Braga

The Universal Balance of Life

by Ashley Maden

I witnessed a murder today, although not
an illegal one.
A tiny precious life was swept away in the
blink of an instant,
The reminder that life fades in and out
without warning.

One moment you're talking to someone,
and the next you can only preserve the memories
made, robbed of future hope to make more.

Today is the birthday of one of the best people
I've ever known,
And she won't be here to join in on a celebration.
This will be the first birthday of hers that she
won't be physically here for.

Life is incredibly fleeting and uncertain.
We have limited time, energy and ability to do
the things we want before we're ripped away
from this physical existence.

This past year I have found simple joy in feeding
the birds in my front yard,
I can sit and work during the day
While watching them fly and play

Recently there has been a beautiful big
hawk around,
I've marveled at this gorgeous creature.
A few days ago the hawk visited again
and I was excited,
until I learned the truth.

This large, beautiful hawk was visiting my yard
not for the bird food I had put out,
But for all the tiny birds I had attracted by
putting out the birdseed.
I realized, to my own horror, that this hawk was
hunting the birds I was feeding.
Whenever the hawk visited, the other birds all
disappeared and got quiet.

Then I saw the hawk going after the birds as
they scurried.

I ran outside and scared it away a
couple of times,
I didn't want it to get one of my
new bird friends.

Today was the last day of teaching a 6-week
journaling workshop,
the very first workshop series I designed, taught
and organized.
I came home filled with so much joy and
gratitude for the ladies who showed up to class
every week.
I made seven new journaling friends to share
journaling and art with,
We've been connecting and sharing about life,
art and goals for the future,
While creating a supportive environment of
learning, wisdom and respectful sharing.

I have been so proud of everyone in class,
Three generations spanned across seven
amazing ladies, In the same room talking
about life and art.
I could not have asked for a better
group of people,
And it's bittersweet that today was the last
day of that series.

This fleeting life is so precious and we never
know when one moment could be our last here,
There's infinite opportunity for creating joy and
helping others in this life we've been given.
Sometimes it can be so easy to complain about
the things we don't have,
wish things were better or living from fear

But in the blink of an eye we could be gone,
leaving behind all the good and bad.

Today in class we reflected on the past
six weeks,
We were missing one who went to help welcome
her new grandbaby into the world.
We talked about money, goals, success,
family and everything in between,

No one's life or journaling journey is going to look the same,

One chapter after another as we learn and go through the pages and chapters of life.

Ebb and flow,
High and low,
Give and take.

The universe and life maintain a balance of energy.

So today when I saw out of the corner of my eye, one of those sweet little birds get snatched by the hawk,
I ran out to try to see if there was anything I could do,

But the hawk flew away, victim in tow.
A sweet little bird who didn't even know,
That today was its last day here.

The body that it used,
It probably didn't realize how precious it was,
But the hawk knew all too well.

I listened to its sweet little bird family sing songs of distress and sorrow,
To the hawk that bird was just lunch,
But birds travel together and eat together in groups,
They have a way of communicating to protect the group when danger is near,
While also bickering and fighting for resources,
It's what families and communities do.

Sometimes there is no preventing the inevitable.
For we are all temporary here
And life has a way of maintaining balance.

Sometimes you're the ebb,
Sometimes the flow,
One day you come in,
And another you go.

We have one precious life that we've been given,
A blank canvas with which to create a masterpiece.
Mistakes are a part of the story,
It's what you make of it that matters.

We never know what the next moment holds,
nothing is promised.

This past year has been one of doing things scared,
Teaching my first journaling class workshop,
A new job,
A local election,
A life I could have never imagined.
It hasn't been easy,
And some days are definitely overwhelming.
But I keep holding the truth that if I do my best,
things will work out the way they are supposed to.

If I get snatched from this life in the most inconvenient time,
I want to know that I did my best,

So far I can say that with peace,

And every day I will do my best to pass along wisdom I've found,
Learn from others who have amazing stories to share,
And treat people with kindness and respect.

Some days its okay to just be sad,
Feeling the feelings,
Grieving the past,
Remembering what was lost,
Reflecting in gratitude for all we've been given in this life.

The universe always finds a way to maintain balance.



Sagebrush Woman by Loretta Sutliff

She stands at a distance. Granite glacier-carved mountains towering behind.

Spring air carves a crisp outline bathed in morning sunlight.

Her bones are silver, twisted, knotted and gnarled. Tiny gray green leaves feather each limb in stubborn repose.

Her smell is fresh washed and dusty. Rocks cradle the roots of generations of pathways, solid and resistant.

Weathering in high desert cold, baking in blazing heat.

A blanket of fresh snow is seeping into her feet.

