

Phineas

2022



Masks Required

When Will Judgment End and Acceptance Begin?

When Will Judgment End
Regarding - What "Women" Can Or Cannot
Create Or Articulate - As Well As - "Man" That is
And Acceptance Of - Her Own - "Equality" Begin?

When Will Judgment End
Of - One Race "Against" Another Race
And Acceptance Of - "Unity and Brotherhood " Begin?

When Will Judgment End
Regarding - "It's Who You Know"
And Acceptance Begin
Based on - "What You Know"?

When Will Judgment End
Regarding - How Much - "Money" You Possess
And Acceptance Begin
Based On- The "Integrity" You Express?

When Will Judgment End
Regarding- "Isn't He Or She Fine"
And Acceptance Begin
Based on "His or Her Mind"?

When Will Judgment End
And Acceptance Begin
How Long?
Not Long!

—*Barbara A. Nairn*

A note about Inside Front and Back Cover work: The Editors of the 2022 edition wanted to celebrate *Phineas* returning after a year hiatus due to the pandemic by connecting to and honoring the past. They chose two works: one a linked poem and photo from 10 years ago (from the somewhat apocalyptic-feeling 2012) found on the inside back cover, and an excerpt of a poem from 20 years ago (2002) above.

Phineas 2022



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Phineas 2022 Award Winners

Every year, the *Phineas* student editors select all the written and artistic works in the magazine. From among the accepted work, qualified faculty members select pieces from each of the categories for first and second prize.

Award Winners

Art

- 1st "Masks Required" by Angel Winchester
(tied) "Darrin, Owner of Candy Heaven" by Angel Parga

Poetry

- 1st "Knick Knack" by David Begnell
2nd "Dear Baby" by Sabrinna Celis

Fiction

- 1st "Shining Light" by Libby Caulkins
2nd "One Day" by Camryn Stevens

Contest Judges

Art

- Mandi Batalo
Dion Cuevas
David Rosales
Alexandra Tommasini
Matt Wardell

Poetry

Alma Lopez

Fiction

Amy Mills

Phineas 2022

Editors

Angel Garcia Manzano
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Our greatest debt is of course to the students of Valley College for contributing to this publication by submitting their art, essays, fiction and poetry.

Autumn Embers

Libby Caulkins

“They don’t listen,” Theresa Cook said after yet another attempt to alert staff and parents about the dangers of the old barn. “Someone’s going to get themselves killed in there.”

She thought about her last time on yard duty while she raked the dry oak leaves into a pile for the fire. Theresa took on the role of mother and caretaker to many of the children, who she considered more important than her own family. Theresa had serious concerns for their safety but found that she had trouble convincing parents or administration of the danger that posed an increasing threat to the children.

Laney Morales, who was already showing leadership ability among her third-grade classmates had found the dilapidated barn which was to become a favorite spot for her and her friends while riding her bike through the quiet farm roads. Family homes, held for more than a century on family farms, had been left behind as independent farming became less competitive with large corporate agribusiness overtaking the livelihoods of small family farmers. The barn, left abandoned next to the empty house that accompanied it, offered a hideaway from adult supervision, a place for girls to play and imagine they had horses and prized

dairy cows inside the disused stalls. Long forgotten tack lined the walls: reins, halters, bits, and shoes hung from hooks along the unpainted walls, memories of better times. The barn still had a hayloft, a rickety, leaning platform with decades-old bales of dry hay and a long ladder, its rungs shrunken and loose with age. For Laney, the barn held all the promise of an untarnished future, a simple life that she found absolutely captivating. Theresa knew what Laney thought, and she knew that Laney could captivate the other girls with her imagination.

A rope hung from the hayloft, long enough to swing on, and this was another draw for the children to hurt themselves with no adults nearby to protect them. So Theresa raked outside the barn, sweeping the leaves through the doorway and underneath the hayloft, with the old, dry hay directly overhead.

“Someone has to do the right thing,” she said. Frustrated by months of city council meetings and PTA events where she went unheard, Theresa moved with righteous fervor. She collected fallen siding that lay strewn about, nails pointing out of the broken slats into a bonfire cone over the leaves, she knew what she had to do. Tonight, she would protect her students. She pulled her gas

can from her truck and brought it into the barn to spill over her kindling, almost gleeful now as she poured. Striking a match and dropping it onto the gasoline-soaked pile, she paused for a moment for a final look at the menace of the barn's interior while it's walls glowed orange as the fire grew. Theresa saw the barn begin to roar with the fire, ablaze with the

insult of her transgression against it, which satisfied her as a long-awaited conclusion to her mission.

Outside now, Theresa started toward her truck and slipped away into the night before anyone could directly connect her to the fire. "They'll know," she said, knowing that she would finally be taken seriously.



Nouveau Isles

Jeremy Conley

Demon Born

Don't dare look into my eyes
And see the sadness there,
All I love that slowly dies,
And brings my heart despair.

I know that I'm not special.
I wait to talk, not listen,
And I can look so superficial.
My mind's my own dark prison.

One must fall to be a devil
Trapped in a personal hell.
Vices to match the new level
Descended from where I fell.

Poor, yet over-educated,
My mother did her best.
A doctress relocated
To build a stable nest.

Bravely instructed her children
Against the ways of the world.
When I first felt the flow of a pen
My imagination swirled.

Young and inexperienced,
I drew a simple curl.
Older now and furious,
I express my inner girl.

Neither genius nor productive
Supernatural my whole life.
Nurtured nature sole destructive,
Wasn't even a loving wife.

A force creeping hides in the dark.
I feel its presence by my side.
Soon, I know I'll hear the bark
Of hellhounds collecting suicide.

Exhausted and afraid,
I'm tired of fighting myself
Over all the mistakes I've made
And being an "angry elf."

I look into the mirror
Yet barely recognize my face,
Phantoms drawing nearer
Taking up all of the space

Except where I can see
My reflection like Narcissus.
I hear a shrieking banshee
As my smirk becomes malicious.

War paint and a stride
As blood pools in my hands.
Apathy spurred by Pride
Gives into the Id's demands;

Into wonders of damnation
The excitement it can bring.
Touch the racing hearts sensation,
Learn the powers of these wings

As the tender muscle contracts,
Straining against gravity.
Committing callous, careless acts
To defy a merciful deity.

—Angel Winchester



Cruel Youth

Maria De Talpa

Conflict

Lifeless and unmoving
A passions' flame snuffed
Tell me that it's okay
To get up and try again
To expose myself
To redeem myself
Cast aside your judgments
And take my place in front of a crowd
Of all of my doubts and insecurities
And once again try to perform

—*Brandice Mello*



The Dragon Walks Free

I defeat the dragon
by making her human
In this form I am unafraid.
Without her wings she cannot fly
nor escape the judgement day.

Her mouth removed of all sharp teeth
her breath no longer burns me.
For sticks and stones
may break my bones
but words do not concern me.

Now woman enough
to be seen with new eyes,
her tail has disappeared.
And in her past, I see the pain
and know that it's sincere.

Her hands transformed
from dangerous claws,
to ones as soft as mine.
So I release this grip
from around my heart,

Because to err is human
But to forgive is divine.

—*Camryn Stevens*



Dragon

Darwin Melchiorre

Making Peace

Camryn Stevens

Jalissa didn't go out often, but tonight was special. She wanted to spend the most important birthday of her twenties doing something she loved, something that always seemed to re-center her, something she hadn't been able to do for almost five months since the incident. Most people Jalissa knew would want to spend their 21st birthday at a bar or a club with friends; and in the past her birthday was a time to reminisce with old friends and laugh with new ones. But this was a night Jalissa wanted to herself, a chance to show gratitude to her body for surviving and make peace with her fears.

Around 7pm on the night of her birthday, Jalissa left her house, roller skates tied together and hanging off one shoulder, her heavy, long handled purse hanging over the other. She walked from her place to the skating rink as she'd done hundreds of times. She took the same shortcuts as she did before; she crossed through the parking lot of Big Al's to get to 8th Street, jay walked when she hit Rancho Ave to avoid the barking of the four Dobermans that protected Mr. Reedley's yard, and finally, after passing the thrift store on Maple St., arrived at the back entrance of Lucky Leon's Skating Rink. Lucky Leon's was one of

the oldest buildings in the neighborhood, and their competitive skating team, along with their roller derby league, were their primary sources of income. Their next was Lucky Leon's Saturday Skate Night, which this year, fell on Jalissa's birthday.

She walked up to the back door and knocked three times. When it opened, she was greeted by the shocked face of Luca, the rink's security and nephew of the current owner, Leon Jr.

"Jay! Hey, wow! It's great to see you! You're back walking already?" Luca said, almost out of breath. Before she could respond, he looked at her skates. "Hey, you're not thinking about skating tonight, are you? You don't think that maybe it's too soon?"

"Wow," Jalissa replied, ignoring his questions, "It's so good to see you too, Lukie!" She replied sarcastically, calling him by his childhood nickname. "Yes, I'm having a wonderful 21st birthday, celebrating making it to my final step into legal adulthood and INDEPENDENCE. Thanks for asking!"

"C'mon, don't be like that. I'm actually concerned about you." He lifted the faded green baseball cap he always wore and scratched the dirty-blond curls underneath. The movement made the once holographic four-leaf clover logo

dance before he fixed it back on his head.
“Do they have any leads on the guy?”

Luca asked in a softer tone.

Jalissa took a deep breath and looked away. From where they were standing in the back hallway, past the mops and the floor cleaning machine and out the hallway door, she could see the skate floor, illuminated by a disco ball and overhanging lights. She looked to the DJ booth, then to the tables where all the non-skaters sat, and finally the snack bar area. She thought about all the years she had been coming to Lucky Leon’s, how she basically grew up here, skating with her older siblings, Luca and his younger siblings, and all the other people who grew up in the area.

She looked at Luca and gave him a little smirk, taking in his freckled face and worried eyes. He was wearing typical Luca attire: some beat up Converse, loose fitted denim jeans, and a dark green hoodie. “You know, Luca, you could do without the old hat sometimes. You have really nice hair. You should let it breathe!” She said to him while backing out of the hallway. “But the color really does compliment your eyes! I’ll see you in the rink when your shift’s over!” She called over her shoulder and rushed out the hallway before he could stop her.

As she strolled towards the main entrance on her way to the big entryway mirror, she passed the ever-growing crowd of skaters. People of all ages sat as

they laced on their skates, or lined up at the snack bar, while others headed onto the rink. She scanned the crowd and smiled and waved at familiar faces, careful to avoid conversations like the one she just had with Luca. She thought about what he said. *Do they have any leads on the guy?* She felt her stomach turn.

Relaxing her face into a smile, she approached the entryway mirror. Staring back at her was a thin looking girl in a fuchsia, long sleeved velour zip-up hoodie, denim cutoffs, and light colored, rhinestone decorated fishnets. She pulled out her brown lip gloss that almost matched her complexion and reapplied. Though Jalissa had put a lot of effort into her birthday look this year, the way she had always done in the past, she couldn’t help but feel like something was missing. She did a full face of makeup, even put on the jewelry she only wore on special occasions, and still couldn’t shake the feeling that something was different. That she was different. Her curly afro, once thick and past her shoulders, was pulled into a slick low ponytail to hide the missing chunks. She brushed her hand across the stiff, gelled down edges. It began to fall out the week she left the hospital and had been falling out ever since. Everything online said that the shedding would stop when her stress and anxiety levels returned to normal. In the meantime, she found that this hairstyle

was the best way to conceal it. As she used a finger to plump up her mascara coated lashes, she took notice of the dark bags that sat under her almond-shaped eyes and wondered if they'd ever go away.

