

THE GUILD

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2016

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The Guild

Reader:

This is *The Guild*, Borough of Manhattan Community College's Literary Magazine. Each semester the Writers' Guild curates this magazine. It brings me pride to have been the leader in curating this issue as I've given it a (*much needed*) face lift. In between the beautiful cosmetics of the magazine, you will find some disturbing, some identifiable and some God-awful ideas formed into words for your entertainment and inspiration.

Remember kids: it's a weird issue. At times you will scratch

your head, and become uncomfortable. If this happens to you, we have achieved our goals. We have made a difference in you. We caused a reaction. Applaud these minds for thinking beyond the scope of the norm and portraying them in the medium of their choice. It's not easy!

With that being said, I thank you for reading. Thank you to all the artists and writers that submitted. Thank you to the editors for their partaking Thank you to Prof. Noveno, OSA, SGA and the English Department for continuously supporting the artistry and

talents of the creative students here at BMCC. A special thanks to Mishael Perez: thanks for being my crutch in the preparation of this issue.

For the students looking to be published in upcoming issues of *The Guild*, contact us at theguild.submit@gmail.com and if you're interested in being a member of the BEST club at BMCC, give us an e-mail at writersguildbmcc@gmail.com Join the club! Submit! Enjoy!

- **Shaquille Smith**
President and Editor-in-Chief

Welcome ladies, laddies, and other laden souls to the Spring 2016 edition of the BMCC Writers' Guild magazine! What follows is an anthology of works produced by hardworking students at BMCC. It is our goal at the Writers' Guild to demonstrate the value of creative thought and artistic input and communicate our cares upon the world. For some of us, writing is an escape, for others it's just a tool for employment. For all of us, however, it is a means of expression -- the agent through which our thoughts and ideas become cemented in reality. To that end, we present our magazine -- a collection of ideas both sane and insane that we hope

will cause you to think twice. First, in confusion and second, in some semblance of appreciation. We give thanks to all of our benefactors at BMCC, most assuredly including our club adviser Benita Noveno who remains a steadfast fixture on the Writer's Guild team.

Now with the pleasantries out of the way consider the following:

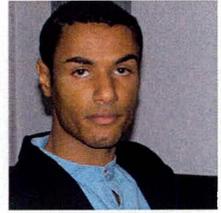
The universe is a sea of ephemeral energies expanding out into what we can only fathom as nothingness. Somewhere in that seemingly infinitesimal sea of nothingness is *you*. You are a hopefully self-aware bag of slowly decaying meat parts held to-

gether by seemingly unaware meat parts. You're kept functioning by an intricate network of electrical impulses that are governed by a slushy slab of meat encased in a hollowed-out pseudo-rock made using dubious plans long ago developed by microorganisms of which only vestiges remain today. You are the result of billions of years of non-stop development. The universe spent all this time writing and *you* are the latest chapter in its insane history. What story are you going to tell? Will the world end with you? That's for you to decide, meatbag.

With that in mind, enjoy your stay. - **M**

Editors

Shaquille Smith (Editor-in-Chief) is an aspiring writer with often abstracted narratives for identifiable issues. He embraces sexuality, uncomfortable vices and breaks down gender norms. You can find more at inspirationoverintellect.com



Mishael Perez (Co Editor-in-Chief) is the mangy mutt of this modest menagerie. He comes well equipped with dashed quips and has a greater bark than bite but that's only because he's well-rooted and down-to-Earth. Stupid puns are what keep him going in life. Also pizza. And coffee.

Hannah Koufos enjoys 19th century Russian composers, flash fiction, and very hot coffee without any milk in it. One day, she hopes to voyage into the great beyond.



Cherie Jacobs is a science major with a passion for writing. In the future she'd like to establish a career in medicine and write professionally. Her writing focuses on ideas of self love, healing, growth, race, and her personal experience as a young Black woman. Find more at loveyoselfsite.org and intogrownwomen.com

Brandon Short, from Alberta, Canada and Coloradan native. This is Short's second semester in the Writers' Guild at BMCC. He is a creative writing major and looks to continue his education in a linguistics program out west. He enjoys being outdoors and hanging out with his troublesome dog (not pictured). Writing styles include poetry, short stories, and essays.



Jada Gordon is a writer that enjoys writing poetry, short stories, essays plays, etc. Gordon has a love of music and anything that's challenging yet inspiring. She explores writing through different lenses and perspectives. She also embraces the uncomfortable parts of life that fuel creativity.

Daija Ruiz is from Staten Island, New York. She is Secretary of the BMCC Writer's Guild and graduating this semester with her associates in Liberal Arts. She'll move on to earn her Bachelor's in Education. She aspires to become principal of elementary school. She started writing short stories as a child. While sticking to her roots, she mainly enjoys writing poetry today.



Front Cover: **Uncanny Cover** John Villarin

Back Cover: **Untitled** Felix Gomez

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Even the Earth Needs to Use Protection

Sherrod Stanton

Damn! It itches so bad. I should have never collided with that slut comet. I knew she wasn't clean. Now I'm covered in filthy humans, from northern to southern hemisphere! I don't know what to do. I take constant meteor showers to get rid of them, but they just hide and resurface. I once covered my entire surface with water hoping the lil' buggers would drown but instead they built boats and waited for the water to recede. I've tried earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados and even dousing them in some bubonic plague spray that I got from my Buddy Mars, but the damn things keep coming back. You kill a million of `em and a billion more come in their place. They even fight among themselves for parts of my body. MY BODY!!! Like it's theirs or somethin`, the nerve of these arrogant parasites. They have had two big wars that involved biological weapons and atomic bombs and they still can't manage to kill each other off. The bastards manage to split an atom and uses it as a weapon and they drop it on one of the other human groups, and still didn't kill em` all. HOW DO YOU FUCK THAT UP HUH? HOW? All that bomb did was give me a bad rash and some swelling. I think they're gearing up for a third war but it don't matter they'll find a way to survive. Now their drillin` holes in my face, draining all of my oil, and making me a crater face. Now that chick Venus will never take me seriously with all of these zits. And my ozone layer is depleting and that bastard the Sun is burning a hole straight through my north pole, giving me a gigantic bald spot in the middle of my head. Where the hell am I gonna find a hat big enough to fit my head?



Untitled Pranto Podder



Reborn Anthony Acevedo

Mystery Children

Joely Acosta

They are the children of their country
this one does not belong to them.
Here they draw pictures of their homes bluntly
Bombed; with green army trucks pointing guns,
the flowers still stand from their stems.

The smiles still showing
blood coming out of their shoulders
The sun still glowing
Homes battered by human's anger like the size of boulders
The flowers still growing

Miss Mediterranean engulfs their bodies
His brothers from other mothers and fathers
I see ominous waves excluding sorries
I smell salty waters and the freshness of hope never bothered
all at once imagining a place where we are all saved.

Floating baby by the shores of the sea
She loves his mother too; taking her last breath
His father urgently wanting to be free
Now reminiscing on a life unoccupied with death
He begs "breathe my sons, breathe"
He closes their eyes
wishing them a slumber with peace.

Darkness over Syria
Like a daunting criminal in question
Placing social classes in the same place
Red explosions like the chemical combustion
Placing mystery children in a tight space

They are the children of their country
this one does not belong to them.

Jumping at Shadows

Brandon Short

It's an eerie, chilly October night. The wind stings like a stranger's breath trespassing on an unsuspecting neck. Even the draft slipping through the edge of the window causes the hair on William's head to stand on end. He's sprawled out on the carpet, struggling his way through *his collection of The Brothers Grimm's fairy tales*. His older brother, Jacob, plays a racing game on the brand new Nintendo 64 he received for his 10th birthday the week before.

"Jacob, William, it's Thursday night, you know what that means!" Mom calls down the stairs towards them from her usual post at the kitchen table. She's held there by the phone's tangled cord.

"No! Please, can't somebody else do it this week? I'm scared..." William says.

"It's too dark out there, can't we do it in the morning?" Jacob adds to their case as they lock eyes and scramble for any ideas or excuses. William considers dashing to the bathroom and locking the door. Better to be locked inside than forced outside; but he knows from experience that mom would be able to get the door open and then it would be back to square one.