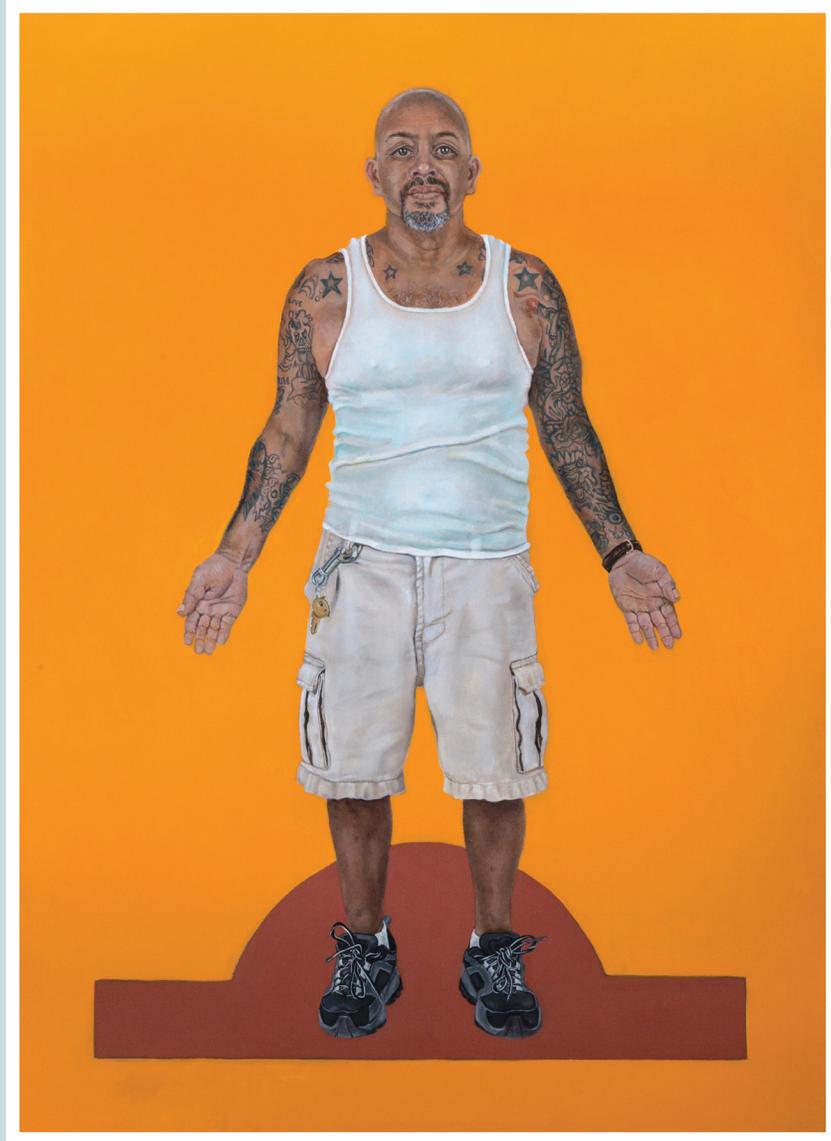
Warmed by reaching rays, releasing the promise of longer days.

The sky is a stretch of impossible blue.

Velvet nights await, dotted by tiny stars. Distant planets, spinning and spinning with hints of spectacular explosion.

The day belongs to undying desert, and her sentinel sister, sagebrush.





P2P No. 40073

Medium: Oil on Canvas 36" x 36"

Glynn Cartledge



Bolo Toad

Medium: Sterling Silver, Jasper, Turquoise, Opal, Knitted Silver-Wire Cord

Sidnie Miller





Bluebird on Barbed Wire

Medium: Digital Photography

Angela Hagfeldt

SECOND PLACE IN STUDENT ART



Balance in Representation

Medium: Acrylic on Canvas

Dalyla Gaytan



The Dissenters

by Dori Andrepont



HE'D ALWAYS KNOWN IT WAS A RISK. That was Rigby's first thought when the transport finished slamming to a stop. For a moment, there was no sound, and he wondered if it was an unscheduled stop. If so, he might make it. Out of habit, he paused the page on his reader.

The interior door, the one he had hand-locked, slid to the side, revealing a darkened center aisle. His small bit of hope died. He felt the loss immediately. The slight smell of what he thought was melting plastic added to his conviction.

He dropped the reader into a pocket and patted himself down just to be sure he had everything before putting on his parka and backpack. He could survive several days with the supplies in his clothing, particularly the coat. If they let him keep it. If they didn't kill the passengers immediately. *Shit.*

Okay, so what did he know? By time of travel, they were in mountainous northern Nevada, so the transport tunnel could be at the surface, elevated or deep underground. No matter the depth, it is the first day of winter. Not good survival weather, even if he could escape. *Shit. Shit. Shit.*

"Hey! I thought only we could open the door!" a passenger exclaimed querulously.

"Are you brain-damaged? Shut up," was the whispered response from another passenger. Rigby agreed.

"Exit your cubicles and slowly move into the center aisle. Show me your empty hands." The business-like voice was female. His mind immediately went to a movie where the robber was dressed in a tight black dress and thigh-high blood-red boots. In the movie, however, there was enough light to see that intriguing outfit.

"I can't see," the first passenger was complaining again. Well, at least he knew who'd be killed first.

The response was the highest setting of lights, making it so bright that it was still nearly impossible to see.

"Move. Now."

Rigby stepped into the aisle, carefully and slowly.

His eyes began to adjust. There were just five passengers – four men and one woman. And one robber. Dressed in full hazmat. All he could see of her was dark full eyebrows over her equally dark eyes. Well, that was one movie to write off.

"I'm assuming you're all couriers, traveling as you are this early Winter Solstice morning," she began.

"I'm not a courier. I'm a business executive." The first passenger seemed to have problems adjusting to the idea of shutting up.

"Name?"

"Gabriel Mechlow."

The robber stepped forward and glanced in his cubicle. She started writing with a pencil on an honest-to-god pad of paper.

"Gabe. I'm Amelia. I can call you, Gabe, right? And, Gabe, I know no one travels solo in a personal cubicle surrounded by crates unless they are a courier. So, I'm thinking you're a mule. One taking business from legitimate couriers. You there," she continued, pointing at another courier with her pencil, "what's your name and insurance amount?"

"Donovan Lingle. Million five, ma'am." Rigby approved. His was about the same. The higher the insurance you carried on your cargo, the higher value cargo you transported with the corresponding higher pay.

"And what happens now, Donovan?"

"The policy is paid to the company."

"Who pays for that policy?" Amelia asked, pointing at the woman.

"Isabella Jones-Rossi. Ma'am, I pay..."

Mr. Mechlow interrupted her. "You pay? Why?" proving that he knew nothing whatsoever about being a courier. Rigby wondered what was in his crates. "And why are you calling her ma'am? She's a goddamned thief! A disease-carrying Dissenter!"

Amelia scratched ineffectively at her neck for a second before seemingly remembering the hazmat suit. "Does anyone have the time?"

Everyone but Mechlow glanced at their comm units, and a couple of them offered "Four twelve."

Amelia looked his way, raising both eyebrows questioningly. "Rigby Williams, ma'am."

"Really?" she asked, as if surprised. Why should his name trigger that reaction?

"That's what my birth records indicate," he answered, keeping his tone even.