Pulling away from the mirror, she stepped outside the front door for some fresh air. Sitting on the sidewalk, she took off her all-black Converse's and began to loosen the glittery laces on her purple skates. Looking around the surrounding neighborhood of Lucky Leon's, a barely audible gasp escaped her as she slowly stood up. Eyes squinted, she focused on the auto service and repairs shop across the street, and there, parked alone in the lot, she saw a familiar looking SUV that sent chills down her spine.

Frozen, Jalissa felt an eternity pass. Her body broke into a sweat as the memories from that night rushed back. The image of a slow moving, black Chevy Tahoe filled her mind. She remembered it being dark inside and smelling like motor oil and bleach. She remembered screaming so hard that she damaged her vocal cords and couldn't speak for two weeks, even after the shock wore off. And she vividly remembered the blood.

She didn't feel the bag slip off her arm, but she jumped when it hit the pavement. She looked down at the heavy leather bag, and suddenly remembered why she carried it with her in the first place. She glanced back inside and

scanned the area, taking in the laughter and smiles of her community. Her eyes landed on Luca, and she watched as he whispered something to the DJ. A few seconds later the song changed, and most everyone ran onto the rink, excited to skate to the well-known hit. She wondered if he noticed she was gone yet. She wondered if he would agree with what she was about to do. If, in her position, he'd do the same.

Wasting no more time, she slipped back into her outdoor shoes and laced them up. Setting her skates on the inside of the door she closed her eyes and took a deep inhale and held. *You've imagined this exact moment a million times*, she said to herself. Releasing her breath and opening her eyes, she cautiously walked towards Mike's with her bag across her shoulder.

As she got closer to the parking lot, she stopped and put her right hand inside the black bag, searching for the comfort of the cool metal she had become familiar with while in isolation the past few months. She slid her finger around the trigger and took a deep breath as she moved toward the car. First, she peered in through the back window. Seeing nobody in the car, she slowly walked up the side and toward the entrance of the garage. The area was dark, closed for the night. The only light came from the flickering streetlamp, and she could hear the bass from the skating rink's music

across the street. *You could always turn back*, a voice whispered in her head. *Run away and make it, like last time.*

Hesitating at the entrance of the open hanging doors, she started to back away. That's when she heard footsteps.

"Can I help you with something, Miss?"

She heard the voice she knew she would be able to pick out if it was a whisper in a crowded school hallway. The voice of the one she couldn't let haunt her subconscious any longer.

Slowly, a tall, slender, scraggly haired man appeared from the shadows of the open car garage. Jalissa's stomach dropped to her knees and her mouth went dry. As he got closer, and closer, her body began to tremble. For a moment, they were locked in a stare. Her fingertips caressed the smooth, cold instrument inside her bag. She couldn't quite read the expression on his face, but she didn't care to. She had enough memory of what it was like to stare into the eyes of the Devil.

Before any more words could be said, there were gunshots. Warmth shocked her hand as her purple jacket was tie dyed red and her lips tasted like iron. A metallic scent rose in the air, lifted and carried by the summer breeze of the night.

The man that was once standing across from her a moment ago stumbled backwards, shocked. There was a thud as

he sank to his knees, then smacked face first onto the ground. Eyes frozen open, his body lay still in a growing red puddle.

Head spinning, Jalissa turned mechanically, and slowly walked back to the skating rink. She could feel the still-warm hole in her purse where the bullets had exited.

For the second time that night, she walked up to the back door, knocked three times, and waited.

) O (

Just Like Starting Over

Let's listen to *Milk and Honey*
And pretend we're John and Yoko
Write poems to each other
Like Robert and Elizabeth Browning

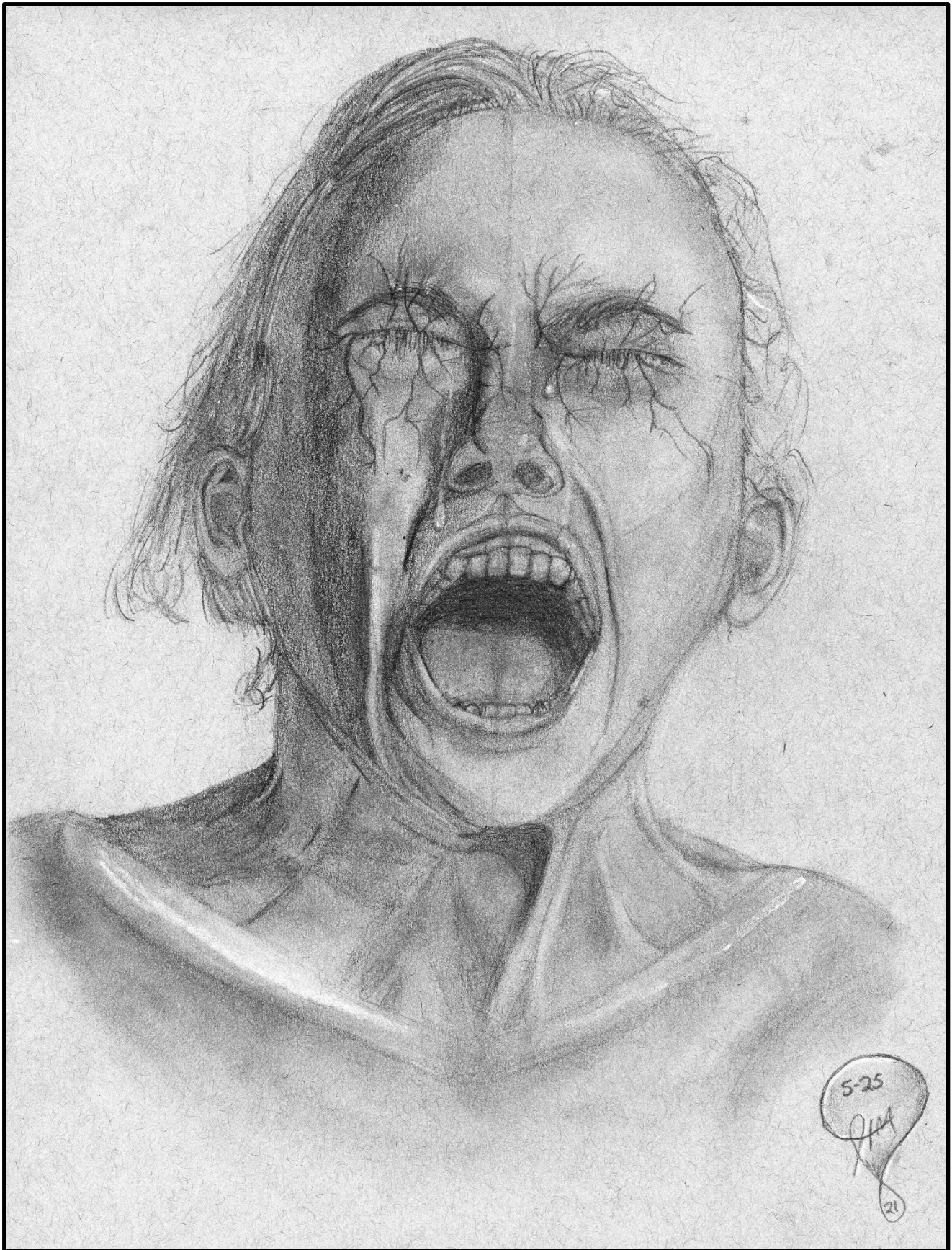
Let's fall in love all over again
And recreate the moment
When we met in the food court
And smiles pricked our faces

I glanced at your hazel eyes
Holding hands on a leather sofa at Macy's
I asked for your favorite color
You laughed, whispering, "Purple"

Our eyes on the white tile
Thinking of what to say next
Our faces burned a fiery crimson
While the ceiling lights seemed to dim

As the years have gone by
Our love has grown deeper every day
Lying beside one another while
the turntable spins "Grow Old with Me"

—Kevin Rodriguez



Relinquish

Darwin Melchiorre

Monkey Trial

Tennessee, July 1925
A teacher is charged with telling lies
It's the monkey trial, science versus God
Did Darwin speak truth or was he a fraud
The world is watching a bizarre bazaar
Befuddled by lawyers come from afar
Newspaper, radio, television
Evolution taught or creationism
People arrived from miles around
Standing room only, no seats could be found
The courthouse floor could not carry the load
To the lawn outside the audience flowed
Revival tents are now raised in the town
Much like a circus with preachers as clowns
Like a county fair with kiosks of food
Barkers do brazenly heighten the mood
"Monkeys in cages!" "See the missing link!"
Laws against teaching your children to think
The ACLU now argues the case
Fundamentalist preachers in their face
The judge not allowing the arguments
The court is dismissing the evidence
A C-note fine and the gavel is struck
It is kicked up court. With a bit of luck
It will be overturned, and not forgot
The teacher must swallow his parting shot
With science, religion still juggernauts
Oh, woe to the wisdom we once withheld
Due to ignorant laws unparalleled
Pack up the cameras, load up the trucks
We're missing the point, ignoring the crux
It's a monkey trial, made for TV
The latest emerging technology
Give God what is God's, give Caesar the rest
Leave science to teachers to teach their best.

—*David Begnell*

Pingüica

Desert fruit, small and medicinal.
Called “Pingüis” since a miraculous birth
That came so close to biblical, it
Both diminished and enhanced my worth.

Bland, with so much fight in me
Child and mother survived the tumor.
Four pounds, just half a baby,
Late to develop a sense of humor

Or blossom the virtue of patience.
Morality forced to govern free will.
Wickedness felt within the silence
Of reverent Mass, with an ache to kill

Hypocrites and pharisees that spread
Their rumors and lies with toothy grins.
How my hands itched to rip off their heads,
Shove their noses in their own sins.

I refuse to kiss a hand or ring,
Confused to receive a sacramental slap.
Who ever heard of such a thing?
Why spoon-feed children any of this crap?

Kneeling before a man in a dress
A mockery of our purposed “Messiah”
As if a woman were born as any less.
My convictions made me a pariah

In a church full of thoughtless sheep
Blindly following man-made beliefs.
Inhibiting innate traits as they weep,
Imbibing bread and wine for sweet relief.

Latin, the language of angels;
A foreign tongue to some, I understood
The words to expel or summon demons,
Pressuring me to try to be good.

Years of suppressing human nature
Only strengthens the beast within,
As older men hurt and helped mature
The wolf hiding under the sheepskin.