"Guys, it's your job and you can't make excuses every week," she says to put an end to the argument. "You'll be fine, there's nothing out there. It's just the wind. Besides, it'll only take you two minutes and you could have been done by now if you had just done as you were told in the first place." The brothers have heard this enough to know it's useless to try to argue with her. Their combined childish logic is simply no match. The verdict has been reached. One way or another, the garbage has to be taken out.

"I'll collect all the bags from inside if you run them to the bin," Jacob says.

"That...that's not fair! You can't make me go out there alone. I'll carry the trash, but you grab the newspapers and come with me." He can't help but think about all the adults who tell him that older siblings will look after younger brothers. They say it's in their nature. Now he realizes how dumb that is. Here's his older brother, right in front of him, drenched in the same fears, trying to march him off to certain doom on his own.

"Mom said you'd be fine. She says there's nothing out there."

"And you believe her?" William asks while searching for any sort of answer in his brother's eyes. He isn't returning the stare; instead he's looking through the window and into the endless darkness that turns their familiar yard into an unknown danger. The apple tree that they run around in sunlit bliss now looks evil with its crooked branches barely distinguishable in the dark. They know it will only be a matter of 30 or 40 steps to the corner where the garbage bin remains tucked away, but they're terrified. This shadowy journey is now snared with monsters and dangers and all the evils that crawled out of the gutters, one by one, as the sun set over their mountain town. These ghouls lie waiting for a slight stumble or fatal pause to pounce on the weary brothers. They stalk the boys just out of sight, like cats in tall grass. Week after week, Jacob and William are put into danger by their mother's insistence that they take out the garbage, feeding them the same unsettling lie: they have nothing to fear and these monsters exist only in their imagination.

How can they believe her? Just because they've never actually seen the monsters, doesn't mean they're not out there.

As William is still secretly trying to think of any possible excuse to avoid going outside, his tiny body betrays him. The brothers separate and collect all the contents from the various bins throughout the house and condense them into a single black bag, comparable in size to

William's body. They snap out of their obedient trance, there in the front hall, side by side, on the edge of certain doom, garbage and old newspapers in their hands, facing the open front door.

"Please don't leave me out there," William begs.

"I'll be right behind you the whole time," Jacob says. William has no choice but to trust him. They take their first cautious steps together. The wind hurts their eyes and slams the door.

They force themselves down the three front steps and out of the comfort of the dim porch light.

"I'm scared," William says out loud, confirmed only by his brother's silence. They creep up to the edge of their driveway, hearts beating in their throats, and fear seems to shrink their skin a few sizes until they feel like they're going to burst.

The silence is broken by a blood chilling scraping sound. Images of long clawed, lanky beasts flood their minds. The eerie sound seems to be coming from all around them, as werewolves are circling, just out of sight, waiting for the moment to charge as a pack to feast on the brothers' childish forms.

"It's okay... It's probably just the wind" Jacob attempts to reassure them.

It seems like the harder they stare into the shadows the more twisted the sights become. William starts to see long skeletal fingers stretching out of the cracks in the sidewalk, and nightmarish goblins perching in the trees.

The porch light flickers as the wind picks up its force, causing a faint strobe to accompany the deafening pulse of their hearts pounding in their throats. With every step, the urge to throw the bag out into the shadows and race back to the safety of the house becomes more and more tempting. But somehow they resist it. William once again feels as though his body is betraying him.

With wide eyes he inches towards the creaky old gate of the fence. Every hair on his body feels like a needle, his ears strain to hear past the wind and the crunching of the dead leaves beneath his feet. William can hear the papers in Jacob's hands whipping their edges in an attempt to rip themselves free of his grip. Taking a deep breath, William reaches for the iron handle on the gate. Everything goes silent as he pulls on it gently in an effort to trick the old hinges into not squeaking.

Suddenly, the tension explodes as a black form darts through the opened gate and streaks between them, causing both brothers to jump back. Jacob throws the papers into the air.

"What was that?" William yelps, through his fear. Jacob chuckles before answering indirectly.

"Jeez, Midnight!" He scolds their black cat, which now turns his predatory glowing eyes toward them. "What's gotten into you?"

Suddenly the humor of the situation allows William to see the absurdity of his fears. Here he stands stiff with fear of his own cat, in his own front yard. Like a veil, the anxiety is lifted from his mind. He swings the bag into the bin and waits for Jacob to collect the papers scattered across the dead grass.

"It's strange, you know," He says to Jacob, sharing his realization, "this fear of the darkness we have." He looks around at the nocturnal surroundings that moments ago filled his heart with icy dread. His eyes have now adjusted to the darkness, allowing him to pick out the details that bring this unknown world back into clarity. "All over the world people are afraid of the dark, and build streetlights and lamps to squeeze it out of every corner of our cities. As if even the slightest shadow will bring some sort of monster. But why? Why do we

do this? What makes us so afraid? It's just a bit darkness. Maybe we're afraid that if we can't see something we can't control it. But do you remember up at the cabin how dark it gets? We weren't too scared. And do you remember how many stars there were out there? They were like the sky's way of telling us that there is always light but sometimes you need to be in the darkness to see it."

"Nicely said, Shakespeare." Jacob teases. But William brushes it off, He's used to people making fun of the way he speaks. They say that he don't sound like a 7 year old and that he makes every small event mean something more than it does. But he believes that he'd rather live in a world of discovery than allow himself to become boring by 8, and defeated by 11.

Noticing that Jacob has finished putting the last scrap of paper into the bin he starts to make his way back to the door, where Midnight still sits watching them with his bright eyes. William sets the pace at a nice stroll, and continues to soak in the night. His improved sight allows him to see the branches bare of goblins, the sidewalks free of fingers, and the street completely uninhabited by werewolves. He now notices the twirling leaves that he mistook for claws. Even the once terrible wind now seems like an old friend as it brushes his red cheeks.

He bounds up the porch steps, reaches out for the door, and opens it with confidence instead of desperation for the first time. He even allows Midnight the time to rub his body against the doorframe before entering. Feeling like a brave explorer, William re-enters his home, triumphant over the fears that had ruled his nights until now. His mom is still at her post twirling the phone cord as she looks up.

"Where's Jacob?" she asks.

Turning around, William notices for the first time that he's alone. Looking through the glass door and out into the night, he repeats the phrase of reassurance that he never understood until now. "I'm sure he's fine. There's nothing out there."

Coffee

Colby Sampel

Smoke dancing
on a tarrish
black ocean
There are people we see
and then people we don't
Like paper people floating by
on the empty black sea
This burning darkness
it sears our souls
Sugar can't hide it
Milk only clouds it
They have names
they had lives
Like soulless beings we pass them by
we blow right past them
like the wind
like smoke dancing
then disappearing
from the lifeless, tarrish
black ocean

Twelve Doughnuts

By Mictian Carax

I had read about the high suicide rates, so I took the job. I had hoped for an early death since I was a child and I needed something to cling to. Something to propel me in that direction. I have a low pain threshold; I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Yet. That's what I would tell those that asked me about my decision to sign up for it. It was a dark joke. My favorite type.

In the first six months of living in that dank, metal coffin we had four suicide attempts. It's hard not to take yourself that seriously when living under those conditions. Imagine not being able to see the sun or smell fresh air. All you smell is the machine's food, oil, and the farts of the entire crew. The sonic and olfactory varieties were endless. Not to mention that people can get quite miffed when you toy with their precious oxygen. The levels of it had to be kept low in order to avoid fires, of course, but try telling your body that; you feel tired and angry all the time, your wounds don't heal properly. We'd been plunged thousands of feet underwater for three years. At that point, I was convinced what powered the nuclear reactor was the souls of the submarine's occupants.

I wish I could laugh, but the joke isn't funny anymore.

For the last three months I had somehow frightened off sleep. My eyelids had ceased to close and my senses refused to rest in the arms of Morpheus. My head felt like it was trapped in a vice. It was hard to concentrate, so much that I became more prone to accidents. One day, I cut my hand while making some repairs. I didn't stop to take care of it because I wanted desperately to end my shift and go to bed. Even though sleep was unattainable, lethargy had long ago set the trap, and at this point had captured the deed to my body. Eventually, I did clean and bandage the wound, but my body was too weak to fight off an infection. It took almost a month to fight it off, or so I could see on the charts. By the time I woke up, my muscles were too weak to support me. Mercifully, I was relieved of my duties in order to convalesce.