She looked at him for a couple of unsettling seconds. "Last, but not least..." she said to the final passenger. Whoever he was, it had to be early in his career as a courier, by his long hair, if nothing else. A courier stayed with his cargo until final scan and hand-off. Inevitable delays meant expenses and buying extra water at transient rates to wash long hair ate into profits. He, Isabella, and Donovan all were shaved in the back and had just enough hair in the front to be distinguished from city guards or military. Isabella's was dyed in a tiger pattern, Donovan's was straight and bleached, and his own was brown with a wave.

"Andrew Worthsome... ma'am. Andy," he added in a pronounced manner. She wrote it down, before turning back to Mechlow.

"Gabe, in two minutes, your government will declare you dead and release your assets. If you make it back to your city, and I've got to stress the if, you will now be a resident of Z housing. You know, where they keep the prisoners, and the ones that no drugs or therapy can help fit in to society."

Mechlow's face slid into fear before anger reasserted itself. He looked at the other passengers. "We can take her."

Isabella made an irritated sound. "There are at least a dozen other people in on this and they have complete control over this transport. How do you think the doors opened? To the city-world, this transport, our cargo, and all of us just disappeared. We're gone."

"And speaking of cargo, start unloading. Pass everything to this end of the transport," Amelia ordered.

"No!" Mechlow responded. Whatever Mechlow was carrying must be highly valuable. Or illegal. Or both. Amelia paused before turning her head slightly to talk to someone on her comm unit. Two more hazmat-wearing robbers appeared.

"Walk him," Amelia commanded. Rigby felt some shock. The movies had gotten something right, and it had to be walking. The sentence of being dumped in the middle of nowhere with nothing. But they didn't take his coat. Rigby ran through a mental checklist of supplies he had on him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Isabella lightly touch the side seam of her own coat.

The two started forward purposefully, grabbing Mechlow by the arms who finally seemed to suddenly realize his own fate. "No, no, no! I'll cooperate, I'll cooperate!"

Amelia shook her head, and Mechlow was gone, pushed through the back access. More robbers entered, waiting for orders.

"Unload," Amelia spoke quietly, so softly that Rigby could now hear sounds from the tunnel.

They were finishing when an update flashed on everyone's comm units. "The government has reported a transport loss in northern Nevada. It departed the upper California terminal at 3:20am and was scheduled to arrive at the Chicago hub at 7:47 this morning. It was a single, unlinked 32 unit with five souls on board. Involved parties have been notified. It was New Year's 2064, nearly 11 years ago, when the last transport in that area was lost with 21 souls. Transport schedules will be delayed 75 minutes today with the 11:10pm trip canceled for time recovery."

They neglected to mention that the '64 transport was lost at the same time, nearly to the minute. Rigby remembered. He'd been the one receiving the notification.

Andy moved as if to message someone before stopping himself. Their locators and outgoing message access had to have been deactivated.

One random thought came to Rigby. "Does anyone else find it ironic that they refer to us as souls on a designated non-religious holy day?"

"Perhaps everyone gets souls when they're dead," Isabella responded. "My Nonna would approve."

Suddenly, natural light filled the back access and the tunnel beyond. The covering was gone.

"Out," was the next edict. Rigby followed the others, passing through the back access, up the ladder, and out onto the land. Despite the bitter cold and the darkness, he could feel the vast emptiness. The passengers were herded to the side, as their transport was lifted by a crane to be butted up against another one. Only loading stations had such cranes. And the energy to make them work.

"Get inside," Amelia ordered, and they moved.

"You'll be quarantined here for three days. There's heat and food. Use the showers, please. The smell is incredibly difficult to get out of the transport, otherwise. It lingers," she said as she exited. The sound of the door being sealed followed.

The four of them stood listening and attempting to identify the noises. The reattachment of the tunnel covering? The crane moving away? Either way, their transport was left undisturbed.

Isabella finally exclaimed, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" Rigby glanced at her questioningly. "A family thing. That is the worst swearing to my Nonna. Saved for special occasions."

"Slaves it is then," Donovan offered. It was voiced with a flicker of a grin as if he enjoyed mentioning the worst-case scenario.

"You don't know that," Andy countered immediately. "We could still escape and walk home."

"It would be at least three weeks of walking," Donovan responded.

"Then there's weather, mountains, shelter, animals, and lack of directions. It shouldn't be a problem. I mean, it worked out fine for the Donner party, right?" Rigby contributed.

"Who were they? A field crew? Anyway, can't we follow the tunnel?" Andy asked.

"How long have you been a courier?" Rigby felt compelled to ask at his naivensess.

"This was my second trip. You?"

Rigby, by nature, hesitated to disclose personal information, but what did it matter now? "Nearly 10 years."

"Wow! I didn't know anyone did it for that long."

Yeah, it hadn't been his plan either. He'd been a full-time student when he cut back the number of classes and started taking courier runs. In the intervening years, he'd finished two degrees and paid off his housing, all with the plan of taking a city-bound position. He just... hadn't.

"I saw that movie! *Long Walk Home*, right? With that sex scene on top of the elevated tunnel covering?" Isabella asked. "I haven't seen that in such a long time. Such a crappy movie. I wish I had it on download."

"I do, actually," Andy responded with a grin.

"Really?"

"We could... watch it together. If you'd..."

"Sure! Let's go," was her response.

Well, that pairing was quick. He couldn't blame them, and it wasn't like three days required a high level of emotional or mental compatibility.

"At least that will keep him busy. Them," Donovan corrected. Rigby frowned momentarily, but Donovan continued blandly, "Breakfast?"

The attached transport was a hodge-podge. The shower appeared to be newer with full water controls. The food prep sink was so old that the faucet had handles, which took him a moment. He stuck a cup under, fiddled with the handles to start it, but when he pulled his cup away it didn't turn off. He hastily set down the cup and pushed the handles to their original position, briefly wondering how much water had been lost.

"Not our water," Donovan commented with a shrug.

Still, it was water.

Rigby took a sip to taste, and then drank deeply of the rest.

"That good?" questioned Donovan, grabbing for a cup.

"I've only had D-level water a couple times, but I swear this is better," Rigby answered.

Donovan downed a cup. "This has to be at least a B."