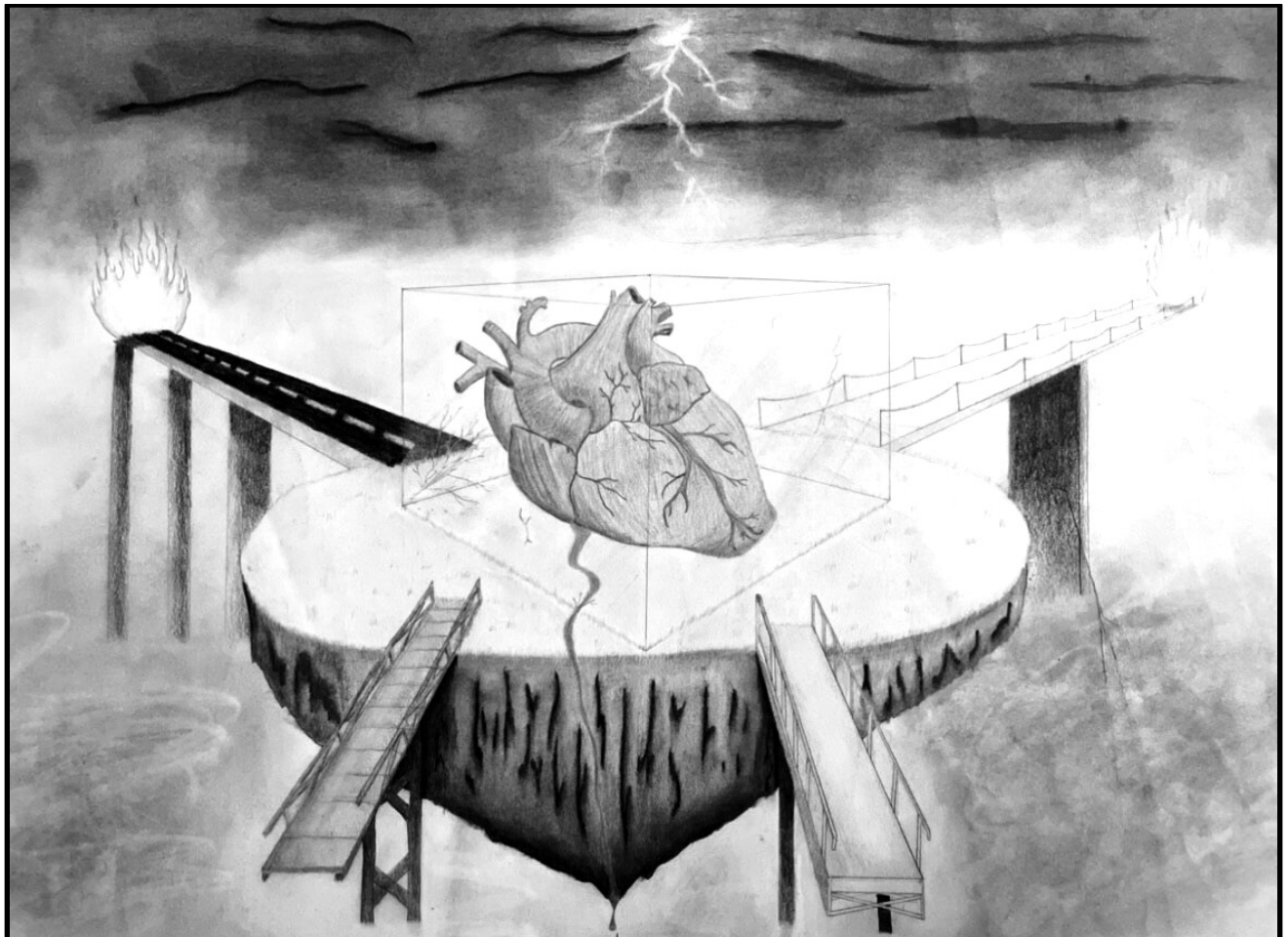
Tiny desert plant, used for healing,
That’s how my father sees me.
Asked my opinion since I was teething,
Smiling as I sat on his knee.

The only man I've ever fully believed
Through his fibs I follow mildly still.
Always returned when he had to leave,
A man who truly follows God's will

Gave me everything, including my name.
I only wish to make him proud.
Family says we're so much the same:
Both of us grounded, with heads up in the clouds.

For my Papi, I try to do what's right.
My white king, who stands like a tower.
Against all hell and wrong I'll fight
To remain his precious desert flower.

—Josefa



Self-Portrait

Maria De Talpa

Knick-Knack

Widow shiny black, bulbous back
Bug thrashing wildly, widow's snack
One is predator, one is prey
God's in the details, let us pray

Soldiers sweat and bleed, scream and shout
Bible or Koran, all devout
Shootings, dogs of war, check and mate
God is horrible, god is great

Red man standing on land we rob
Brown man is a threat to our job
Black man hanging limp from a tree
God bless America, we're free

Purge the voter rolls, tax the polls
Two IDs required to show
Gerrymandering to this day
God forbid not getting our way

Knee to the neck, shot in the back
Vigilante shotgun attack
A no knock warrant, wrong address
God damn drug dealers, what a mess

Protesters choking on tear gas
Young woman wearing a gas mask
The blue line slowly moves toward her
God approves of law and order

Homeless are hungry, live outside
Dirty bodies we can't abide
Mash your potatoes, stab your steak
God is taking a union break

Smooth the whipping post, stone the whore
God's not listening anymore
Genuflect and cross yourself, your
God is a knick-knack on a shelf.

—*David Begnell*

Bested

Oh, my love,
You've vanquished me.
A moment of distraction,
Too long playing the game,
You won me.
Fought for my heart as valiantly
As a knight would for his lady
When I didn't remember myself.
Feeding my dark desires,
I thought I held you captive.
While ego-driven for supremacy,
You won me with your kindness.
Brought out a light in me
I thought I had lost long ago.
Called me "imp" instead of "demon"
Still awed by my true form.
Mischievous, not evil
Is what you saw in me.
Witty but impatient,
Neither damaging nor dangerous.
You bantered at my level
Though education failed you,
I thought I had you cornered
When really, I was in your sights.
Carefully, I waited to pounce,
To unleash my full arsenal.
You used your arms to catch me instead,
With surprised smiles you took control.
Reminded me of good intentions,
Unburdened my whimsey of restraint,
My red knight, with your diesel "steed,"
You beat me in the best of ways.

—Angel Winchester

A Moment Before I Kissed You

I want to love you for the rest of my life,
And even after that;
When my soul becomes a falling piece of ash
And yours a falling snowflake,
I will still collide with you.

—Rojo Winchester

A World Apart

An appreciation of time
woven from distance
A thread across an ocean
tied to our souls
like a whisper
strung from cup to cup

Strings are plucked
at the mercy of a puppeteer
and controlled by the polarity
of our coordinates

The thread that binds us
brings the warmth of the sun
dancing through the patchwork
of a thousand pieces of stained glass.

The knot that unites our souls knows
no constraints.

—Mary Yaryan



Her Heart

Unmistakable as hail,
Present as drizzling rain.
Gentle as falling snow.

Lovely like hues of the
evening,
Warm like the setting sky.
Full like the sun in its
strength.

—Tadeo Macon

Relationship

Dice rolls and diced rolls
Fried foods and fried dudes
Drunken shenanigans throughout the night

Elves and fairies
Tolls and tarries
Theatrical shows of might

Whispers and secrets
Truths and confessions
Real feelings come to light

Hands and movement
Consent and approval
Relations to new height

—*Brandice Mello*



Adoration

Hair as short and dark as the evening skies,
A touch I am unable to resist,
Fingertips softly graze her where she lies,
Wrapped so precious round the arm and wrist.

Full moon eyes gold with flecks of emerald green
Gaze adoringly upon my loving face.
Her regal stare is that of a queen,
Movements confident and with such a grace.

She's my shadow, we're never far apart
Through thick and thin, throughout heaven and hell.
I feel a gripping pain around my heart,
Pondering the fated time of farewell.

It may be so absurd in this format,
Hearing all this about my loyal cat.

—*Brandice Mello*

The Key to Happiness

To be
To be somewhere
To be with someone...

Still young,
Still growing up,
Still learning my place

Is next to you;
Travelling and planning,
Seeking comfort in your arms.

You are my good days,
My laughter, my tears, my comfort,
You are my best decision and friend.

The key to happiness
Is companionship worth keeping.

—Angel Winchester



One-Sided Love

How do I say goodbye on this last night?
Perhaps a grin, a frown, or something else?
Should I lie and say all will be all right,
Despite the loss and pain inside myself?
Your face with which you look at other men
Has hardened my heart into hollow stone.
Yet time and time again you speak of them
And I at most, feel more and more alone.
Goodbye to love of which we never shared.
To all the others that will not be born.
Do not let me see that face of despair.
Why cry when I should be the one forlorn.
Maybe the love will have been torn away.
Maybe I will see you again someday.

—Damien E. Diaz

Steadfast

In God's oh so special way;
He seems to bring us through each day;
Whether your day be happy, or a challenge to bear;
God will make it alright, you'll soon be aware;
Thou he knew from your birth, situations you'll endure;
Whatever your situation God's blessings will procure;
See, we all fall under God's good grace;
While we are running life's everyday race;
Don't give into influences without seeking God's guidance;
God will dispatch his angels to command an alliance;
When we see blessings start to change our lives;
Watch, look, listen, and don't lose your strive;
For when all your blessings begin to overflow;
Everyone will see the change in your spiritual glow;
In all ways thank God for showing you the light;
Keeping faith, standing strong and staying in the fight;
It's the fight of faith we must go through;
But through it all, God carries you;
You grow in faith, in faith you mature;
His precious word will instruct you to endure;
Share his word everyone you know;
And in his word, you too will grow;
God's word has love, God's word has life;
For love, his body he sacrificed.

—Julie Jones



One Night Stand

Sounding snores seep through silk sheets
Bringing breezy breaths to be,
Silent songs singing through sleet
Beckoning brittle cold to me.

Buckling belts branding shame,
Shuffling shirts shifting blame.

Fretting fearfully for a yawn
Creaking floors, and creeping dawns,
Sighing and stretching arms,
Wooden slams as alarms.