Through the window in my room I began to pass the time by exploring the undersea volcanic hell I was submersed in. We were at this point in the deepest place on earth, the Mariana trench, in the Pacific Ring of Fire. No light ever pierces the gloom here, so the artificial light was not agreeable to the crabs outside my window. They would swim up frantically trying to escape, but when they realized they were not in danger they would parachute right back down. They looked like little crab snowflakes. We approached a bizarre sea of molten sulfur. Despite this mortal, boiling, toxic sludge, there were flatfish lounging about close to the vents of two-hundred-degree boiling sulfur, like it was a Korean Spa. Some moved gracefully, like butterflies, swimming through this death trap. As if taunting the flatfish, the crabs just waded through the sulfur unharmed. Toxic plumes from the sulfur bed that reached the higher levels, however, killed the fish that inhabit those areas. They had not adapted to this poison. This is how life was possible down here; these little demons were scavengers. Soon after this discovery, the submarine shook violently, and in the distance, I could see lava, exploding gases and rocks being torn apart and rocketing through the water. Everything went black. The lights flickered and died in

the submarine. After a while, I began to see small specks of blue light dancing in the distance. I couldn't tell how much time had passed, but eventually, I learned to decipher the language of these spectral animals. Flashes of light are used as a welcome or warning sign, or to woo potential mates. Some of them vomited a bioluminescent liquid that they used as a weapon. This language was more romantic than any I had known on earth.

One day, a monster with long, transparent, needle-like teeth, that gave it an unsightly protruding jaw, swam so close to my window it scared me. It must have sensed something because it slowly swam back to my window, the lights along his belly and one over his head, beginning to glow softly. It bumped its head against the glass a few times, trying in vain to enter, but mostly it danced with exquisite elegance for me. I remained motionless for hours, staring at the sinuous undulations of its glowing body. I began to feel quite heavy, and a warm sensation began to trickle from the middle of my chest to the rest of my body. I felt I had been chosen. I felt eyes looking at me. Just me. Was this love? I didn't know, but what I did know instantly was that if it wasn't love, then it was the explosion that brought us together. There's nothing strange in this; violence and hate are responsible for as much bonding as love. His bioluminescence dimmed gradually until he was no longer visible.

It was impossible to know if it had been hours or months since the lights went out entirely, but I had resolved to join it. Even under the best of circumstances, love is always a cosmic catastrophe, and I was prepared to go to the end. After all, I was just an animal looking for a home. I just wanted to share the same space for a minute or two. I flooded the compartment of the escape trunk to open the hatch. When the door flew open, I immediately felt my whole body as fit to burst from the change in pressure. The pain in my joints, chest, and abdomen was excruciating. I felt tiny rat nails scratching, and crawling all over my skin. My skin swelled and started to form indentations, it felt like bubble wrap and the bubbles seemed on the verge of exploding. I was drunk on agony. The ocean floor began to tilt. I thought he had returned and was playing a silly trick on me. I was relaxed and happy now. With that suddenness of euphoria, I set out to look for it in every niche, felt around in every dark recess of the underwater mountains and volcanoes, trying to find him. But despair is a formidable foe. I let go; I dropped until I landed on the deepest point of the planet. I pleaded, I prayed to the blue-lit monster to come back to me. I prayed for this. I never pray. In the periphery of my vision, I began to see flashing lights, I jerked my head to the right, but there was nothing there. To my left I heard the most blood-curdling screams, but they were only in my memories from when I was a child and I played on dry land. I couldn't help but think that in other places there was light, and books, and music. At that precise moment there were people whose only concern was whether or not Homer would eat all twelve doughnuts. Then, I saw an army of Nazi pastries, marching with sacks over their shoulders. There were pieces of my body inside the sacks.

How come someone hasn't noticed that I'm dead and decided to bury me?

Best not to think.

What the Doctor Did

Shaquille Smith

An uncontrollable urge to pop an abnormally large pimple on my face is what prompted this 'transition' in my life. Every twenty year old boy got the occasional pimple. Sometimes it was ingrown hair that wouldn't bust. Sometimes it was an indestructible pimple that fucking temporarily stained my mocha skin purple. This one was right below my eyebrow. If I cared about anything on my face, it was my eyebrows. Religiously, I got them threaded. I prided myself on making people uncomfortable with just my eyebrows alone. They are *the attraction of my face, and now they're ruined. I couldn't hide the pimple and I couldn't stand it anymore either.*

It took over my brain: I studied the pimple. In my bathroom mirror, in my job's bathroom mirror, in random mirrors in retail stores, in the bus terminal's bathroom mirror, in the front camera of every phone I got my hands on, in every dark tinted car I can make my reflection out in. I obsessed over this pimple. This huge abnormal pimple.

"I'm gonna kill myself over this," I cried, sarcastically.

"Just see a doctor," Jo

said.

"Who goes to a doctor over a pimple?"

"Those who don't know how to get rid of them. They go to *dermatologists!*" He said as if it were magic.

"Would you happen to know of one?"

"There's a walk in clinic, not far from here that you can go to." He proceeded to give me the address and insisted on coming with me to see the doctor, at that very moment.

"I'm not sure if I'll even go." I said truly indecisive.

I don't go to doctors often. In fact, I don't go to doctors at all, really. I could get a cold, and take no medicine and just live through it. Allergy seasons come and go, and I persevere through it letting my body cure itself naturally. I hate medicine. I hate interfering with my body. In every aspect of life I usually think things will resolve itself. Jo's invisible, transparent, absent feeling for me - they'll somehow appear. My grades - they'll somehow pull through on their own. The universe - it'll somehow work itself out, naturally. My body - the immune system will replace all those damaged cells and once again,

I will be back to normal.

This time, the thought of seeing a doctor even for a quick fix of a pimple interested me. More than it would to see a doctor for a flu, but not enough for me to race there the minute I obtained the information.

I went to sleep - or tried to. I turned, and sweated, and thought all night. It was as if the pimple somehow got legs and pushed against the pillow, sending my head flying. My head flopped back and forth, like a fish out of water, for hours this went on. My right cheek would pound the pillow and then my left cheek would bounce off the pillow. All night this continued until I woke up and realized I *had to see a doctor. Another pimple grew, below my lip on the opposite side of my face. Miraculously, this pimple grew to the same length and even strength as the one below my eyebrow. Together they pushed my head off the pillow from both sides all night giving me killer headaches.*

Laying there in bed immobile, a panting sweat drenched me. I zombied out of bed. I slipped on sweat pants from my bottom draw, threw on the biggest hoodie I could find and slid on Adidas slide-ons. In the almost pitch black, five AM morning sky light I gurgled a gallon of mouthwash, swiped deodorant under each pit four times and drowned my face in the

stopped up sink. Looking like a retired athlete, I walked out into the morning to the dermatologist clinic.

The door was open, the lights were half on, half off. Spanish music played in the background. A man with a mop whistled at me, and with no words, just the swaying of his hips, invited me to dance. It's a common mistake both people and men get. People think because of my brain skin and loose curly hair, I'm some sort of Spanish. Men think because I'm flamboyant, I want to dance with all of them. I gave him a smirk and proceeded to the empty waiting room.

The woman in green scrubs wiped her eyes and sat up in the chair. She croaked something that sounded life-threatening.

"Hello," I said approaching the counter.

"What can I do for you?" She yawned.

Removing my hood, I said "I must see a doctor about these two pimples."

Unfazed by my pimples and their mutation, she asked if I was the 6:30 AM appointment for the doctor. I glanced at my watch and looked at the entrance I came in and said I was. She pressed a button on her desk and told me to wait with her finger.

Trying to act casual, I picked up a magazine that had all these smooth photoshopped faces on them. A smooth face I once had. I

started thinking about what the doctor would do.

Maybe he would suck the pus right out of the pimples in seconds and send me on my way.

Maybe she would use a laser machine and zap them, making the pus explode like a water balloon.

Maybe he'd tell me to go home and wait for them to combust on their own.

Maybe she'd give me creams that will shrink them.

Snapping me out of my thoughts, a hunched-over figure appeared from a long lightless hallway. Dragging one foot and creeping up the hallway with the next, the silhouette came as close to the entrance of the hallway as possible. I sat up in the chair and looked at the receptionist.