They both slowly drank a second cup. Rigby found himself smiling. At the superb water. At the three-day reprieve. At not being walked like Mechlow.

There was one more notable item in the transport, and that was a north-facing window next to a makeshift table. The cut-out in the side of the transport was rough, as were the welds to hold the window in place. The metal bars over the windows looked like they had once been part of a fence.

Despite all of that, it kept the men sitting there just to watch the sky lighten at daybreak. It revealed pagonip-covered desert bushes in the foreground and snow-covered foothills and mountains in the distance, and not a person or a structure in sight.

"I never thought to see something like this. In person," Donovan offered, surprisingly softly.

"Me either."

Rigby eventually pulled himself away to return to his cubicle. Despite mocking Andy's idea, he wanted to plan a route to Salt Lake City. It was far closer than home. Unfortunately, other thoughts kept intruding. He'd spent years deliberately not thinking about the disappearance of the '64 transport, or what his uncle had gone through. Now he couldn't stop. Perhaps Uncle Will had escaped – he had always been prepared to be stranded. It was from him that Rigby learned about lining his clothes with everything from food packets to money to water purification tabs. But Uncle Will been a field engineer, and they worked in teams. Teams that relied on each other.

He thought about his fellow passengers. Isabella seemed okay and he suspected she would be fierce in a fight. Andy would add more work than value and some instinct told him not to trust Donovan. He chased these thoughts all day, and finally gave up and stretched out awkwardly on the transport seats to sleep. The next morning, he had showered, shaved, eaten, and was back at the window at sunrise when sounds of an argument broke his peace.

"This is my job, you realize that, don't you?" Isabella demanded. Andy followed and Donovan was immediately behind him. Andy shrugged.

"Do you know who he is? 'Andy Worthsome' is actually Anders J. Fellsom, and I..." Isabella left the rest of the sentence unsaid.

Rigby's eyes narrowed. A Fellsom, a B-level family dynasty member, working as a courier?

"Why?" Rigby asked. Andy pulled himself up a bit and had the audacity to flip his hair back. Gone was his look of innocence. Donovan said nothing but seemed tense.

"We spend far too much on couriers. They need to be replaced with bots," he snipped with some condescension.

"Well, that's an old argument," Rigby responded in careful tones. "But bots can't be insured for transport. You

realize that, right? And why? Because they can always be hacked. Always.”

“Not our new ones! See, I was just sent to get any little, grimy inside details. You know. Before we take over and kill off the trade,” he gave them a small, self-satisfied smile at his ruse. Isabella punched him in the face. Donovan made as if to move but stopped himself.

“You’re an asshole. No. You’re a…” Isabella began but was interrupted by noises at the other end of the first transport. Rigby stood and slid past the three of them to get back to his cubicle.

He barely finished fastening his parka when he heard the back panel open. What happened to the three-day quarantine?

“Move! Into the truck. Now!” Amelia’s tone was different today. Stressed. He stepped into the aisle.

She wasn’t wearing hazmat today. She could have pulled off the black dress and red boots nicely, he randomly thought as they followed her into the morning cold. To the right, seven or eight trucks were coming at them full speed.

“Hurry!” For a second, Rigby considered that this could be his moment to escape before dismissing the thought. It wasn’t as if he could outrun the trucks. He and Isabella did as she ordered, climbing into the truck bed after her.

“No,” stated Donovan, pulling out a pistol and pointing it at them. “Anders and I will be going with them.” He nodded his head at the trucks.

“What?” came from Isabella.

The pieces came together. “Donovan is Fellsom Security.”

“Go!” Amelia called to the driver, who obliged by flooring it. Amelia motioned for them to move in together close to the cab. He complied. Anything to lessen the wind chill.

Isabella made a shivering sound. “Couldn’t they have taken us with them?”

Weapons sounded, drawing their attention back to the Fellsom trucks. Donovan fell to the ground first, and Anders dropped on top of him.

“Oh, God,” Isabella cried. “Why would they kill them?”

“They need effective optics for the war,” Amelia answered, frowning.

What war? And why would Fellsom security kill Anders?

They made a hard left and a rough stop behind a low hill. It wasn’t high enough to completely hide the truck and not nearly far enough away from the Fellsom goons, in his mind.

The driver hopped out and the thoughts falling over each other in Rigby’s mind stopped flat. Uncle Will. His hair was longer with some grey, and he wore glasses, but

it was him grinning at Rigby and saying, “Get inside the truck, Rigs!”

Amelia climbed in the back seat first, and the front passenger got out for Isabella to take his seat. He climbed in the back seat and folded open a display to show camera angles of the tunnel. The man in the center front did the same.

At first, it was painfully hot, and Rigby unclasped his coat, but a few minutes later it wasn’t warm enough. Uncle Will turned to look at him, still grinning.

“Uncle Will,” Rigby began and stopped to clear his throat. That was as far as he got. He couldn’t form any clear thoughts, let alone questions.

“Rigby,” his uncle answered. “Good to see you! Let me just start this conversation by saying that I’m sorry to have left you.”

“Did you have a choice?”

Uncle Will didn’t answer that but instead offered, “This is Amelia, Samuel, and Duncan, my wife’s cousins.” Wife? Rigby looked at the three. They certainly had the same hair, light brown eyes, slashed dark eyebrows and varying levels of freckles to prove a familial relationship.

“Okay. Family reunion. Got it,” Isabella interrupted. “What the hell is going on? Start at the beginning.”

Samuel answered her while keeping his eyes on the screen, intently watching the Fellsom goons loading up the two bodies while others went to the tunnel. “In 2030, the government announced their 20-year plan to cut off resources to anyone not living in a designated city, and they began building cargo and human transport tunnels to connect the cities. In 2037, when the AIs released diseases across the globe…”

“It wasn’t the AIs, it was the doomsday nihilists manipulating them,” Uncle Will’s defense of the computers took Rigby back to his teenage years and their discussions on this topic.

“Stop dumbing this down,” Isabella demanded.