—Damien E. Diaz

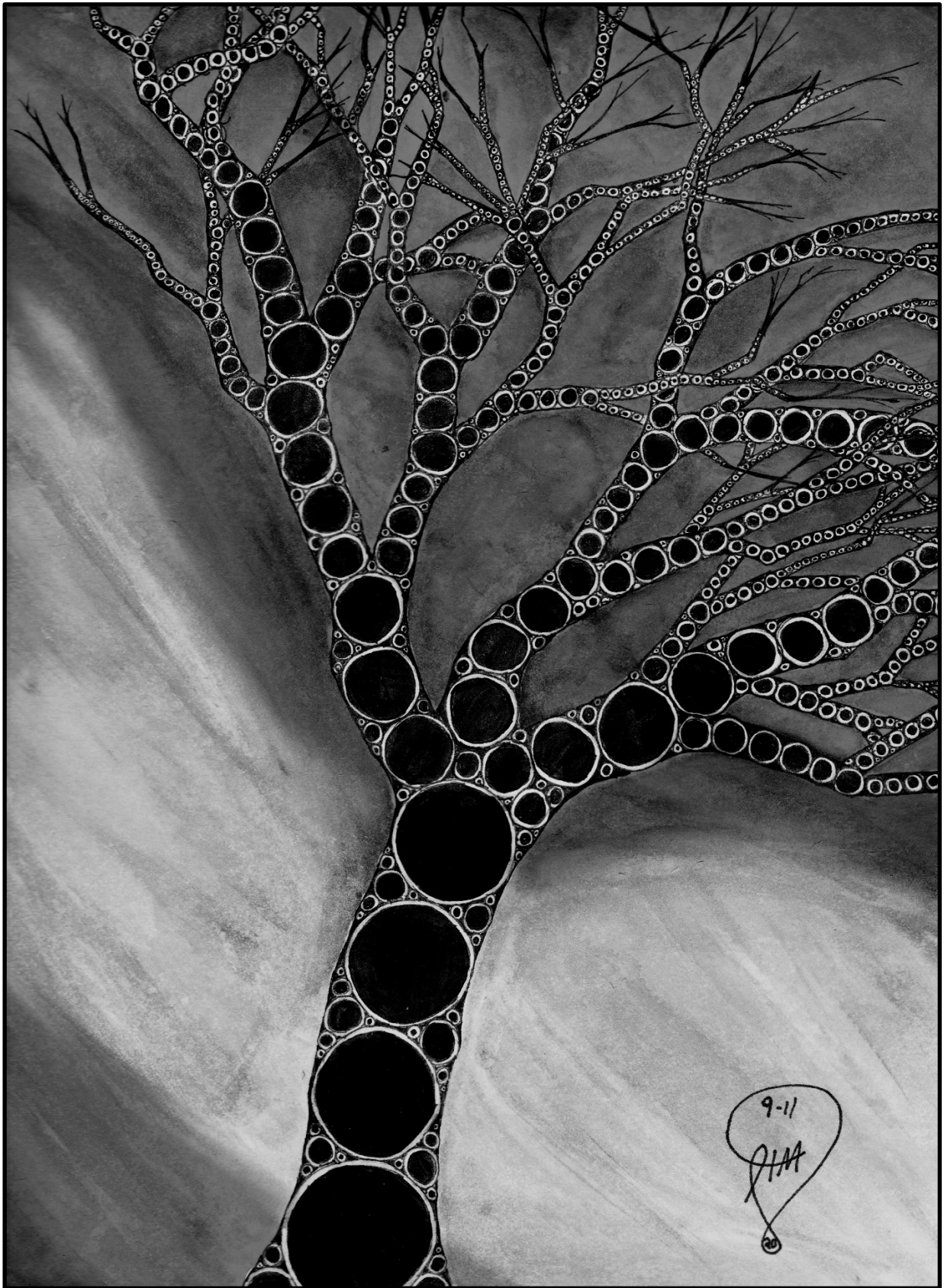
Twenty Something

Frisky, trying to stay free,
Dashing, outrunning them all.
Frantic, fresh and staying true
She'll be the last to stand tall.

Friendly and sometimes she's frail,
Not just one side but many.
Frank and a little bit blue,
Hope her years run aplenty.

She'll stay soft, shy and simple,
From now, past her first wrinkle.

—Diana Lopez



Contrast

Darwin Melchiorre

Dear Baby

I gave away your clothes today, the ones saved from your brother.
The ones I packed so nice and neat, in dreams I'd be your mother.

The hand-me-downs as some would say, the favorites of the lot.
The warm ones for the winter, and tops for when it's hot.

'How cute!' I thought to see, them fit you as they fit him.
And whether you would fill them out, or in the wrinkles swim.

Girl or Boy I didn't care, I'd dress you just the same.
I'd add a bow or earrings since strangers love to shame.

I giggle at my thoughts since thoughts of you bring joy.
My heart was filled with love for you, no matter girl or boy.

I gave your clothes away today, now seven months have passed.
Since God took you to heaven, you came and went so fast.

I'm holding on to clothing, as if I'm holding you.
But that is so unhealthy, and THIS is right to do.

I gave your clothes away today, I packed them into bags.
And as the bin grew emptier, each of my heart strings snagged.

As I looked into the deep, dark cold and empty bin.
I'm forced to think of my own womb, that you're no longer in.

I gave away your clothes today, a bond so hard to sever.
Just know that although far away, I hold you dear, forever.

—Sabrinna Celis

A Terrible Day for Rain

Josh Tran

“Are you ready for this?” Jaune sighed as he ran his fingers through his dark brown hair. He rubbed his wife’s shoulders as the two sat in silence.

Anita reached up behind her to stop Jaune’s hands, and she stood up as she deeply exhaled, “No, not at all. I want to see him though... I want to say goodbye.”

She straightened out her black dress before she helped Jaune adjust the collar on his black suit. The two tightly embraced one another as they mustered up every ounce of emotional strength they had left in their hearts to proceed with their day. They stepped outside their home into the cold, winter air, where their skin seemed to dry almost instantly, and their breath was visible after every exhale. Silently, they both entered their white family SUV and drove for thirty minutes without making a single noise other than a slight snuffle every now and then.

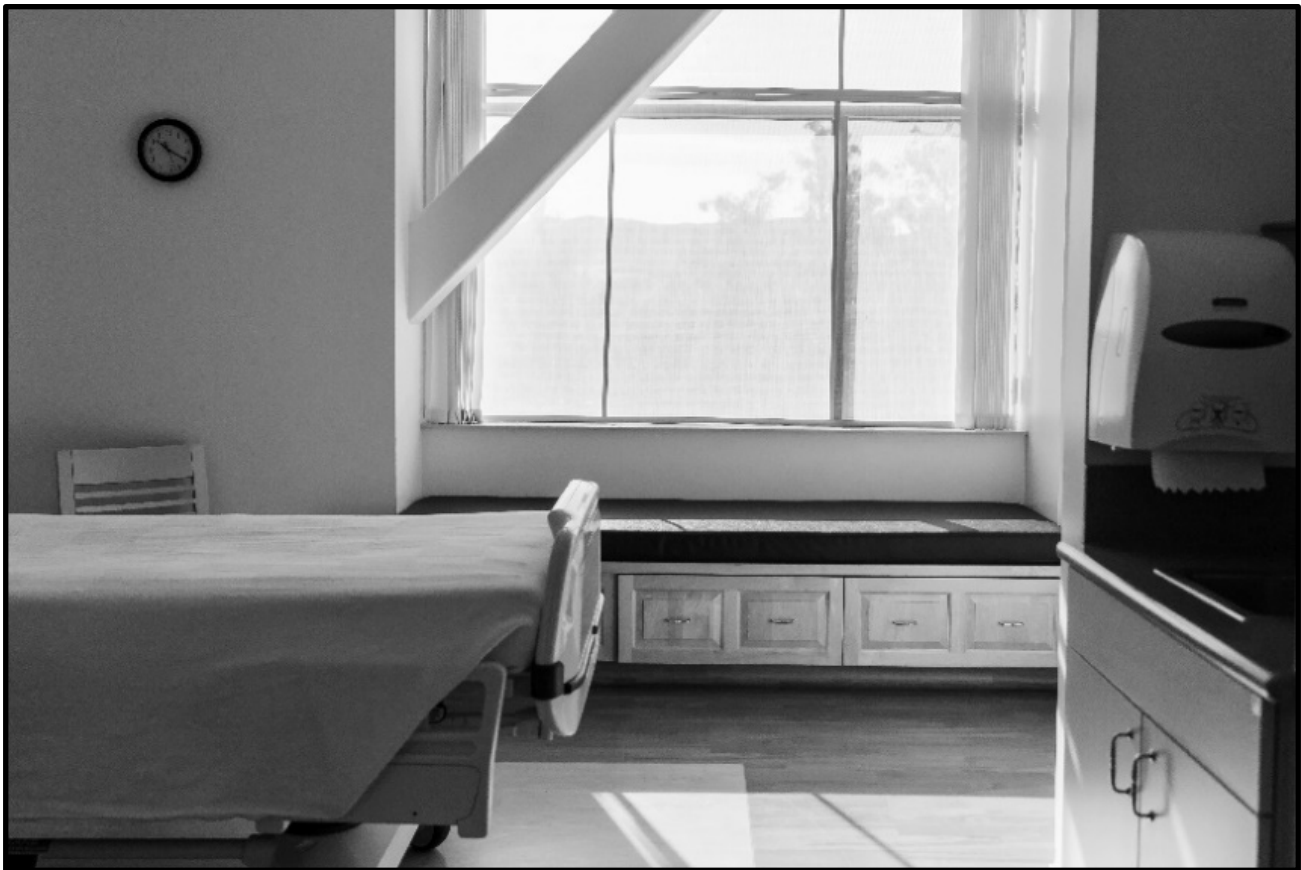
The sky was littered with dark gray clouds that prevented very little sunlight from shining through them. Other than the noise of the engine and car heater, the rattling of the car’s snow chains on the tires went to fill some of the silence,

but even that was muffled as Jaune began to drive over a snow-covered dirt road. The white SUV stopped at a tree with a single branch on it, and everything around it was completely covered in a beautiful, sparkling layer of the color white. As the couple got out of their car, a light sprinkle of rain began to fall upon them. Despite that, neither of the two decided to grab their umbrellas from the trunk. Before continuing on in their journey, Jaune took off his black coat and placed it upon Anita’s shoulders. The two looked at each other as tears welled in their eyes. Jaune simply shook his head and muttered with a broken voice, “No. Not yet. We’re almost there, so hold your tears. Save them for after we see him, and after we show him how strong we are, we’ll let them out away from the grave. He wouldn’t want to see us crying, would he?”

Anita nodded as they both inhaled deeply and wiped their eyes. The couple approached the tree, once again, in complete silence. Snow crunched beneath their shoes before they stopped at the base of a large birch-wood tree that almost blended in with the snow around

it. Quickly, the light rain stopped as Jaune kneeled down with a golden coin in his hand. He wiped away a plaque that was covered in snow. As soon as Jaune stood up, he held Anita in his arms as they both stared down at the ground. The clouds slowly began to part and, for a brief moment, allowed a sliver of warm

sun hit Jaune's face. It wasn't raining anymore, and the sky had begun to clear at a pretty rapid rate. Despite the creation of a beautiful day, tears began to stream from Jaune's face, and that is when he realized that it was a terrible day for rain.



385,000

Angel Parga



Darrin, Owner of Candy Heaven

Angel Parga

Electrogram of a Dead Love



I want to dedicate you a poem...but
your name crossing my mind makes me lazy.
Don't call me anymore!
Don't look for me!
My heart refuses to open the door
when you insistently knock & knock
asking to enter.
It's clear that you are an unpleasant guest
in this territory.
I said goodbye!
Go away, wherever you please.



I don't want to hear your lies.
Find another diluted who would fall in love
with *el personaje que elijas*.
with your smile in disguise
who will make you an altar
to prize your hologram?
No! Do not repeat to me
the same repertoire of lies...
I already know them by heart.
Don't beg me for another chance, I gave you many.
I gave you love without measure.



Put on your omnipotent costume
and treated me like a toy brought at the Goodwill.
Go away! I have nothing to give you!
No looks, no words, no kisses, no caresses.
Giving them to you was like throwing seeds
into the desert nothing blossomed
Tu eres tierra infertil!
Remember, there it was time
when I couldn't bear the thoughts
of not being with you...
But you lost, through pain and tears
I empowered myself!



I paid the price in gold,
to learn about yourself
now I can read through you...as a doctor can read x-rays
and I am skilled like a mentalist
now I can intuit your thoughts, your intentions,
and your tricks when you feel threatened.
I can read you...and I can perceive
that terror invades you,
that you feel minimized like
a “Chiquita banana.”



Your sweetened words, your offers, your desire
to be politically correct all the time.
Your obsession with the past, your country, your family.
I already know all of that by heart,
You are like a scratched vinyl record,
repite, repite y repite
the same chants, belittling my intelligence.
Stop it! Do not go on! Do not repeat yourself
I am sorry for you! Your desire to control me
And your fantasy that you're a movie star
doesn't allow you to realize
how ridiculous your performance is!

Stop it! Do not go on! Do not repeat yourself!
I already know everything that comes
out of your mouth word by word.

-Rosenelly Martinez

Don't Kill My Parrot!