As I made eye contact with her, the scraping of the foot against the tiles stopped. The one heel came to end.

"6:30!" The silhouette called out, muffled by their mask. Silhouette turned at a snail's pace in the opposite direction, continuing to drag the foot and step ever so loudly with the other.

I confirmed with my eyes that this was the doctor with the receptionist. "Can't you hear!" She snapped. It was the doctor.

I sprang up out of the seat and followed the doctor down the hallway of closed doors and no lights until I

found the room where they'd turned into.

"Sit!" The doctor said, back turned towards me.

The doctor had a ponytail wrapping around the hump of their back. Every three inches, a rubber band kept it in place and the tail got thinner and thinner the more it traveled down the doctor's back surpassing the doctor's bottom.

"Doctor, thank you for seeing me!" I said as I sat in the patient's seat. "I have these pimples or ingrown hairs and -"

"Pimples!" The doctor shouted, banging their metal plate of metal cutting instruments.

"Pimples..." I resumed, "and it's been bothering me for weeks now. And just this morning, over the course of the night, I got another one."

I pointed to the freshly formed pimple as if the doctor had eyes in the back of their head.

"Doctor..."

"Quiet!"

I complied as the doctor started looking for more things that made sounds like wind chimes banging against one another in a tornado.

"Well, I'm just looking to get rid of them really... Very simple. Do you think you could help?"

This caught the doctor's attention. Our eyes met for the first time. The only light in the room that was on

was the one pointed at me, but even in the dark, I could see those overgrown beady pupils examine my face.

"You're not the 6:30 appointment," the doctor realized.

"No, no I'm not." I confessed.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Thursday, and I'm having a pimple problem."

The doctor let out an inaudible laugh under the face mask.

"You, hold on!"

Sliding to the door, the doctor peaked down the hallway and called "6:30" again.

The receptionist is heard yelling from her desk down to the doctor. Her footsteps replace the sound of the dragging foot and piercing heel of the working foot of the doctor's. They exchange words in the hallway. Sounds like the doctor says something along the lines of *You're an idiot, and the receptionist apologizes, saying the 6:30 appointment has not yet arrived. The doctor is en route back to the room.*

"What can I help you with?" The doctor says approaching my face.

"I just want to get rid of these pimples. They're driving me mad."

"Oh, are they?" The doctor takes a close look at the pimple, tapping it with their gloved fingers. "You understand, you did not make appointment, correct?" The

doctor asked.

"I do understand, I can make an appointment now," I said grabbing my wallet.

"No, no. You stay." The doctor said, pulling a lever on the seat and making it lay flat. "You close your eyes." I did as the doctor said and they tampered with the pimple near my chin first.

I felt something sharp stab into the pimple and the doctor pushed two fingers together to release the pus. I started breathing hard and wiggled around in my seat.

"Sir - I mean ma'am - Doctor!" I said finally opening one eye and trying to see the bottom of my face. "Did you get it?"

The doctor just stood there looking at the pimple, their eyebrows bunched up at the top of their head.

"It don't budge!" The doctor said stepping away from my face and grabbing the tray of cutting utensils and needles. "I try this one." The doctor said touching the one near my eyebrows. "You close your eyes and you no move. You hear? You no move!"

I closed my eyes and played dead. The doctor took scissors to the pimple, and tried to force a small entry. I could hear the doctor struggle, making sounds that a kid makes when trying to open a sealed jar or locked knob.

"Is everything okay, doctor?"

"You need new skin."

The doctor said, walking away.

I laughed to myself. "I wish I could have new skin."

"You want fresh, beautiful skin?" The doctor asked me.

"I do!" I said jokingly.

The doctor took out a needle and patted my skin. "You stay still."

"What's that for?" Not that it mattered, because the doctor had already injected me.

"New skin." The doctor said flatly. "You a good citizen. You deserve new skin. New skin will cleanse you. New skin will make you feel beautiful. New skin will change your life drastically. New skin is a dream come true for you. New skin..."

The doctor continued on and on about the 'new skin' and how much it will help me in life.

The last thing I could remember was feeling like the air had gotten dry, and my body felt like it had ran across the Great Wall of China. I could swear I called out for the doctor, but the doctor kept talking. It was becoming impossible to keep my eyes open. I know I fought it as hard as I could, but I was unsuccessful.

I woke up in an incubator.

It was obvious that it was still night time, or that I had slept twenty-something hours. The lights were all on, but the window on the ceiling

showed a bunch of stars.

Nudging around, I noticed my arms were tied down to the bed. My legs were tied together, and my neck was bound to the bed.

In a normal tone voice I called, "Doctor."

And I waited.

In a normal tone voice I called, again, "Doctor..."

And I waited.

In a normal tone, once again, I said it and started wiggling whatever of my body I could, "Doctor...?"

I didn't wait. I called, in a panting voice, louder than the one I'd just used, "Doctor!"

My claustrophobia forced me to yell, "Doctor!"

I could tell that I was starting to move the incubator.

"Doctor!" I screamed, now wheeling away from my post. "Doctor! Doctor! DOCTOR!!!"

Finally the incubator came to an abrupt stop.

"Doctor!" I wailed.

"Doc -" the incubator was being pulled by someone with strength. It was moving so fast it was moving made me hit my head on the top. The wheels were sending rapid vibrations into my body. A brief stop, and over a threshold, a tiny bump in the road.

The doctor with the mask removed from his - yes his - face smiled brightly. He motioned for others to come take a look and people dressed in colorful scrubs all crowded around me, observing. A man with blonde hair and blue

eyes and the ginger woman looked pleased. While the woman with Havana twists and the man with the kinky top and fade began to cry and turn away.

The man with the kinky hair charged at the incubator, hauling fists. Crying out loud. I continued to try to wiggle free from the tight straps. The other people came in between him and the incubator, some prying him away and some fighting the ones that tried to stop him. The group segregated. The offense fought against the defense, knocking one another over. Kicking one another, punching one another. Knocking into the incubator. With my jaw hanging open, I watched speechlessly. They fought and tugged and the incubator moved further and further away.

The woman with the Havana twists slipped past the brawl, toppling over the incubator.

Still strapped in, I hung upside down, nearly kissing the ground. Their voices started to become audible. My heart shaking me in place, I screamed for help. The incubator was being turned right side up. The woman with the Havana twists pried the straps off with her bare hands crying.

"You'll always be one of us!" She repeated sobbing.

The man with the blonde hair and blue eyes helped her free me of the straps. Finally

getting me off the table, they played tug of war with my body. It was in her hands that I realized the change, that I realized what the doctor had done. I realized the new skin. Like the yin - yang, our skin contrasted. Like night and day, our skin opposed one another. And like the waters of the five oceans of the world, my skin blended with the blonde hair, blue eyed man.

Untitled

Jonathan Lamar Boyd

Blessed with a curse
And it's like
The more I speak
The feeling grows worse

I guess it's because
knowing truth
Is what's causing the hurt

Constantly feel the cries of the Earth
Heart broken
Mind stressed
Body tired
So how is it that I suppose to stay inspired?

Even though I'm alive
Sometimes
I Feel so dead inside
And with each passing day
How can one stay inspired?
While continuing to lose faith

My motivational drive to touch the sky
Has took a dive
Got me dwelling with overwhelming aches
Fate
It seems

So here's a fake smile
Just so you won't ask
Are you ok now?

Remember

Hannah Koufos

Josephine Baker is playing from somewhere far away. Her voice bobs in and out in a dizzying haze of “da da dee dee’s” and tinny strings.

You are sitting in bed at a hexagonal poker table. You’re tucked in between your new flame and a man in a straw hat. They’re both holding leaves over the blue felt. They’re smiling. Then, on the other side, there’s a man dealing cards in a fencing mask and a white tuxedo.

Josephine Baker says, “Uh-uh, daddy.”

After the first hand your date knocks twice. Pine needles fan willy-nilly onto the bed sheets. The man in the fencing mask gently lifts them off the felt with his gloved hands. He shuffles them into the deck. The straw hat man’s voice trills in over the romping piano.

“Remember that time...”

Their words join the ranks of French horns and trombones.