“Survivors moved to the cities nearly 13 years ahead of schedule, so they could seal themselves off,” Samuel continued, pedantically. “The countryside was left to the holdouts, the Dissenters, as you call us, and the bots to take care of goods production. At the same time, worldwide restrictions were placed on existing computers and future computer development. For the most part, it worked. Nearly 63% of humanity was saved.”

“Fast forward, dirt dweller,” was Isabella’s response. Samuel stopped to glance at her, obviously not understanding the reference.

It was Amelia who took over. “People wanted specialized goods. Bots were limited by restrictions in their ability to provide them, so we began trading goods with the government. The government resold the goods

while imposing a very high tax rate, so it helped everyone. Including you. Couriers carry a lot of our goods.”

“The government supplies you with resources?” Rigby asked.

“Of course.” Oddly, in this moment, he believed it.

“So why does anyone care?” Isabella questioned. “We live our lives, you live yours. It works.”

“It looks like they’re placing charges in the tunnel,” Samuel noted. They all watched the screens. One guard was gesturing to the east. Samuel redirected the camera, and they could see more vehicles approaching.

“That’s military,” Amelia stated.

“Thank God,” someone muttered.

“Seriously, what is worth going to war for? What do you produce?” Rigby asked her.

“Our town primarily produces vanilla. Growing it requires complete environmental control and a lot of work outside the scope of bots. Even after its harvested, the beans must be cooked, sweated, dried, and finally, cured. But it represents one market that the rich want to control.”

“Vanilla,” he repeated. A war for control of the vanilla production?

“There are thousands of towns producing specialized and luxury goods,” she responded.

“They’re coming!”

Rigby glanced at the screen. Two of the Fellsom trucks were heading full speed to their hill. Everyone got out of the truck quickly. Uncle Will, the brothers, and Amelia pulled out rifles and handguns.

“Can you shoot?” she asked him and Isabella.

“Only low-energy shockers are permitted for couriers. So, no,” Isabella responded with some sarcasm.

They got out of the truck, and Duncan gave them a quick lesson. As they lay down on the rocky, snow-covered ground, weapons pointed at the trucks, Rigby gave a quick thought to all the years he trained in hand-to-hand defense. He always thought someone would take him on for his cargo. So, of course he was here, defending his life with an antiquated rifle. At a distance.

“Hold off until they’re closer!” someone called. Rigby waited. A small explosion hit the ground in front of him, painfully spraying him with dirt, rocks, and snow.

“Grenade launcher!” someone yelled.

He’d decided they were close enough and began firing. As if in response, there was an explosion at the tunnel.

The trucks immediately turned west. Rigby frowned briefly. It appeared Fellsom wasn’t there to kill them, just to keep them from the tunnels. One of the trucks rolled to a stop, and the moribund driver pushed out. He watched him fall in a lump. A moment later, the truck was getting back up to speed. Rigby had always wondered how he’d react if he intentionally caused someone’s death. He took a quick

moral inventory, and decided he had no problem killing mercenaries launching grenades at him.

As they watched, the Fellsom trucks fled with three of the military vehicles in pursuit. The fourth military vehicle stopped at the burning tunnel.

“Let’s get in the truck,” Duncan suggested, and suddenly Rigby felt the bone-chillingly cold. “It could be a while.”

They settled back in the same seats, passing around antibacterial sheets and cleaning off cuts. Duncan seemed to be injured the worst, with a pebble embedded in his cheek that Isabella dug out and threw out the window. Rigby became aware of the odor of not only the antibacterial but of six people on the downside of an adrenaline rush underscored by what he thought was the smell of fresh-turned soil.

“A question. Who’s going to try to kill us next?” Isabella asked. No one responded, but Rigby had to agree with her. This could be his last chance for answers, and he was going to get them.

“How did you end up here, Uncle Will? Specifically.”

Uncle Will shifted in his seat to look back at him. “When demand continued to grow, the towns let the government know that they not only needed more bots to keep up with demand, but also permanent engineers.”

Wait.

God, he was slow today. The government orchestrated the ’64 transport disappearance? It was a cover to supply the Dissenters? Somehow, at this point, he had no problem believing it. It wasn’t just Uncle Will who had gone missing, it was his entire team with their families who were supposedly combining work with a New Year’s celebration. In retrospect, it seemed highly contrived. He’d never questioned it. Not once.

“Why didn’t you ask me to go?”

There was a pause. He found his hand covered by Amelia’s.

“I did,” Uncle Will responded and his voice came close to cracking.

Suddenly, he was back in time, right before the transport went missing. He’d had what he thought was the flu and his brain was fuzzier than he could ever remember. Amnesia drugs.

“I said no.”

Given the circumstances, and the drugs, of course, it wasn’t surprising that he hadn’t remembered anything. Yet, he felt as if he should have. Was that his subconscious purpose in becoming a courier, and his reluctance to give it up?

There was another long pause before Amelia contributed, “You were in college, seriously dating a girl, and starring in some athletic show. He understood. You had your own life.”

"I ran track," he corrected before returning to silence. The girl, who had seemed so integral to his life at the time, had given up on their potential future when he started taking courier runs.

"I got the government to agree to extra personal insurance and prepaid education credits for your primary degree," Uncle Will offered.

This, too, was news. He'd assumed it all been in place for years in advance of his disappearance.

Amelia added to the conversation. "So, what did you do? Become a muscle-bound courier?"

"It pays very well. I live in G housing," he offered, distracted by his thoughts.

"Wow, that gets you what? Multi-filtered water, 400 square feet, and easy tram access?"

She was well-informed too, but wrong on one point. "I have 465 square feet."

"Oh wow! I'm so impressed." He had to smile at her sarcasm, and she smiled back.

"So, tell me about Fellsom," he asked.

Her smile dropped. "Fellsom Industries has sold luxury goods for years. If we sold it for a dime, the government taxed it a nickel, and Fellsom would sell it for thirty cents. That got the Fellsom family to B housing, but James Fellsom wants A. He wants to control production for that first dime. He's willing to kill us to do it, but Mrs. Fellsom, who controls the bulk of their wealth, isn't. By sacrificing her youngest son..."

"He'd get her to agree to killing the evil Dissenters."