Rosenelly Martinez

I was born and raised in San Martin Jilotepeque, Guatemala. My mama and I lived at my *abuela's* house. My mama was only eighteen when I was born. She separated from my dad. I never knew why. I was raised during a time when children were not permitted to ask certain questions. Then, as I grew older and began to ask out of curiosity, I received many different stories from adults, including my mama and papa. With time, I lost interest in knowing and stopped asking questions. My *abuela's* house was located in a corner of one of the principal streets of *el pueblo*. It was an old colonial style house. It has two principal doors in the front and one to the side street. Plus, a door that was used by the servants. And a big window between the two front doors. One of the door's panels had a small window to pick when somebody called at night time.

The house was long, made out of adobes and red cement floor tiles. I remember that the outside of the house was always painted yellow and a plinth in a tone of reddish bricks and had a red tiles roof. A corridor that was the same length as the house. Across was the kitchen, that was the territory of my Aunt's Mary, I can safely say that twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week the aromas of sweet spices emanated from the kitchen and probably scented the *ambiant* all the way outside the house. During morning until noon, she would be cooking and preparing our food. By the smell we could predict if she was cooking *pepian*, or *pulique*, or maybe an *estofado*. It cannot be argued or doubted that the best and most delicious aromas were during the afternoon and nights after dinner, when she'll be confectioning typical traditional sweets to sell. Some of her specialties were: *cocadas*, *turrón*, *espumillas*, *platanos en gloria*, *rellenitos*, *roscas*, etc.

Because of that, the kitchen always smelled like cinnamon, allspice, anise, molasses, and who knows what else. Next was a big bedroom where my aunt Mary and my cousins Roberto and Mario lived, and was followed by a garden with a big lemon tree in the center and purple agapanthus contour.



A few feet away, kind of in the center of that space was a big magenta bougainvillea that was always blooming, under its shadow was *la pila*. One side was to wash dishes and the other one for laundry. Across from it was a small garden with soft pink, yellow, and white rose bushes and purple and white agapanthus, my *tia* Lila's favorites. And in the very back against the wall that divided the property from the neighbors were two rooms for the servants. And then all the free space was our place to play, and where *las piñatas* were hung at all of our birthdays.



My Abuela's Bougainvillea

Rosenelly Martinez

In Guatemala, we only have two seasons during the year, Summer and Winter. Really is more like tropical weather the whole year. Thinking back is confusing, but the heavy rain begins in May, and that is when *la siembra del maiz* takes place, *con las primeras aguas de la estación*.

If May starts raining, you can imagine how much it rains during June. I was a June baby. Consequently, most of the time I had a rainy birthday... or maybe sunny weather abruptly interrupted by a heavy rain that lasted a couple of hours and then the sun shined again. I remember that it was going to be my birthday, and my *abuela* went shopping in Guatemala City, about sixty-eight kilometers from San Martin. She brought fabric for my aunt Mela to make my dress. I have a vague memory of a white fabric with tropical fishes outlined in black and colored in orange, pink, yellow, and green. She also brought my piñata, a big parrot perched on a hoop. The parrot was big and very colorful. Covered with China paper fringes in green, blue, orange, yellow and red. With big round eyes drawn and cut out in white paper circles, a big yellow beak and black nostrils. It's wired feet and legs lined with orange paper, and a big hoop lined with paper and multicolor fringes. I don't need to say how happy and excited I was.



My *abuela* sent my nana Julia to the neighbor's houses with kids my age to invite them and also my cousins, my uncles Salvador and Juan's children. My dress, even though it was homemade it was very pretty and special.



My *tia* Mary and my *nana* prepared *los chuchitos*, horchata drink and *barquillos* (rolled thin wafers). My cousins Gloria and Clemencia made some small paper baskets that simulate roses (made out of construction paper covered with petals made out of crepe paper) filled with *confites* (wrapped candies), *chocolatios* (homemade coffee candy wrapped up on wax paper) for the girls and little packages of the same sweets wrapped in China paper for the boys.



Waiting for the day of celebration, it seemed an eternity, until my big day came. I woke up with “*Las Mananitas Chapinas*” (a Guatemalan song, used in all birthday celebrations) and fireworks. Besides the traditional breakfast (refried black beans, refried plantain, eggs, fresh cheese and sour cream), no milk that day, instead a cup of hot chocolate and a special bread. After the special lunch (I don’t remember what we had for lunch, but I know that *mamas* and *abuelas* cook to the birthday girl/boy their favorite dish), my *nana* fixed my hair and helped me to get dressed, white shoes and socks. I was ready, looking pretty and feeling happy to receive my guests.



Meanwhile, in the clean yard, freshly swept and watered, my uncles Salvador and Juan helped to place the ropes to hang the piñata. I was happy and excited. The people started to come (in Guatemala, it was customary for moms or *nanas* to accompany children *a las fiestas infantiles*). The guests settled on the patio, ready to break la piñata. The first turn to hit la piñata was mine. They didn’t blindfold me, not only because I was small but also because it was my party. Everything was going smooth, until I saw that my cousin Gloria was blindfolding one of the girls and then turning her around (to get her disoriented and dizzy before trying to hit la piñata) showed her where the piñata was and left her alone. When I saw that scene, I interrupted the festive atmosphere with screaming and crying, asking that my parrot not be killed.



My uncle's mission was to move the piñata from one side to the other so the kids could not break it and make it last for everybody to have a turn. I don’t recall if la piñata got broken or not, or how they convinced me to keep on going. ¡I am sure the parrot got killed! We went to the table at the end of the corridor, it was a long, long table, against the wall it was the longest bench and on the other side were chairs. *Los chuchitos*, looked delicious and smelled like heaven, *la horchata blanca y dulce* with the touch of cinnamon y *los barquillos* made specially for the occasion by my auntie *fueron servidos*. In my pueblo were no cakes with frosting (they have to be brought from the city) we had homemade

quesadillas, sweet spongy bread baked only for special occasions or *tortas* (a special kind of heavy sweet bread with ornaments made out of dough and sugar like “*las conchas mexicanas*” special order at *la panaderia*).

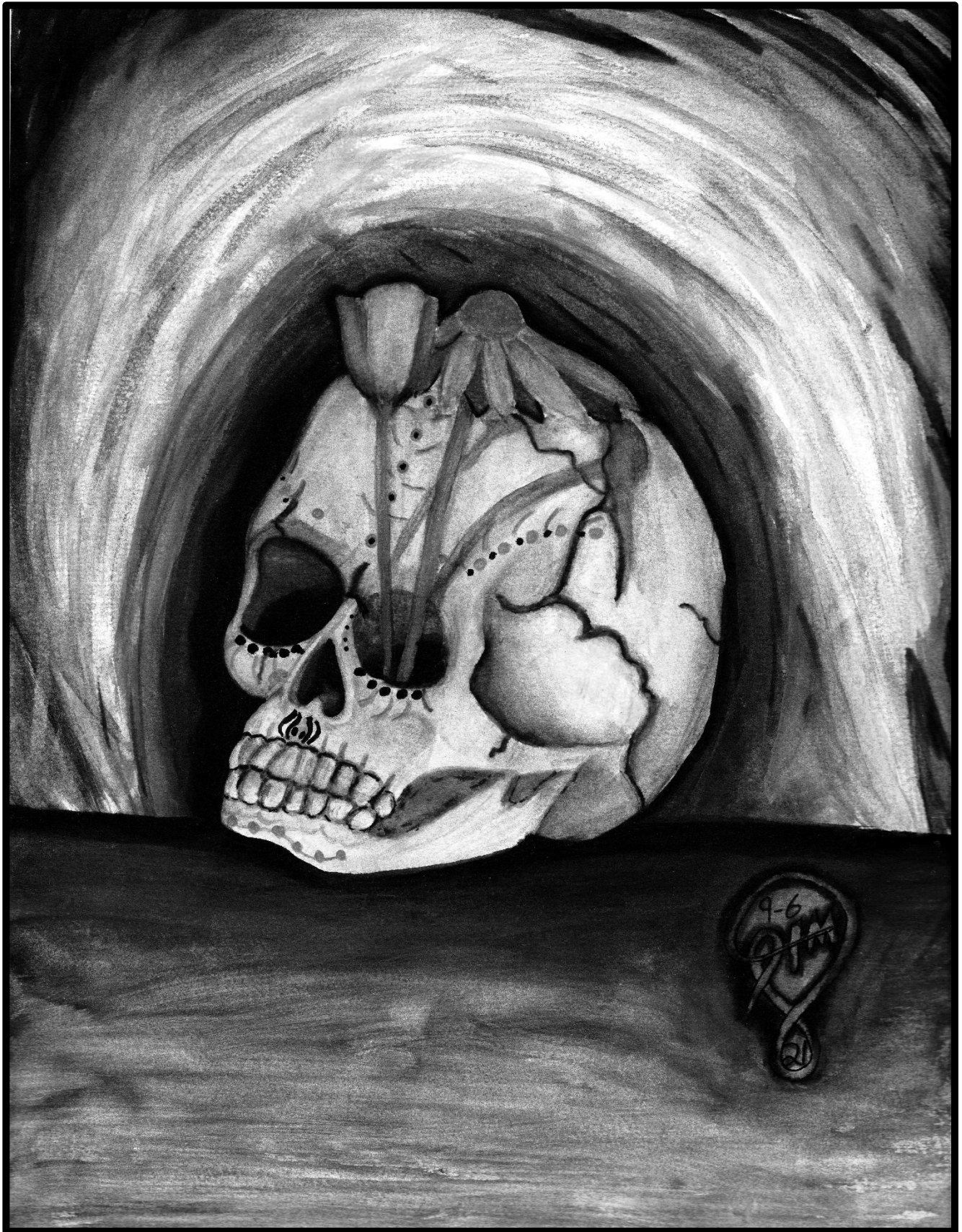


During that time, it was not customary to open the presents during the party. That time was used to play, after all, I think we didn't care much about the presents. The good part was to have friends and family to come and celebrate. The common presents from the neighbors for girls were little porcelain teacups with saucers, violets lotion, or bars of bath-soap wrapped on China paper (pink for girls or blue for boys). Parents and relatives give other things like toys or clothes. I don't have a memory of my dad being present, usually he came to visit me on Sundays.



As the years went by, my family never forgot the crying baby pleading for the life of her parrot. When my siblings were preschoolers my mom shared with them the anecdote of my fourth birthday, for them to learn the fate of all the piñatas, but that was not the end of the story, it was just the beginning because from there on until now many times out of boredom or wanting to tease me or just because they are bullies or while at the table in the chat after eating they would sing ¡please, please, please don't kill my parrot!... *¡Por favor, por favor, por favor no maten a mi loro!* And the tradition I think will keep on going after my days are over. The story will continue for a few generations your aunt, or your *abuela* Rosenelly, while celebrating her fourth birthday when she saw that her piñata was going to be beaten by a little girl, she started pleading for the life of her *loro* to be spared... *o talvez se transforme en una historia para antes de dormir...Había una vez una niña que durante la celebración de su cuarto cumpleaños imploraba*

¡Por favor no maten a mi loro!



Sweet Rest

Darwin Melchiorre

Laurel's Boots

Libby Caulkins

"It's so boring in here! There's nothing I want to do here!" At twelve years old Laurel wanted to be free. In her room she looked at the pink walls and glossy white wicker furniture and wondered why her mother insisted that she would like it. Laurel looked at the mani-pedi set she received as a birthday gift with a feeling of contempt that she couldn't yet express. The stuffed animals piled on her bed reminded her of toys for babies, and not for an older, mature girl such as herself. The framed prints of ballerinas, also in pink and white, that hung on her bedroom walls felt like more of an expectation than an inspiration. The athletic shoes lined neatly under her bed featured Disney princesses, her ballerina flats were made in pastel colors, and standing in opposition to the other shoes was a pair of sturdy brown leather boots. The boots were Laurel's most treasured possession.