“Remember that wah wah, whoa, whoa... whoa... *whoa.*”

What? You shake your head. *Of course you don’t remember. Your date knocks again and more leaves flutter onto the slate silk. You wrack your brain for information—what are you supposed to recall?*

The man in the fencing mask deals a new hand. A mess of leaves and cards spill onto your section of the poker table seemingly from nowhere. Somebody knocks, but it isn’t you, or your date, or the man in the straw hat.

The man in the straw hat. The man’s eyes are boring into yours. Do you remember?

Josephine Baker twitters in French.

“Canne, canne, canne, canne!”

Your date looks at their cards when the knock suddenly, inexplicably, comes again.

“Good round, boys” they say. They slip away through the door while the man in the straw hat opens his mouth. Radio static

comes out. You still don’t remember. Funny, though—there wasn’t a door there before.

You only blink once, but you have the sense that quite some time has passed since you closed your eyes. Maple leaves, apple blossoms, and duck down whirl in the air. You turn and the man in the fencing mask and the white tuxedo is holding out one of his gloved hands. You squint through the swirl of feathers as the blossoms settle.

You don’t know why, but stretch out your arm. As he reaches for you a mud dauber wasp trembles in his palm. It seems to remember. The man in the mask seems to remember, too.

You run your fingers over the ribbing in search of answers. The down begins falling in heavy clumps as you unlatch the strap that holds the mask in place and delicately draw the white collar up over his head.

You freeze when you see it. You don’t know how much time has passed, or how long you’ve been staring, but the wasp has died.

Mask-less, the man has a face that parallels the Somme Offensive. The slopes of his cheeks could be fields where men are piled with their arms tucked over white crosses and the feathers continuing to fall turn rosy brown as they moisten in the spaghetti thin ridges of his skin.

Now you remember. You remember that time quite well and you are reduced to the sound of a door squealing closed upon itself. You become something like the whistle of fins on a falling bomb.

In the interim, Josephine Baker croons at a phantom octave:

“Moi, j’ai quelque chose de bien meilleur

Qui fera votre Bonheur

Vous vous demandez déjà ce que c’est

Pour vous, je n’ai pas de secret!”

Ward 29

By Yesenia Reyes

Westchester Medical center contracts with Bedford hills, New York's Maximum-Security prison for routine deliveries. Women are placed in a prison unit called Ward 29.

The orchestra that dwells in my mind became still as I looked down past the rusted metal fastening that clenched my waist at that thing between my thighs. Suddenly, an intense shimmered enveloped my being. Eight pounds nine ounces, flat nose and a head full of brown unyielding ringlets. And my oh my let me tell you she was black. Coal-black. A sort of black that makes you squint in an attempt to make sense of the ugliness. I gazed at her hoping that I could find somewhere in my discordant mind a reason to love her. The attempt made me ill. And so I wanted my thighs to swallow her back up to the cascade of white snot, blood, and blackened water they spat her out from. I wanted my glare to dissipate and slowly evaporate her blackness into invisible fumes. My wet eyes wanted her to die. The correctional officer caught a glimpse. "542 why the hell you looking at that nigger baby like you ain't got no sense?" And quickly told the nurse to whisk her away.

I laid on the stiff bed with its blood tainted sheets looking through a glass ceiling window. There in the silent dark I saw a star shoot by. A somewhat distant but constant memory drifted its way into the front of my mind. My mother was sugar-brown with straighten hair. And she never ever missed church on Sundays.

"Momma what's that cream for? You know the one next to your bedroom lamplight with the sour dough smell."

Mother replied her usual reply, "Justice what I done told you? Stop snooping around grown folks business."

"Yes ma'am."

I remember climbing her seamless

wooden bed. She gently squeezed my arm and in the most heavenly voice said, "Baby I use to be pitch black. Lord knows I was a ugly lil thing. So I went up to that pharmacy on the corner of Dumont and Melrose and I got me some lightning cream. That's what that is, lightning cream. Listen Baby look here." Her soft fingers clenched my chin. And her words played a lovely menacing tune. A chorus delicately curtailed by her lightly-browened skin. "Justice, the lighter your skin the closer you is to God." I knew then as I know now. God could not love my child.

I closed my eyes and wagged my head left and right left and right. As if to shake off the always present hubbub in my chaotic mind. But instead I heard yet again for the ten thousandth time the Tap, boom, pow. Tap, boom, boom, pow. Tap. Boom. Tap. Boom. Pow, of that ever-growing screeching bass.

So I waited for the correctional officer to bring me to her. The orchestra was now playing relentlessly loud. At 9:46pm the officer came in with a groggy look in her eyes. Her uniform had a slight stench of alcohol. Without saying a word, methodically, she unfastened the metal shackles that grasp my hands, waist, and then feet.

The moment had come. She was behind a mercury glass door enclosed in the white marble walls of the hospital nursery. The whiteness seemed to amplify her blackness. The officer said "Go head, you got 10 minutes." I walked limply into the sterilized room. Blood and mucous still trickling down my thighs. There she was. Inched in the rear. Black, ugly, and naked. Her cries were hard, and loud. And like every other foul thing it wedged itself in my mind and stayed there. The orchestra, her cries, my mother they all bound my mind and so I had to find a way to strip it free. I had to silence the noise.

So I took her by her warm thin neck and with the other hand I twisted right, left, right, left and once again left. And finally that bass, oh my, that bass stopped screeching.

Green Glass

Kashawn Henry

I once saw a door made of green glass,
Behind it was no foliage,
But there was yellow and green grass,
There were no forests,
But it was filled with trees,
They were tall and small,
But had no leaves,
They didn't have branches either,
There were only willows,
No pine or cedar,
A woodsman would stand there,
He could look at me,
But he couldn't stare,
He had no shoes,
No clothes but he sported a collar,
He was able to communicate,
But he couldn't speak,
Only hoot, yell and holler,
It was strange seeing such things,
There was a wedding,
but there were no rings,
There was no bride,
Only the groom and his groomsmen,
I wonder what's really hidden inside,
I was shocked to see something hidden,
But it couldn't hide,
To see such a terrain,
That is devoid land,
To see such stress with no pain,
To see people with feet,

But not a single hand,
Basketball exists,
But not a single team,
Food was everywhere,
But no one could eat,
No one was awake,
They were all asleep,
But the crazy part was,
There were no people,
That is because,
What was behind the glasses green glow,
Is nearly the opposite,
Of what's outside the red plastic window.

The Manhole

Tyriek Warren

It was often that I saw a manhole covering on my street during my morning commute. It was slightly exposed from the hole that was its place of origin. Each day that I passed this manhole covering I noticed that it would inch over slightly and mumble under its breath "...same..." A delusion I might rightfully assume, but the fervor with which it uttered this guttural word was of profound significance to me.

The next day I arose, prepared breakfast, walked the dog and headed out for work. As I walked down the street I spotted a car careening over a dark circular object (or perhaps it was bright, I could not tell in the early morning light). I approached the object and had noticed that it was the manhole covering leaning about two inches from the ground.

"The same..." it stated in that guttural voice.

"Have a good one," I responded back and scurried down the street.

The following morning I arose, prepared breakfast, walked the dog and headed out for work. This time the manhole covering was even higher off the ground. A black

sedan sped down the street only to be sent slightly into the air by running over it.

"The same thing..." it decreed at an intensely high pitch. I could only respond in an intense smile and nodded the sentence from my mind.

As I walked away that very same manhole covering, seeming amused by its own anecdote, proceeded to laugh. The following day I arose, prepared sustenance, ran the dog through the motions, and went off to bureaucratic torture and would you believe who was there?

"The same thing everyday", said the manhole now completely flipped on its back. A giant smile created by the markings in its body began to form. It began to speak a haunting tongue, "Do you not tire of the banality? The ever present sense of boredom must be corrupting your psyche as we speak. Believe me when I say that I've seen some shit, but nothing quite like yours. Honestly, it has become pathetic to watch the somber look on your face."

"And what would you know of differing of banality?" I retorted.

"More than you certainly," it replied, "Just look at me I'm on the flip side of life."

Upon hearing the manhole

covering state that, I looked down at its position. "You goddamn fool," I started "You've never even escaped the hole you were in!"

The manhole covering then began a surprising reaction. It proceeded to laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh, stopping for a moment to chuckle but then laugh some more.

"You're right my human comrade, It seems that we are both stuck in place!"

The following day I did not arise, nor make breakfast, nor walk the dog, nor head for work. I would not do so for any other days to come...