"He isn't alone in that. There will be war. When we got word of their plan to stop your transport at the third station from here, we stopped it first. We thought if we returned Anders, it would build some good will."

"Then why did you leave us in the transport?"

"We lost people to a virus that your uncle's team carried. Quarantine wasn't optional. We thought we'd have more time."

"But I'm here," he questioned her logic.

"Me, too," Isabella stated.

"And do you see other people? As Will's family, we volunteered to take the risk, and we'll be isolated," Amelia answered.

"Where's your wife?" he asked his uncle. He was having a hard time visualizing Uncle Will married.

"Meredith's with the girls. We have twins. Your cousins."

Cousins? Two of them? He'd have think about that later.

"Okay, what about the government?" he asked.

Duncan joined the conversation. "That's tricky. How do they fight in a war protecting a group of people and production that they aren't supposed to be supporting?"

"By giving you weapons but little support," he speculated.

"Just a courier?" Amelia responded, and now her eyebrows were raised. He gave her a smile.

Samuel interjected, "They're coming."

Isabella sighed tiredly. "Again?"

"It's the military."

They all got out of the truck one more time. He wanted to believe they were coming in peace, but recent experience taught him to be leery of vehicles driving towards him at high rates of speed. In one morning, he went from never handling a gun to wishing he had it back in his hand.

The truck stopped and a woman in winter fatigues got out.

"Hey, there! Anyone injured?"

Uncle Will answered. "Nothing serious, Major. We'll all be fine."

"We'll take care of the fire, the bodies," the Major stated. "They took Fellsom's body, of course. We suspect they got coded footage of the explosion, which is what they needed."

"Why?" Rigby asked.

"To frame you for killing Anders and disrupting transport. Why don't you know that?"

Amelia stepped forward. "These two were passengers. There were five. Gabriel Mechlow should still be heading west near the tunnel. We suspect he had Fellsom crates, but we haven't broken through the security yet. Also, he was obnoxious, so there was that," and no one disagreed. "Two were Fellsom and Lingle, Fellsom's guard. These are the last two. Without consent."

The major nodded. "As passengers removed without your consent, you have options. One, you can take an amnesia drug and be returned to your city. Your assets will be returned, and your life will continue as before."

Rigby had never heard so much as a whisper of such a thing. How was it possible that this was so commonplace as to have policies and procedures in place?

"Two," the major continued, "if you can make a sustainable contribution to a non-city community, you can stay. You will be permanently forbidden, by force, if required, contact with any city resident in any capacity. You have two weeks..."

Isabella stepped forward, stopping the major by raising one hand. "Drugs. I'll take the drugs. I have a cat and a home. I have friends. Clothes. Reliable lovers. Downloads. Fine alcohol. Well, and family."

The major pointed her to the truck, and she left without glancing back. Next the major looked at Rigby.

He looked at Uncle Will before allowing his gaze to shift to Amelia. She raised a questioning eyebrow. He glanced at his comm unit. It had been less than 31 hours

since his transport had been stopped. Was he honestly willing to abandon everything he knew?

“The water is quite good here,” he commented, looking as if it were a high-level debate point.

“The best,” Uncle Will contributed.

Amelia looked mildly irritated and clamped her lips shut.

“I’m staying,” he answered with a grin.



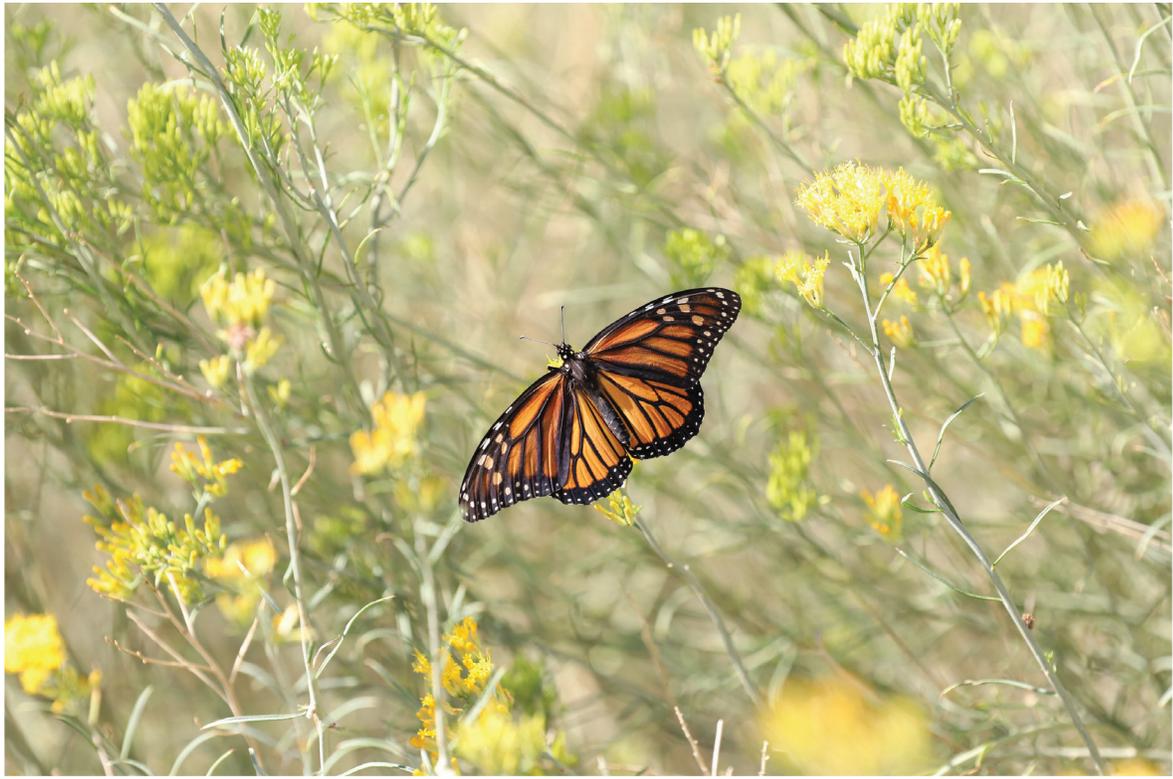
Icarus Falls by Gabriella McAnany

My hands, they protect the flames that cause you to suffer.
I’m trying my best to reclaim what was once lost.
My wings broken in two,
If only I was capable of understanding what you knew.