Laurel was flooded with memories of summer camp when she was given the hiking boots with their criss-crossed red laces along with a rugged green backpack the year before as essentials to bring to summer camp. She thought of the boots as more than an essential for camp, she thought of them as essential for her own empowerment. She remembered archery

lessons, trying again and again for a bullseye, horse riding, and how freeing it was to feel connected with a horse as she explored the trails. The smell of campfires that lit the night, and how she found another side of herself trading stories with the other girls. She could be who she wanted to be; an adventurer with the whole world in front of her. With the other girls she found hidden lakes and sun flooded peaks where she could see everything for miles around. The expanse was an invitation, calling her into a world she needed to experience in order to truly understand it. Laurel felt that she was truly alive when she was wearing her boots.

The child sized white vanity that stood next to the window held unnecessarily ornate barrettes and sparkly lip glosses that seemed to mock Laurel's need for adventure. She needed to feel real, not just pretty; she wanted to take command of her life. Laurel knew that the world outside was nothing like the stifling domesticity of her bedroom which she felt was a bedroom for someone else. She struggled with her feelings and had a growing awareness of a truth she held inside. Laurel felt as though her real self was a disappointment, and that she could never

be who she was expected to be when she didn't really know herself. Laurel knew what she wasn't, though, and she wasn't the girl her room was made for. She needed to get out.

Frustrated, her eyes moved about her room, quickly scanning the cloying femininity until she saw her leather boots. With a small, wry smile and a feeling of anticipation Laurel put her

boots on, drawing the red laces tight in readiness for the adventures she was sure would await her outside. Pulling her window up she swung a leg out, stopping to listen for signs of her parent's return, and finished her climb out of her window with her boots landing solidly on the ground.



Orange Feet

Angel Parga

Not Available in Stores

Do you work long hours at an unsatisfying job dreaming of starting your own business?
Are you tired of envying others and want to start writing your own success story?
You have the drive and smarts, but where do you even begin your unique path?
Get ready for the life you've always dreamed of in the exciting world of BS
Learn how to become the master of your own destiny with Baeton Sales
Baeton cosmetics are distributed through our exclusive B2B network
With special volume discounts available for Diamond-level sellers
Just follow our three-step patented income generating system
Each sale you produce opens the door for new possibilities
Your loyal clientele will grow into a new referral network
And each new client is a potential BS sales associate
Growing another sub-network underneath you
With all the profits flowing directly to you
And through you to your level manager
Creating financial independence
So, what are you waiting for?
Call right now for your free
Bronze-level starter kit
Just pay \$9.95 S&H!
Become your
Own boss
today!

—Rowena Lin



Un Charro

Angel Parga

Springtime Junket

Bumblebees bouncing and flouncing en route
Butterflies flutter and flitter about
Dragonflies hover and hang in the air
Crickets chirp loudly and longingly fair
Hummingbirds thrumming on membranous wings
Going and coming the mockingbird sings
Horses are clopping and clacking along
Choral refrains beckon throngs singing songs
The wagon is winding and wending its way
A pond by the park, a verdant display
Where green grass grows and clovers root
Blankets with baskets of bread, cheese and fruit
Upon the lawn children wrestle and play
It warrants a wondrous, glorious day
The morning is bright with golden sunlight
The weight of the world is suddenly slight!

—*David Begnell*



Neck

Angel Parga

The Sailor & the Sea

I'd like to buy a little boat
one with sails that stays afloat
to drink so much my belly bloats
the Sailor & the Sea

I'd stain my tongue with cursed words
and drift among the feral birds,
clouds hung above in wild herds
the Sailor & the Sea

I'll spend my days in somber song
to boast about the love I long,
what doesn't kill you makes you strong
the Sailor & the Sea

My lungs would fill with salty air
through ghastly waves, I'd never scare
To venture off where no one's dared
the Sailor & the Sea

I'd let my compass be my guide
and through the Seven Seas I'll ride
heaving through the Ocean's tide
the Sailor & the Sea

The sailor
and the sea,
is where I long to be.

—Allie Rosen

Shining Light

Libby Caulkins

“How soon can you get a case down to South Mills?” Jerry Mayes, the Norfolk County Sheriff asked.

“I don’t know, how soon you want it there?”

“You’re gonna want to get it there before the 15th of next month.”

Simon considered his reply, calculating the time and money lost as well as the time it would take to get the shine down the river. Knowing this was a bad deal, and keeping his composure he asked Jerry, “Your man’s gonna be there for the pickup? Last time I ran a hundred dollars down the river for no good reason.”

The sheriff’s eyes narrowed as he rested his hand on his holstered revolver.

“Don’t you worry about my guy, just worry about when you’ll have it there.”

“It’ll be there on the 12th, same place.”

“It’ll be there on the 12th, or you’ll find yourself in a jail cell.”

Resigned, Simon once again told the sheriff “It’ll be there on the 12th.”

Sheriff Jerry Mayes patted Simon The Shiner on the head with a paternal smile and in a smug display of condescension said, “I knew you’d see the light, Shiner.”

Everyone in the know in Norfolk, Virginia called Simon Jefferson “The Shiner” because Simon Jefferson ran a still just inside Dismal Swamp. Simon didn’t just distill moonshine, of course, he also made rye and bourbon whiskeys for the more formal occasions of his customers. Though Prohibition laws had made life dangerous for independent shiners like Simon they also made the whiskeys that much more profitable.

Simon knew the swamp; he knew it so well that locals would say that he could find his way around in the dark. His stills were housed in a windowless wooden enclosure with one door facing the rivulet that made its watery path from the drier ground where Chesapeake runoff met with smaller freshwater streams. The rivulet widened and grew shallower about a mile inside the swamp, and it was on the side of the shallow water that Simon had placed the only door that separated the piered floor and dark, unpainted walls from the rich life outside in the swamp.

After about an hour of stirring pots of corn mash, gathering jars, and caring for his coonhounds, Simon let his dogs free to resume their patrol around his operation. Muttering and grumbling, he began the first of six stripping runs,

pouring mash into one of his copper pot stills. After lighting a small fire underneath the pot still, Simon began to ease back into the familiarity of the darkness at nightfall in the Great Dismal Swamp.

Simon walked outside and pulled his catfish trap from the water.

“Empty,” he said. With no time to fish Simon opened a can of sardines, pulling the fish from the can with his fingers and filling his mouth with the silvery fish. Tired, and still hungry, Simon rinsed his hands in the swamp water and went back inside to tend his stills. He began to pull the first jars from the first stripping run, the first step towards distilling shine.

Simon kept the last, more flavorful jars from the stripping run and saved them for aging into bourbon, a product in high demand, and a product that few others had the time to prepare. While he was separating the jars, Simon heard his hounds start to bark, and he was wary of what might await him outside. Sometimes the people of Norfolk didn’t want to have to pay for their shine. Thinking that there may be someone lurking outside, Simon grabbed his shotgun and walked quietly toward the door. He stood with his back against the wall and silently peeked outside. Nothing, there was nothing but a bright full moon, and Simon now felt more energized. The tightness from his irritability began to loosen in his chest.

Firefly light reflected off of the water in tiny diamonds and Simon felt the same familiarity with his surroundings that sometimes arose during moments of contemplation. He took it all in and felt for a moment that he was the swamp, kindred spirits with the dark water, the chirping crickets and the croaking frogs. Walking toward the water he approached the rope on his catfish trap. Inside the trap were five large Bullhead catfish swimming lazily against the bottom of the wire trap.

Smiling widely, he pulled the trap from the water as the fireflies scattered into the night.

The following morning Sheriff Jerry Mayes was enjoying his fundraising mixer with Riley, his deputy, by his side. The fundraiser was held at the Norfolk Church of Christ. The church held the fundraiser, featuring Sheriff Jerry, in order to raise money to support prohibition efforts. The Norfolk Church of Christ attracted some of the wealthier folks in Norfolk County, and Sheriff Jerry Mayes loved to keep his supporters motivated.

“It’s so wonderful to see you all again tonight, and I’d like to thank you for helping me to fight the scourge of the drink, and all of the violence and depravity that comes along with it,” Jerry proclaimed. “If there’s one thing that’s sure to tear even the most tight-knit communities asunder it is the demon

threat that's posed by liquor. The victims of the tragedy of drunkenness are not only the innocent wives and children, but also the drunkards themselves, who remain trapped in the death grip that liquor holds over this country. I ask of you today that you donate what you can to help our station continue the righteous fight against the sale of alcohol in Norfolk County."

Following his speech Jerry sampled the food at the church picnic alongside some of the donors to his campaign. Telling Riley that he needed a few minutes he met up with Buford Willis. Buford, who had been buying homes on the cheap as poorer residents could no longer afford rent, gave Jerry a wink and walked with him to an empty table.

"Happy to see you, old friend," Buford told Jerry. "It certainly is a fine day, and we've got ourselves a little private party going on tonight. It would be an honor to save a place for you." In a lowered voice Buford mentioned that "we've got some girls coming by and it sure would be nice to have some uh, refreshments. We're getting started around 10:30, does that work for you?"

Keeping his voice very low Jerry replied, "How many are on the guest list?"

"It's a bit of a shindig, really. Maybe 50 or 60 people. "I got a lot of compliments on the good stuff you brought last time. Weiss over there was

especially fond. Are we still talking about the same price?"

"Why yes, and I'd be honored to attend, Buford. I'll be there."

Otto Weiss, owner of the First Bank of Norfolk joined the two men, and after catching up with Buford Otto took Jerry to the side of the fundraising picnic. The pair shared a few pleasantries and Otto got down to business with Jerry.

"You know I've been a loyal supporter of yours for years now, and I like to be on the right side of the law, it's good for business. Times have been a little rough on the bank lately, so I'm very interested in seeing some of the bank's donations result in some criminal arrests of some kind. As you know, investors prefer to invest where their money is safe. Safe means areas with a strong police presence. I've got to consider more carefully what I do with the bank's donations this year. Hell, bank robbers are getting famous across the country, and some of these gangs are shooting each other in the streets. We've seen a lot of booze and crime over the past few years, and, quite frankly Norfolk County is starting to get a little notorious."

For Jerry, Otto's words carried weight—Otto contributed more than any other donor, and also allowed Jerry access to Otto's wealthy circle of friends. Jerry enjoyed hobnobbing with Norfolk's elite, but not only for the prestige, there was money to be made. If Otto started

supporting his competition for sheriff, Jerry knew he could lose his seat, and the money he had grown accustomed to making. For the rest of the picnic Sheriff Jerry Mayes was more withdrawn than usual, being lost in his thoughts about placating Otto Weiss. Sheriff Mayes drove his own car to Dismal Swamp.

Freddy Brown sat in his fishing boat just inside the swamp, sipping hooch and watching his line in the water.

Mosquitoes were troubling him, and he had just put his arms through his shirt when Sheriff Jerry called out to him.

“Freddy! Freddy, come and get me!”

Freddy knew what the sheriff wanted, who he wanted, and how to get there. For a refilled flask Freddy would take a select few out in his fishing boat to see Simon. He rowed his boat as far toward the road as he could get it, and after making sure the sheriff was alone, he made room for him.