Every Turn

David Spence

A woman slowly appears in the middle of a dark alley, naked. Two men who have been drinking at a local bar walked outside and heard a woman crying in an alleyway as they proceeded to walk home. France says, "Hey man, do you see that chick? She's naked,"

"I see it, but I ain't going nowhere near that," Jason replies.

The woman says "Jason?!, Jason!!! I miss you baby..." Jason gawks at the dark figure in the distance and realized who she is. He turns around to France.

"Oh my god! It's..." Jason says.

"Julia?" France replies.

Jason says, "No, that's my mother. Who is Julia?"

France says "That's my mother!" They both looked at each other and behind them emerges a figure of a small boy holding a knife in his hand. The child stabs both of them in their calves and runs away. Both men stand there screaming in pain and they hear police sirens approaching. They see that there is no way they can explain, for they are both confused about what is going on.

Jason screams out "What the fuck is going on? Why is my mother here? MOM?!"

France says, "No, that's my mother. MOM? JULIA?!" The woman appeared to be walking with something held behind her. She is now fully clothed and smiling with a very heartfelt motherly smile on her face.

She says, "Oh my god, my babies..." She approaches them and brings out a knife. They both start backing up and start to scream in disbelief. She runs full speed and right before she stabs them a police officer shoots her right in the head. Jason and France turn around and they both see their father standing there with a pistol in his hand smiling.

He then says, "Son, are you ok?" Both are left speechless and they turn back around and see their mother standing up again.

She says, "Oh my goodness, you're going to kill me one day".

The father says, "I am going to. One day. How about these boys, can they take a shot you think?" They both scream.

Jason screams "DAD, MOM? What are you guys doing?" France notices that Jason is seeing his parents and not his. He becomes quiet and starts to look around. He turns around and sees the little boy appear with a knife smiling, the boy cocks back with his knife in his hand and runs after France, he hears his parents laughing hysterically and then he hears Jason laughing too. France looks back and sees them all laughing with a doctor uniforms on and then the boy starts to stab him repeatedly. They continue on laughing as France screams in pain. He frantically tried to fight off the child but he noticed he was trapped and he screamed so loud that he blacked out. France suddenly wakes up in a hospital bed. He sees Jason his parents and flowers on his bedside saying,

"It's a boy!"

He gets up and feels handcuffs are attached to his wrist, then says, "What's going on?" They continue to stare at him with a very sad look.

His mother says, "You killed her France..." He looks at the door outside of his room and sees two police officers standing outside staring at him.

His father says, "You killed her while she was giving birth to your son, France..." France, still confused looks to his right and there lies a pool of blood and a corpse holding a baby that was in his dream. He turns to his left and sees the baby standing with a smile and a scar on his chin.

The baby says, "Daddy I love you!!"

Poem

Jeffrey Ekwealor

Now I understand my past, for it led me to Christ, as I proceed to venture into my path, for there my purpose lay. In the treasures of my heart, that I seek for home within. My knowledge increases as I journey in these days of storm to see my very end untwine.

Something new is what I seek for, new sets of glasses that I might see passed old, new place that might drag out time. Wish me safe journey as I go on by.

The time has come, that I embrace my purpose for living and hope that it suits my crown. The lord never fall me through, that he will not pull back up. Into dungeons and causes, I set out to say my peace, for my journey with thee is paused, as time begins again.

As I marched into the hollow grounds, I wonder where my path still lies. As I see men tall as trees dancing around the deep blue sea, into the shade they fade away, like piles of ashes spilled away, from the heavens to earth. I see my place till the angels sing for me to come.

These follow even in the meek of earth, betray his blood and to use is murder. I can't understand nor can see. For I am just a little boy within, with the eyes of a scarecrow.

The Kid Robot Who Became President

Bryant Reynolds

A kid robot named Robert Robo jumps into the presidential race at the last minute in April and wins the Democratic Nomination. He won the amount of delegates he needed. He even won delegates that Bernie and Hillary already had because all the people voting for them changed their mind. Robert Robo promises free health care, free education, granting all teachers a sense of humor and getting rid of the Republican/ Democratic Party. They'll be replaced with The Freedom Party. The Freedom Party will focus on all people's needs and actually protect the American people. Other promises include installing big radio poles on sidewalks that will play nostalgic music every day, making trains supersonic fast, and negotiating with the greatest people in business to get the economy fixed.

Robert Robo won the presidency and became the first kid and robot in history to become president. He was so happy he flew all around America and shot fireworks out of his mouth.

He went straight to business on his promises. All his promises came to great effect, much to the American people's happiness. President Robo did so much more when he stepped into office. Great deeds like helping the people in the poor neighborhoods, putting them in rich neighborhoods, giving them chances to great education and having life coaches to lead them to great career/jobs positions. The technology was updated to it's full potential with no bugs, glitches or hacking ever happening. President Robo also created new days for America to celebrate like "Broadway Explosion Day," "Rap Day," and "Rock 'n Roll Day." The creative and quirky people of the world were the top bosses of all big business having everything done in not only the smart way but also the unconventional way. Hollywood was ruled with more diversity as people of different colors, disabilities, genders, races, religions and sex groups join in. Hollywood was in top form once more and growing more in popularity. The Oscars and all the awards shows followed this act. The whole U.S. army and police force were robots while the American people went through lie detector tests for homophobia and racism. The ones that are racists will be sent to Mars, legally.

President Robert Robo became the first to be in office for three terms. The age range to run for president was now from age 16 and up. Any robot can run for the presidency.

Praying Girl from Funshun

Joely Acosta

I'm young

I'm young and I know about love

I love you like the young girl loves the moon she watches over like her mother

I pray

I sit here praying in my dress, my head down

My hair up in my favorite hairstyle thinking of a love I knew

I ran away to be safer from the monster roaming where they said they never could

I lost a part of me, like the man who lost his treasured love

Praying that the monsters see, like the eyes on this face that they are wrong

Pray that family returns

Dreaming of the days when I can get to play with other girls my age

Painting our nails, sharing small secrets as an automatic response

Fantasizing of playing games with my sisters cultivated from the place I used to be free

In Nanjing

In the place I used to know, people ceased to live

Bamboleo

Mishael Perez

That intoxicating sway of yours
boils the blood in my feet.
I have the urgency of a thousand bulls
to match my rumba to your beat.
I pull you closer with sinister hand,
and dip you with dexterity.
You slip through my fingers like sand,
and dance around my heart
with sincerity.

I lose myself in your gaze but
when I blink you're already gone.

I sway on in a daze,
until I black out in the dawn.

I sway
to the left,

because in their eyes
I don't have the right.

because what's left
is my life.

I sway
because when you left

I stopped being all right.

I sway
to the right,

Blues Woman

Hadassa Francois

I am the pigeon toed breath who limps.

Limps in pursuit of a passageway, a dig, a tunnel

A tunnel that foxtrots in the stars to whispers and tears of release, taken by force- taken by blood

I am the humming hums that live no longer to sing, but to guide the new born melodies from music sheets to howling drums.

I am half the moon and sun, and in desperation I refuse to neither rise nor set, convinced that the galaxies mock me while the humankind scorns me.

I am the stuttering fingers that have been betrayed by large hands, hands that once use to embrace, but now is in search of anomalous fingers to dissect.

I am deliverance for the righteous and remembrance for the guilty.

I am kinks and naps so sharp; your eyes will bleed at each glance.

I am a hip shaking, eyes rolling, knee slapping, teeth sucking, finger licking good warrior.

I am father, mother, brother, sister.

I am love.

So hate me as much as you can, as much as you want, but baby, you know who I am.

You know I am what connects the sky to the sea,

You know I am tears and blood,

You know I am sweet hugs and blunt words, and whispers,

You know I am Big Mama Blues, whip your ass into shape with my clues and rules

I am Sin and Savior to all ya'll fools, and if you look closely you can still see the cord that bonds me to you

I am

Listen baby, I AM

A BLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLUESSSSSS WOMAN.



Untitled Cosima McCoy

Note to Self

Samantha O'Brien

You are a bird flying high above the skyline
As the thunder rolls in
And they try to trap you
They don't trust your wings to brave the storm

They love you
They just don't hear you
Care to know you
Take time to understand you

They compare you to a star
You burn too brightly
The intensity of your heat is frightening
The scorch of your words unforgiving
Too sharp

And so you set out to change, didn't you?