My blood stained teeth, and blood shot eyes will never go away.
Do you only see me as a lavish prize
I’m lost in the labyrinth of my low ambiguous mind
This burning sensation that will never respite.
For my wings and the sun will be forever intertwined.

I am burning in the hell you call a sun
My actions can never be undone
I apologized yet you never listen
You have watched me burn in agony
As I crash to this earth never able to return.





Balanced Wings

Medium: Digital Photography

Angela Hagfeldt



SECOND PLACE IN STUDENT WRITING

Juggling by Shauna Dagna

The weight I carry is heavy.
I am told to stop trying to carry so much,
But I cannot put anything down.
It is all so important; nothing can be left behind.
Family, Work, and School.

It's all to provide a better life for my kids.
It is a constant struggle for balance because I carry the weight alone.
Some days are worse than others.
But I am learning, I think.

Today, I work less to make time for school.
Tomorrow, I won't work or school to spend time with my kids.
The next day, the kids get shuffled to the side.
They play on devices for hours while I do schoolwork; They're happy with this arrangement.

I should be proud of my hard work, but all I feel is guilt.
I feel guilty for being unavailable to them.
I'm scared they will resent me for not having quality time with them,
But I'm doing this all for them.
Not sure if I am even balancing. It feels more like juggling.
I am just trying to make it to the finish line without dropping any balls.



Content by Wyatt Baumeister

In the confines of life, stretching from
birth to death,

I am what is lost.

I am what the spotlight forgets, what the eyes
lose interest in.

People push past me to strive for the top,
forgetting your equipment and training.

Often I am left in the shadows as your voice cries
out in the darkness.

I am met in a mirror, an impostor or the pinnacle
at the decision of a coin flip.

Duplicitous in nature I am perceived,

a mask or promises, holding
nothing within.

A vortex into the abyss. Unending, falling
forever.

The cycle I am attached to is rusted

I live in the boundaries of growth and decline;

A fine line not often met.

Decay chips away at my armor. Left to the
overgrowth until buried.

Unearthed I am observed as a relic, desired but
not wanted.

I am myth incarnate. Something spoken of in
legends but never proven possible.

Why settle for something so mundane?

Why strive for the lesser when the
peak is within sight?

Distance is but a number to be added to and
subtracted from.

I am the depth perception, the third eye of
understanding.

I know when to quit, not on the loss of will;

I am the strength to
understand defeat.

In a thousand wars, I have seen as such.

Bloody wars in search of the grail, uncaring of its
consequences,

for the worst outcome to them is
better than nothing at all.

I am the tension in your neck on the clash of a
sword, the pull of the trigger.

I am the sweat in your brow. The stress in
your heart.

I am the pumping blood, the pouring blood.

I coat the earth, devour the land in
rhythmic waves.

I am what the eyes truly see, what lies in your
wake and at your feet.

Does this search satiate your hunger? Is it what
you have craved?

Or have you gorged yourself too far?

I taint your heart, infect you with a sickness.

If you fail to reach your highest
peak, are you worth anything?

A faint hiss in your ear, taunting you to push
forward.

All that glitters blinds you, and you forget your
third eye.

You lose me in your pursuit,

left in the bubbling blood that
drenches the soil.

And now I, in the misery and suffering, am left to
pick up the pieces for your inevitable return.

Maybe you can reach your goal, and I am the
pessimist.

Yet left forgotten, your equipment in case of
emergency,

how will you return when you have
nothing to bring you back down.

The highest peak is not always worth reaching.
Can you say for certain what lies at the top?
All the stories that you heard, or is
there something else? Something more?
Something less?
I am the backup plan that never gets used.
 I am traded for the stubbornness
 to see fruition met.
I am the exhausted exhale during a break, the
satisfied sigh after drinking water.
The peace you feel does not have to be for only a
moment's respite.
 I can lead you to a land of
 relaxation, at your beck and call.
I am deep in your mind, you need only think my
name and I shall arrive.
When sleep is restless, when aches become
prevalent,
 I am there to ease your burden.
Look at me in the mirror again, and witness
yourself.
The twinkle in your eyes, or the distant thousand
yard stare.
All you see is us.
The blood that pumps in your veins, or the slow
rhythmic pulse.
All you feel is us.
The distant echoes of perfectionism, or the
growing moans of failure.
All you think is us.
We do not have to play a game of tug-of-war to
reach our goals.
No, I am not the best.
Yet I am not the worst.
I am when you feel lost and confused.

I am when nothing is right, yet panic is far
from the mind.
I am the mix of joy and woe.
I am you, and you are me.
Our war does not have to continue.
Your exhaustion does not have to continue.
The fears that continue to creep under your skin,
that shriek above the horizons,
 they need not be met on their terms.
Your goals need not be abandoned to satiate me.
That lauded peak does not have to be climbed
with bare, rugged hands.
 Blood does not have to be indicative
 of progress.
When everything becomes unbearable, with
static intensifying in your mind,
When blood roars in your ears, and deafens you
to mine and others' voices,
When your legs become strained, and your
shoulders begin to crack,
You need only open your third eye again:
The armor you once adored but did not need;
The grail that glittered in the sun;
The abyss you stared into behind my mask;
It can be repaired;
It can be looked away from;
It does not need to be endless.
We can be content.
We can breathe in an even breath.
We can appreciate where we are.
We can gaze into the mirror and smile without it
hurting us.
We can frown without it pulling us down.
We can be content.
We can be okay.



OCD by Hilary Kinney

This mania holds me captive,
Haunting thoughts keep me distracted.
The devil whispers in my ear,
Using me as his puppeteer.

I am the ideal hostage.

“What if this? What if that?” he says.
Making my mind swirl in a whiz.
Daunting, sickening, will this end?