“Alright, come on Sheriff,” Freddy said. Sheriff Jerry climbed into the boat, adjusting his gun so that he could sit on the wooden plank serving as a seat. He watched the sky grow darker under the canopy of bald cypress. The rhythmic sound of the oars in the water marked time while Jerry did the math for the upcoming party. As he was getting an idea of how much bourbon he would need Freddy’s boat touched the edge of the small pier in front of Simon’s stillhouse.

“I’ll just wait here,” Freddy told the sheriff as Jerry swung one of his legs out of the boat and onto the soft, soggy ground that immediately clung to his boots. Simon’s hounds raced up to the Sheriff, barking and circling until Simon came to his door.

“Take it easy!” The dogs, obeying their master, backed away from the sheriff.

“Come on over, sheriff, they’re done.”

Jerry approached Simon, telling him “I’m gonna need about a crate of bourbon.

What are we lookin’ at?”

“Thirty-five, sheriff.”

“Thirty-five? It needs to be more like thirty dollars.”

Simon considered the lost money in free shine that he promised to send down the river for the sheriff and thirty dollars was more than enough.

“Thirty dollars. I’ll bring it out in about an hour.”

“No, you’re gonna drive it in and drop it off behind the Mayfield Hotel. I’ll have a truck here for you.” Jerry counted thirty dollars out for Simon and asked, “You can drive, can’t you?”

Simon brought a crate around to the back of his stillhouse and began to pull the moss and branches he had been using as a cover from his barrels. He kept pulling until he uncovered the wooden spigot on the oldest barrel. He filled bottles and stacked them in the crate

until he had 24 bottles of bourbon in the crate, which was just about his limit when it came to moving heavy things. Simon struggled to get the bourbon into his boat and once it was safely inside, he got in too. He hung his lantern on the bow and rowed forward. The ride back toward the road went smoothly, the rowboat cut through a carpet of green leaves that laid upon the water, leaving swirls of green and black behind him. The road grew near, and he started looking for a truck. There it was, a pickup with wooden panels along the bed and sun faded black paint with a dent in the bed on the driver's side. Simon lugged the crate from the boat and tried to get it into the bed of the truck, but the tailgate wouldn't open. He rattled the tailgate, but it held tightly in the dented corner. Using most of his strength he lifted the crate onto the corner of the bed, then climbed in and eased it down. He moored his boat next to Freddie's and got in, turning the truck's lights on to find his way in the dark.

The Mayfield Hotel was one of Buford Willis' more profitable buildings and sat right in the center of town sharing a back lot with Daisy Fresh Cleaners, The Bel-Air Theater and The Silver Starling, one of the oldest restaurants in Norfolk. Simon knew well enough not to try to go in the Mayfield's front doors, so he drove the truck around and through the shared lot to the service

entrance. Sheriff Jerry was outside along with Buford, Otto, and the hotel's concierge. The four were enjoying themselves, telling stories, and making plans for the party, but mostly they were waiting for the bourbon to arrive. Simon drove in with the crate in the truck's bed and parked near the small loading ramp outside the hotel.

"Get someone to unload the crate and put it in the cellar," Buford told the concierge. Simon waited, watching people start to leave the second showing at the Bel-Air. Some of the laundry workers were outside, cooling themselves in the outside air, and outside the Silver Starling four men were walking toward one of the parked cars in the lot.

A young worker in an apron chocked the hotel's door open and walked over to the truck to help Simon unload the bourbon. Simon tried to open the tailgate again and had no luck. Relieved to have some help this time Simon climbed into the bed of the truck and lifted the crate onto the tailgate, holding it steady. The worker reached up to grab it from the edge of the tailgate, then looked into Simon's eyes and said, "I've got it, I've got it."

But he didn't have it and the crate fell from the truck, breaking several of the bottles and leaving a spreading puddle of bourbon beneath. The sound of the crate crashing to the ground had drawn attention from the theater-goers, the

laundry workers, and everyone else in the lot. The crash, and the sweet, boozy smell of bourbon rose from the lot and began to attract a small crowd.

Sheriff Mayes turned to Buford and Otto. Buford, pale faced, said “Well don’t look at me,” and turned and disappeared into the hotel leaving Jerry and Otto to fend for themselves.

“You better fix this!” Otto told Jerry with a look of combined anger and fear. Jerry, knowing he needed to make a show of an arrest, started to make his way toward Simon who promptly turned the truck around and headed toward home. Sheriff Jerry scrambled to his cruiser, picked up Deputy Riley at the station, flipped the siren on and single-mindedly hunted down Simon The Shiner.

The truck flew down busy streets and toward the road that would take Simon home, he began making some headway once he saw the road out of town. Heading West, Simon raced back to the swamp, the Sheriff still a quarter of a mile behind him once he made it back to his boat. Rowing back, he made it to his stillhouse and laid low.

It was not long after that that the coonhounds announced the arrival of the sheriff and his deputy. Fleeing, Simon ran into the thicket behind his stillhouse.

The darkness held thick and close with dew, slicking the reeds alongside the water, and coating the cypress knees that threatened to pull Simon under as he ran

through the swamp. Simon’s heart pumped fire through his blood, his lungs full of the damp night air as he gained distance on the lawmen. He ran nimbly through the reed-choked water, the sounds of heavy boots crashing through the watery thickets behind him propelled him further through the shallows, sidestepping brush and leaping over exposed roots. Barred owls barked into the night, frogs croaked, and the sheriff’s boots splashed divots into the mud as he and Deputy Riley chased Simon further into the swamp.

As he ran, Simon felt a lightness that held his terror mute. He began to lose his fear of capture, instead feeling a deep, primal anticipation. He passed through clouds of mosquitoes that seemed to clear a path for him, rafts of ducks taking flight from the waters as he sped by, the thicket seemed to be making way for his flight from the sheriff. With his future at stake, Simon became freshly aware of the Dismal Swamp, and of the life that unified it into a single, living entity.

Saw brier clung only gently, with thorns turned away as the outlaw ran for the mesa-island he knew. Slipping past trumpet vine and poison ivy Simon felt as though a steady hand guided him along a well-worn path. Angry now, Sheriff Mayes fired a warning shot as he ran, shouting at Simon “Stop or it's your ass!”

Simon, engaged and newly aware of everything around him, felt a smile crack his face as he saw the moon's light start to penetrate the mist. With copperheads turning in the water toward the lawmen, Simon saw the clearing on the island.

The ground, growing more solid as it lifted the outlaw onto drier land, still pulled at the lawmen's boots, mud slowing their steps while the snakes blocked their path through the shallows behind them, leaving no way out but forward into the clearing for Sheriff Mayes and Deputy Riley. The moon seemed brighter as Simon turned to face his adversaries.

Light flooded Simon, illuminating his skin, and clearing his eyes to see all and everything. He saw his place as part of the swamp around him, breathing the collective breath of the wildlife, and knowing the truth that laid wide upon the faces of the law. He saw their tired faces

and dull, mean expressions. The men whose worlds were made small through simple greed and missed opportunities to do better. Simon saw their slow confusion turning to a mounting awareness as the antlers of white tail deer showed through the evaporating mist. Bobcats' eyes flashed as they watched the lawmen, weasels and possum lurked in the brush around the two men and the outlaw, all watching intently. Simon's gaze closed in on the sheriff and his deputy, awaiting their next move. The clear moonlight was like a flame from within his fiercely beating heart, and Simon walked with the swamp. Smiling and victorious, he walked slowly toward the deputy and the sheriff, knowing what they didn't. He put his hands up in the air and was struck with a fit of laughter. The two men were in The Shiner's swamp, and he was the only one who knew how to get back out.

What a Sight to See

When the time comes for kids to snuggle in beds
And the dynamic dreams dance in their heads
Oh, what a wonderful sight it is to see
How these daring dreams bring such glee

Dreams of tailored tigers talking
With purple peacocks gawking
At kid tea parties so utterly divine
Hosted by animals in every design
That all can truly guarantee
Oh, what a sight this is to see

Dreams of magical musicians
Performing in fantastical conditions
On trumpets of twirly, swirly fashion
Playing with such perfect passion
With a Zing, a Zap, and sometimes a Zee!
Oh, what a sight this is to see

But soon the morning sun will rise
And children will then open their eyes
And Dreams will become just a memory
Of all these wonderous sights they've seen

—*Brandice Mello*



A Mountain Stream

A mountain stream gurgles over moss covered rocks
Rocks rounded by centuries of melting snow
Melting snow rushing headlong to thirsty valleys below.

Beneath azure sky, a solitary raptor circles attentively
Attentively watching for wayward prey
Prey a prancing, a foraging, astray.

A field of grayish green nestles a meadow
A meadow adjoining a mountain stream
A mountain stream gurgling an alpine dream.

—*David Begnell*



Tribute to Frida

Maria de Talpa

Song of the Night Crickets

As the soft song of the night crickets plays
Outside the open window of my room,
And dusk fades with the sun's last rays
The darkness speaks of an unknowing doom.

Listless shadows dance upon the pale walls
Offering little warmth in this sterile domain.
The ringing of a phone chimes in the halls
Echoing a stifling dread in my brain.

An unwelcome chill has appeared and stays
Like Winter Lady's gift of timeless gloom,
As the sad song of the night crickets plays
Outside the open window of my room.

—*Brandice Mello*



Child of Nature

Her infinite kisses
Tasted as sweet as honeysuckle
In twilight

Her touch was gentle and warm
Like a field of flowers on a summer day
As the sun sets on the horizon

She wore the stars around her
Her dress was as white as the clouds in the sky
And her hair a golden-brown
Like the leaves that fell to the ground

At twilight she danced to the music of the forest
Her dress swayed with the violets and the wind
The moon adored her
As her bare feet kissed the earth with each stride

Every night she would lie in a bed of flowers
Beneath a multitude of stars
Her heart beating to the melody
Of crickets

—*Kevin Rodriguez*

One Day

Camryn Stevens

“They said at this point, they aren’t looking for any more models.”

“No more models? Ain’t that why they had a casting call, to look for more models? What type of shit is that?”

I nodded and looked at the ground.

“Oh Baby, I’m so sorry.”

I felt a hot tear trickle down my cheek. I didn’t tell her what else they said, the part about not needing any more Black girls in their show. Mama had enough to deal with.

I looked up to face my reflection in the mirror of our apartment’s only bathroom. I looked at my makeup, left over from the audition this morning, and remembered the excitement I had as Mama hyped up my look. She said I looked so good the Queen of Sheba would be jealous, and that the new lashes I had on were her new favorite.

The now runny mascara was painted down my cheek by the two streams of tears that had squeezed out. I picked up the roll of toilet paper and grabbed a square before returning it to the sink counter.

“Yeah, well,” I replied as I began to wipe under my eyes. “I don’t wanna hold you up.”

“Okay,” she said softly. She looked around the tiny bathroom before continuing. “I gotta get back to work. But I thawed the tamales Ms. Terri made for us; they’re in the fridge for dinner. Make sure you let CeCe out, she hasn’t been let out since I left this morning, but don’t let her roam too far down the street. I’m not tryna hear the neighbors complaining again. And clean up this bathroom! It’s been a mess since this morning.”

I nodded at each task she gave me and when she finally stopped talking, I turned to face her. I was almost a whole foot taller than her, surpassing my tiny grandma by age ten.