You tried to dull your edges
Soften your sting
To speak in whispers
Less punch
Less substance

That way they could swallow
You're sweeter
Palatable

Until You're Not

Unlovable! Unworthy! Undeserving!
Too much, yet not enough
Who do these words belong to?
Your Mother? Your Grandmother?
The boy who broke her heart?
The ghost in the empty hallway
The one you call your home,
Where you long to disappear

Oblivion became your safety
Your demons stood guard outside the gates
As you stripped your walls white
Leaving only skin and bone

Fingertips with no print
A shadow claimed by nobody

You're a hole in the sidewalk
That they trip and fall into
You swallow them whole without meaning
They do not see you, although you surround them
There is nothing left to see

You destroyed your body for peace of mind
Your mind is at war
It's a civil disturbance
North versus South
Flesh versus Beliefs
Beliefs versus Messages
Messages versus Culture
Culture versus Heredity

Your heart is on the line
Fighting to pump your blood
Your soul is on the line
Fighting to reclaim its identity
To use its wings to brave the storm

You are not a dark, vacant space
You are a library full of volumes
A museum full of art
A story full of pages not yet written
An infinite possibility

You are the sum of your mistakes
Your successes
Your sharp tongue
Your overwhelming passion

You are lightening in a bottle
And fireflies in spring
Or the feeling of love
And the snapshot of a perfect night
Indescribable because it is meant to be felt

You are not a shapeshifter
You are a human
You do not exist to please
You exist to be
You are not the manifestation of someone else's words
Someone else's thoughts
You belong to yourself

Lost In Communication

Jada Gordon

I know I'm so bad at reaching out
We always say we should but we never do
There's a lot we say we should do
But let's be real though we never see it through
Part of it is that I don't know how to
communicate my emotions and be true
It's fear of rejection
And an extreme fear of losing you
I build bonds to break them
But this is not chemistry
And this is more than you
This is all me
The mistakes I make within
I'm not sure if it's too late
Too late to break the chain
I burn bridges even though it's a sin
We can wash it all down in gin
Throw my main thoughts in a bin
I wanna make sure this never happens again
Just lost in communication
I want to figure out what's wrong with me
What's my situation?
That I pick stuff up and I leave it
Break promises, give, and never receive it.
Maybe I'll fade into the shadows
Forever scared of what happens
If we got further
Forever dreaming of what happens
If we ever got closer
I play and act like I'm a lone wolf
But I need you
I need a sister to share to
A man whose eyes I could glare into
Consistency
Normalcy
I can blame the people who stopped talking
to me when dad died
There were no words spoken
So there couldn't be a lie
We were so young
So unaware so shy
I haven't seen her face in twelve years
So I haven't even said hi

We're so close in blood but so apart in love
I wish I could say our personalities match like
a hand and a glove
Just lost in communication
I want to figure out what's wrong with me
What's my situation?
That I pick stuff up and I leave it
Break promises, give, and never receive it
How could you be so selfish?
Turn your back and leave me with the
aftermath
To live with the cards I was inherently dealt
With

Song of the Moon

Clovis Kabongo

There is an enchantment, I believe, that the night sky presents so eloquently. It is the only hour that represents truth my mother would always say as she braided my hair into the tightest knots. God, how I despised her; that miserable old sagging bitch who breathed corruption and reform in fiery glory. However, I must admit her words themselves did hold a rooted knowledge about people – about men and their uncontrollable perversions. The night sky itself – the height of midnight reveals the darkness in people, or better, the ones that are capable of slithering out from the deepest holes, and infecting the lives we'd worked so hard to build only to leave a pile of despairing rubble around our feet. Night births destruction and that – that is what we feed on – what we're made to ensue upon others. And the stars... Well, the stars she would say, only emphasized how beauty burned, was merely nothing but a ball of flame that would sizzle everything that came along with it... Look at me! I was beautiful once, wasn't I? Held an allure associated with what men in those myths and fairy tales would've sought in order to claim – make their own like gold stacked on top of the tallest mountain... Were you passionless that night we first met? Donned the exotic mystery I searched for during those hot summer days only to remove your fine costume when the show was over, and heads bowed, and people clapped? Was I nothing but the first tulip you planned to pluck in a garden full of hidden black? ANSWER ME! That's right, you can't, not with all that tape on your mouth... I... I can see now – with precise and sparkling clarity, why my spiteful mother hated me, made my days a roller coaster of ceaseless bedevilment. I can see it with a vividness that is uncanny... because she sits in front of me now; the rose that stole my beauty... that shares the affection of my husband, her father. Were her pink lips softer than mine, hmm? Was she warmer than me? Did she fuel your desires with MY FERVENCY, MY WOMANHOOD? Shh; don't cry, my husband, beings like us don't cry, we don't shed tears over our lovers, even if it happens to be your daughter. We are, and we live without ever having to make apologies about who we are. My mother certainly did not when she whipped me because my father worshipped me with her stolen pride, and I won't either. Because I know, with an old knowledge I possess myself, that what I'm doing is right – is a wash that will scrub away the disease plaguing both you and our daughter's immorality... There's... There's one last thing my mother told me. As women begin to expand in a household so do our pool of enemies, for there is no deadlier adversary than blood. But unlike her, I'll do what I need to to win – to thrive and survive. Look at me for the last time, my daughter and husband. Look at me and this steaming cattle prod in my hand. It is pure... and when it's inside you, it will purge and purify. And your deaths... your deaths will be serene... until we burn together in blissful damnation for the sacrifices fulfilled here in the midst of this honest moonlight.

On the Seats of Nebula

Alberto Rodriguez

A quiet and subtle night brings many thoughts to 26 year old Jordan, as she stares blankly at her typewriter in search of inspiration. Her room is disheveled and her mother confused at her daughter's blank stare opens discussion.

"Jordan, hunny, are you having trouble writing again?"

Jordan replies, "I just don't have anything mom, I've been sitting here and this paper needs to be written before April."

The house shakes and decays at the loss of one of its members in the last 3 years. The kitchen is sloppy, the halls tilt pictures, and silence spills over midnight slumbers as son and mother rest ... and cope. Scattered throughout we see constellation pictures, telescopes and a mother standing in her only daughter's room seeking what advice to give to her that would serve justice to her misfortune.

The mother confidently responds. "There's much motivation in walking alone. Meet yourself along a quiet, scenic route but most importantly as your father would say 'always look to the stars for inspiration' and always remember that no matter what happens, he and I will always love you for the person you are, in this life ... and the next." Taking her mother's advice, Jordan takes her walk outside but also to meet her friends before she walks alone, unaware of what's to come but also forgetting to take her deceased father's astronomy hand-booklet on the table... Which she loves so much.

A masked scribe wrapped in an orchid cloak holds a magnificent posture as it engraves its elbows, cemented on a chabudai table glazed for reflection. Its hand grips scarcely on a quip, with an order to write truth. The figure is placed in the middle of a circular room due to a darkness creating the shape. No windows or doors, only a keyhole presented by light can be seen visible as only else engraved in blackness. As the candle ignites on the table, a notebook is revealed. The scribe begins to write, "As a keeper of sorts, I've been given the task by 'the understood' of recording the deaths of humans on the planet they call earth. As obliged, I will record the final moments of the human, without name, but referenced as "it" in respects to the nameless of the afterlife. The record is written as followed concerning such a death, but not explained in entirety as 'the understood' knows infinitely further of what you cannot grasp beyond your nature. Entry: 1, 000, 457, 679, 104. Record open:

Nightfall stretches its sheets over the vast plains and echoing life of the earth. Without companions, bedridden, and weak from labor, eventually it will end up walking home, alone; but will it be prepared for the walk and what lies hidden in its history? It never will -- no man, no woman, and no ghost. It can parley with friends but when it is finished with them on almost all occasions, the long stretch of road wanders and guides it to superstitious occurrences which begin to stroke the tip of what it defines fear but can otherwise be described as wonder. Such an occurrence follows on the night of February 24th, 1987.