This mania holds me captive.

Brush it off, but it only stays.
Adrift in a mania daze,
Caught in the river of despairs,
Anxieties come out in tears.
Obsessive thoughts spill out my brain,
No escape, only in my dreams.

This mania holds me captive.





Glassed Jeans
Medium: Fabric Art
Curtis McMillian

Balance

by Eliza Talbot

Balance.

Where is balance?

In my quest for happiness it stands off to the side, mocking me,
A lifelong journey along a rickety path covered in ivy,
My aching soul has traveled it for so long and has seen no end.
But if I stop for rest am I wasting my time?
Losing sight of the path that could have been mine?

Balance.

What is balance?

Is it an acrobat on a tightrope,
Taking one step at a time,
Tilting to the left, to the right,
Never quite steady on the line?
Is balance a pedestal,
Weighing my needs and my wants?
It tips, rises, it falls, but rarely it slows,
Never quite finding the perfect equilibrium.

Balance.

Is balance an idea?

A thought process?

An act?

Or is it merely the reflection of all the things I cannot have.

Is balance a game of cards,

Where only one can win?

I watch warily as the Jack of all trades laughs at me.

For if he is the Jack am I but the Jester,

Putting my heart into my work only for it to result in laughter?

Balance.

Is balance simply a fantasy,

A simple but thorough ploy made up by the king,

Born out of writhe to placate the villagers,

While they remain poor and hungry?

Maybe not a fairytale, but perhaps part of reality?

Is balance seen in the overworked cashier,

Or the mom with two kids working two jobs.

Is balance within the woman who starves herself for a good praise,

Or in the eyes of a lost man who sits all alone?

Is balance all around,
Teasing in a never ending game of hide and seek?
But before you give up it screams,
“I’m here! I’m close! You just have to come find me!”

And so I continue on my journey,
yearning for any respite than the esteemed balance might bring to me.
And still, while I wait patiently,
The weight of my responsibilities travels down through me,
And like a water spigot it is held in, until one lever is nudged,
And suddenly it all comes out at once.
But unlike a sink one the flow it turned it cannot stop,
It will not stop.

Drip.
Drip.
Drip.

My self respect leaves me drop by drop,
Will the pressure erode me until I am nothing?
I’ve spent too many years placing my all into this to desiccate now...

In my quest for peace balance I image it standing to the side, cheering for me
A lifelong journey across a rickety pathway with more lifetimes to see.
My exhausted soul has traveled it for so long and had never seen an end,
And so I stop and sit to ponder under the gentle shade of a tree.
Where is balance?
Balance is neither here nor there, not up, nor down,
It is not a final destination, but rather the ghost of one.
It can never be reached by continuous sprinting,
Nor by sleeping lazily in the sun.
Instead it is alike to a traveler,
Moving at its freewill.

I’ve crossed paths with it many of times,
But never met face to face,
So as I leave the conformality of my tree,
And start my journey anew,
I can almost taste the sweet freedom I’ll feel when I finally meet it.

Balance.



THIRD PLACE IN STUDENT ART



Tiny Treasure Boxes

Medium: Copper, Brass, Silver, Semi-Precious Stones

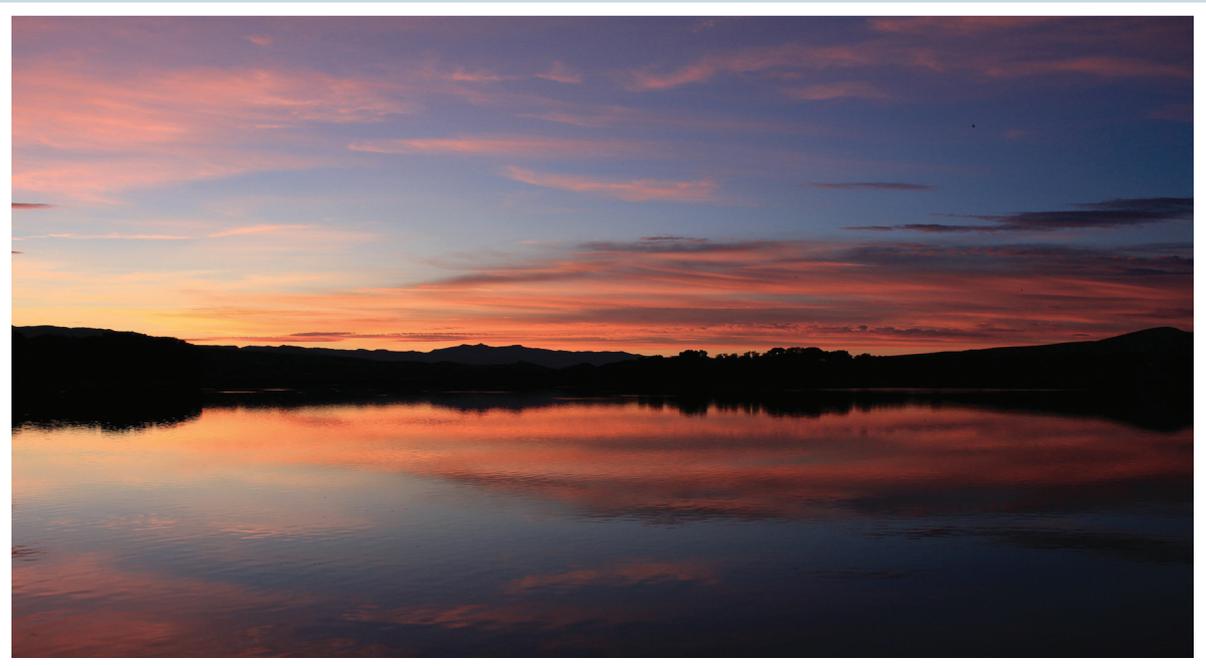
Deb Bonetti (left rear and left front)

Sidnie Miller (center rear and center front)

Meg Glaser (right rear)

Susan Church (right front)





Where Earth Meets Sky

Medium: Digital Photography

Angela Hagfeldt



Ripples and Reflections

Medium: Acrylic on Canvas

Emme Miller



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