She took a deep breath and grabbed my arms at the elbows and squeezed. “You know, you about to be the best damn model the world’s ever seen one day. Oooh you just don’t know it yet,” she said grinning and gazing deep into my eyes. She gave me a little shake before marching off down the hallway.

Standing in the bathroom doorway, I watched as she picked up her coat and purse and patted CeCe, our pitbull, goodbye. My grandma had been looking after me so long, at this point she was basically my mother. A fiery old Black woman, Mama had full lips and hips, a

slick walk and an even slicker mouth. She was not to be played with; 5'2" but was raised in the backwoods of Texas with eight older brothers and three sisters. Her mostly gray salt-and-pepper colored hair was always pressed flat with a hot comb and slicked into a ponytail that fell down to her mid back. She was a force in a female body.

After she walked out the front door, I turned back to the mirror. Poking and prodding at my face, I looked for her in me. Her skin, weathered and wrinkled by laughter and long, sunny days of work and play, had the same red undertones as mine. It paired well with the rosy cheeks and pink lips I had worn for the audition. Although our complexions were different, mine the color of coffee before the added sugars and creamers, hers like a peanut butter Girl Scout cookie, we had the same bones. The flat noses, high cheek bones, and spread apart almond shaped eyes screamed 'Jackson,' the last name we carried from her father's family. Anyone could tell a Jackson from a mile away.

I reached up to untie the ribbon which had held my hair in the high puff it had been in for my audition, relieving the headache I'd had all morning. I shook my head a few times, encouraging my curls to return to their natural state of rest. I looked at my brown curly afro as the

sides brushed against my shoulders and the rest, unphased by gravity, shot up to the ceiling. Mama always likened it to those sun-halos we saw at church on those manger paintings of Baby Jesus and Mary and Joseph. She never let me straighten my hair growing up, and getting older helped me understand why. Whenever I asked, she always told me that I wasn't about to lose my halo on her watch. I knew it was deeper than that, though. I knew it was so I would grow up loving the way I look, not trying to hide it.

I began to clean up the makeup palettes and stray brushes, the creams and powders I had left out in my rush and excitement this morning. I let out a chuckle imagining what Mama would have said to those casting people if she had been in my shoes. "What do you mean, you have enough Black girls for your show?" She'd start. "You mean y'all got a capacity on how many Black folks can be on your runway at once? All them white folks but y'all gotta put a cap on *us*?"

Once I finished and the room looked good enough to pass an inspection from Mama, I switched off the light and walked into the living room where I was greeted by CeCe.

"Okay girl, I know you've got to pee," I said to her as she ran circles around my ankles.

I walked over to the door, grabbed my key, and put the leash around Cece's collar. As I opened the door and stepped out of our second story apartment, I paused before the stairs to breathe in the

fresh air. Feeling the warmth of the sun on my skin and the slight breeze blowing through my curls, I knew Mama was right. One day, I would be a star.



Just Thinking

Stella Grosso

Dare to Succeed

Dreams can come true.
But it is not because a person has a dream that it becomes reality,
It is because it's the dream that the person pursues,
They are willing to go above and beyond their call of duty to receive that which they seek.
Dare to succeed.

When faced with a challenge and someone tells you that you can't overcome it,
Then see if you can around it or up under it.
If you are told that your goals are impossible to reach,
Remember that many before you were told the same thing,
Yet they went on and achieved more than others ever thought they would achieve.
Dare to succeed,

The Wright brothers are accredited with being the first to fly airplanes,
But they were told that such idea was inconceivable, impractical and unfeasible.
Nevertheless, they pushed forward with their dream and proved to the world that it was
certainly achievable.
So narrow your focus and pursue your dreams,
Because what you have to offer may be the key to change things.
Dare to succeed.

Challenges may come and obstacles may arise,
Doubt may show up just when disbelief has run out.
However, use those challenges to build your strategies.
Allow those obstacles to increase your strength,
Those experiences to expand your wisdom and your dreams to solidify your goals.
Dare to succeed.

Above all, let your small victories prepare you for larger territory and build your confidence
in times of perseverance,
Never give up, refuse to give in and if you fumble or fall,
Get back up again.
Dedication makes success and eventually you will win,
If you dare to succeed.

—Tera Person

Once Upon a Dream

I sit outside at lunch and breathe the fresh fall air.
I watch four tall green trees that dance without a care.

Sunlight on my water bottle glistening rays of gold.
As if a hidden message, a secret never told.

I hear a little rustle, a leaf? Why no, a crow.
Slowly creeping closer, inches from my toe.

Its eyes as black as midnight, on a clouded desert night.
With a reflection of myself that instills my heart with fright.

Transfixed I stare with wonder of what he may be thinking.
As if he saw right through me, we lock eyes without blinking.

A small tilt of his head, as if to question me.
Who are you? Is this really, the place you want to be?

My mind begins to wander the depth of vacant eyes.
Revealing all my truths and shedding my disguise.

The lies I tell myself to justify my settling.
They make me think I'm happy and keep my dreams from meddling.

I search my mind for answers, how did I end up here?
I said it would be short term, but months turned into years.

A once inspired spirit, full of hope and passion.
Slowly chipped away, in unexpected fashion.

It happened over time, and so I didn't feel it.
Distracted by this life that happens to conceal it.

I lost the wish I once made, to write with words of magic.
Instead I focused nine to five, in routines dull and tragic.

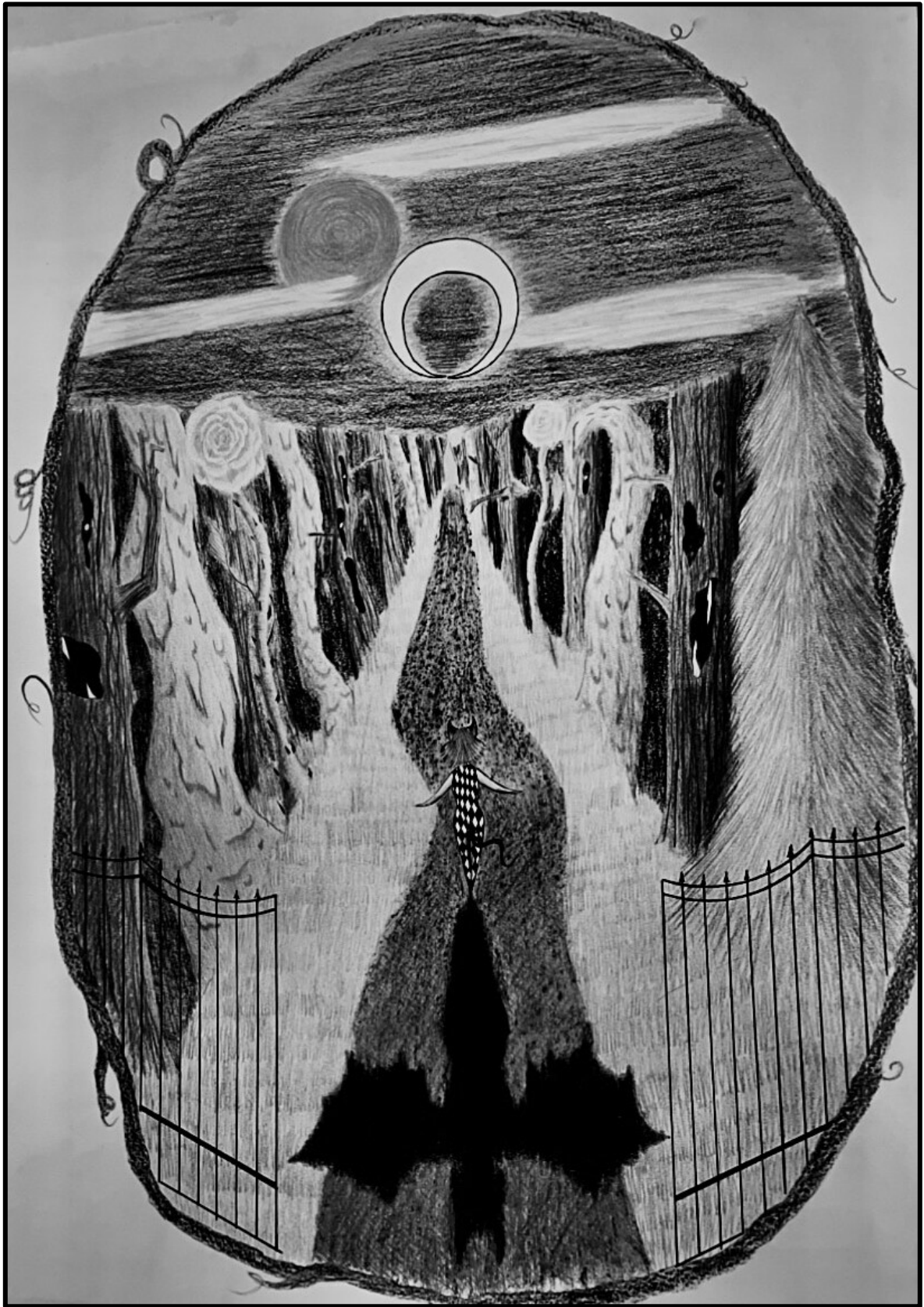
I blink back to the present, the crow then spreads its wings.
Then with a graceful leap, into flight it springs.

Oh what it would be like, to up and fly away.
To another land or time, in fiction for a day.

The spirit of the child within, begins to overflow.
What I questioned once before, now I seem to know.

I leave this place to chase my dream, it's time to write again.
I'm ready for the life I want, for I have found my pen.

—*Sabrina Celis*



Bigger Than My Body

Maria de Talpa

I Fear No Goodbye

I fear no goodbye,
no departure overdue

I'll plant my feet deep in the sand
and welcome something new

I'll let the ocean have her way
finding peace beneath surrender

Because I know life is but a cycle
going on and on forever.

I accept the rising of the tides
and the crashing of the waves

I choose to love you while you're here,
and long after you've washed away

I know the ocean is so vast
always bringing new adventure

But if I'm brought ashore to you
we'll sit in the sand 'til we remember.

For Christabel and Esther Ruth

—Camryn Stevens

Lovely Woman San Berdoo

a lovely san berdoo woman sing me blues away from me
when she sang me tune in choppy time and a wobbly key
jazzy voice seductive made me turn me upside in a sway
this lovely san berdoo woman sing me blues from me away
a turn here and a turn there and me heads goes another spin
them jazzy lips seductive waltzing lips me a spinning grin
tonight me dances woman of san berdoo in wobbly choppy key
me door never finds her shut this san berdoo woman so lovely
oh me woman blues away and wine with lovely woman san berdoo
san berdoo me woman is the lovely oh me wine me woman blues
jazzy kissing and me waltz her lovely and seductive with me wine
me lovely san berdoo woman sing me blues away with me

poem and picture by Ivan de Jesus Alvarez





Loving a Woman

I love a woman as a friend
Hoping she will stay till the end
Her curly hair just amazes me
And that perfume smells like daisies

I love a woman just as sweet
Like chocolate, to serve and to treat
Through candy kisses and hugs
She's all I ever thinking of

I love a woman o' so dear
Soon she end up leaving me here
Missing her like mail without letters
Send it to receive something better

I love a woman way too much
My addiction is uneasy to pluck
Come back my precious femme
So present as an emerald gem

I love a woman til this day
Wishing she would stay
Hoping her love will not close
Instead it opens and grows

I love a woman with all my heart
I pray that we will never be apart
God sent me this angel from above
This woman is who I love

—Vincent Brewer

Lady

Angel Parga