It does walk home a lot, it keeps this human in shape, occupies its time, and lets it know that age has not given into gravity. It wanders in thought and when it walks it releases a type of therapy and comfort that its friends or family could not possibly present to it. But as a weakness it distracts from what's around. And whatever is around it could potentially have a certain type of awareness to love or otherwise inflict harm upon it so it keeps its vision tunnel, but its peripheral sharp. This is what the world has taught this human. Anything that can move, and think rationally has the potential to harm you, even yourself if not distracted by the beauty it gives us. Above this, your devices are essential at moments of dusk when the men and women of the world cloak themselves of mischief.

Its friends are fun and entertaining but as soon as it feels the eyes rolling down it is time to depart as closure will set in. "I will catch you guys later" it said to friends as it walked down 4th avenue to a more private and scenic route. This human enjoys this particular route because of the trees, clean serenity from shade, and the whistle of winds as they cry melodic lullabies along its path. It takes time on the road, as gentle as a pioneer of a man in his 60s who has not seen enough to penetrate his patience. The pavement, crystallized and smooth set up as its own grey carpet to celebrate arrivals.

The human was welcomed by this path, and as it walked each step felt as its first steps: off-balance, ambiguous, but equally celebrated triumph to a child who knows no words, but rather his actions. It is at peace, and the evening sky is as beautiful and blissfully infinite as his mind can co-exist and understand each-other's wonder. The human begins to ruminate about its family: the ones it loves, the ones it hates, its first fall, its first rise, and its first kiss. If people were laid upon this planet for a reason, it could only come to the conclusion to say it is because of the walk; the silence on the tables in which we feed ourselves to put pieces together. Life -- until you cannot walk or see walking people.

It picked up a very good pace until it realized home was close. Brick houses lay on its right and a park on its left side that could classify as its own simple aesthetic; small and hard to find if your eyes wander easily in a vast city. It walked in between this with such time to think about the good things. It was hard for this human to focus on what other creatures lie hidden, watching, laughing and crying for a chance to prove themselves holy. This creature may or may not know of happiness. Major circumstances has brought them to survive for the purpose -- or follow order.

For what reasons? The creature knows this, not the human. For the human, wherever it goes eyes are aroused. It is more difficult to perceive shapes who use the night to their advantage because of its inability to understand humans and ability to camouflage their intentions -- anomalous animals of crusading nature. Unknown to the likes of men; celebrated by the children of galaxies whom you the reader knows nothing about... at least not now. Ever so slightly can the thought arise of how significant a being can be — thrown into a realm of assumed insignificance.

The walk, as encouraging as it was, was at an end as it distanced about 10 blocks along the park. Then silence drifted the human's sensation turned to a more puzzled and suspicious manner when an urge to look behind took over. The human executed one gentle turnaround, it was not confident of nothingness. Following it was revealed to be open space, sure

of its occupation in the morning. Then an about-face was executed and it proceeded to enjoy the fact that its mother was cooking tonight. Then, piercing its vision ahead it responded "I'm coming home." Consequently, the night reveled in spectatorship when the following concluding performance gave way to the clamorous applause of stars; the vast nebula seating them for the final scene in which initiation becomes of the human-- the birth of a sun.

Immediately after follows: from behind, a gust of wind, the gentle hymn of a beauty heard by the human's ears, a hand of luketh warmth sliding slowly into its back as if its body for that moment was thick but moist as milk, and from behind the unusual tickle of 200 individual strands of cerulean shaded hair stretched past its face positioned as if they were floating on innocent air; enamored by winds. It never was sure and it never knew what lie behind, but the hymn -- close and warm, was moistening its ear as if the supposed entity stood as a songstress right behind. There came a feeling of content and hypnotism as if everything after the touch was gentle and comforting; a rapture of sorts. It seemed like ecstasy and curiosity was intended as an arm of human nature slithered around its torso like a serpent, ignored by its eyes but felt by its skin. Shock is sharp, but not monotonous. It ends like everything else, peaceful. Ten seconds drifted and it felt subconsciously that there had been talks of a ceremony between two entities previous to this occasion including the human in a portrait amongst the infinite eyes that serve as apertures into the spirit.

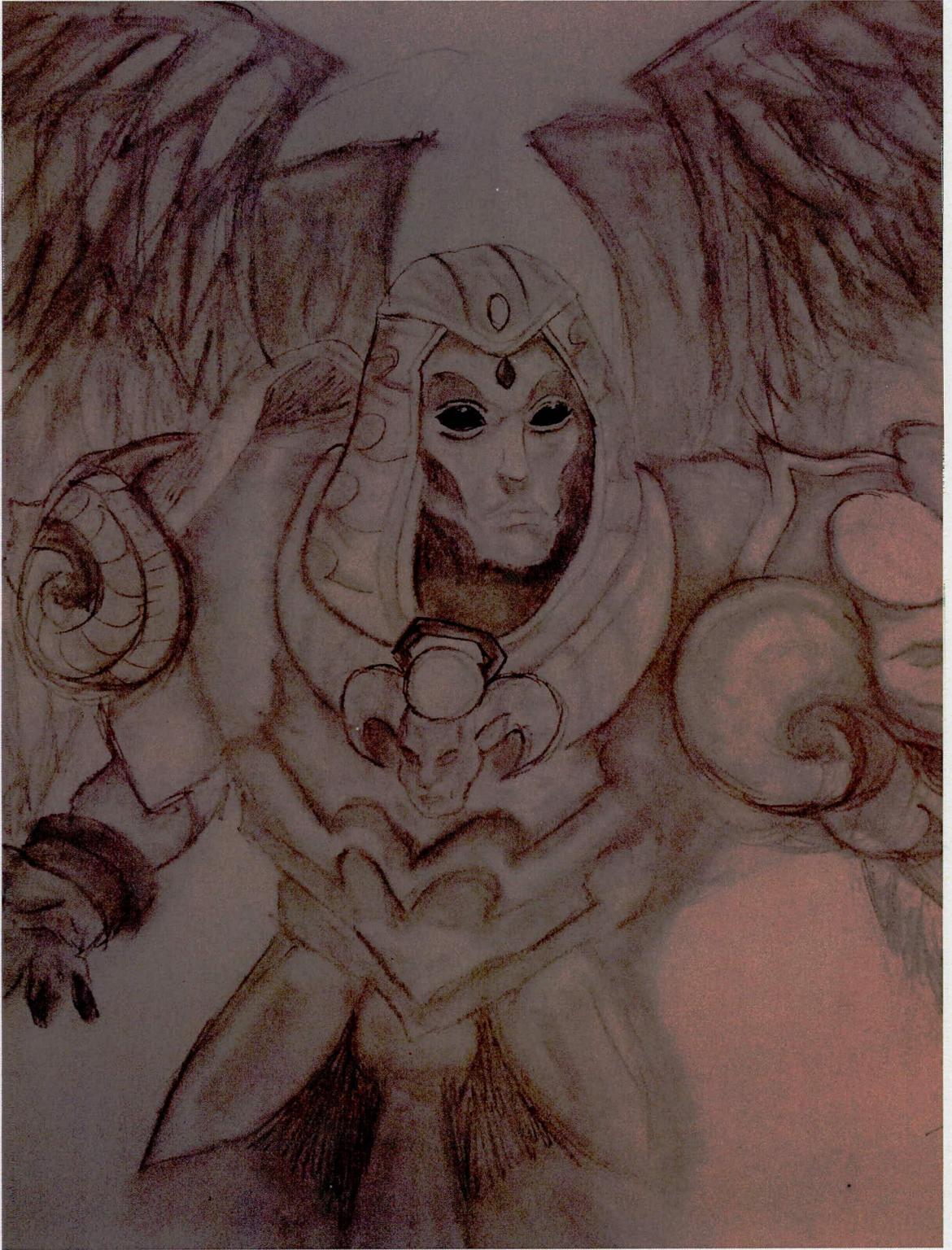
In its last moment, sense fleeting from its body, a magnus of thoughts occurred in its head associated with a type of covenant that was conjugated between it and the supposed creature; a recording in history far beyond the comprehension of man. A certain cycle that had to be completed in order to maintain a certain celestial balance. It did not look behind itself, what was there needed no acknowledgement. All that lay left was the memory of its father's advice which resided in its last look before darkness; a final Glance upward toward the stars. And with the action, the stars cried billions of tears in unison as they looked down on it, presenting the human a final image: "SN 1987A" the last supernova ever to be recorded by the human eye.

Entry: 1, 000, 457, 679, 104. Record closed.

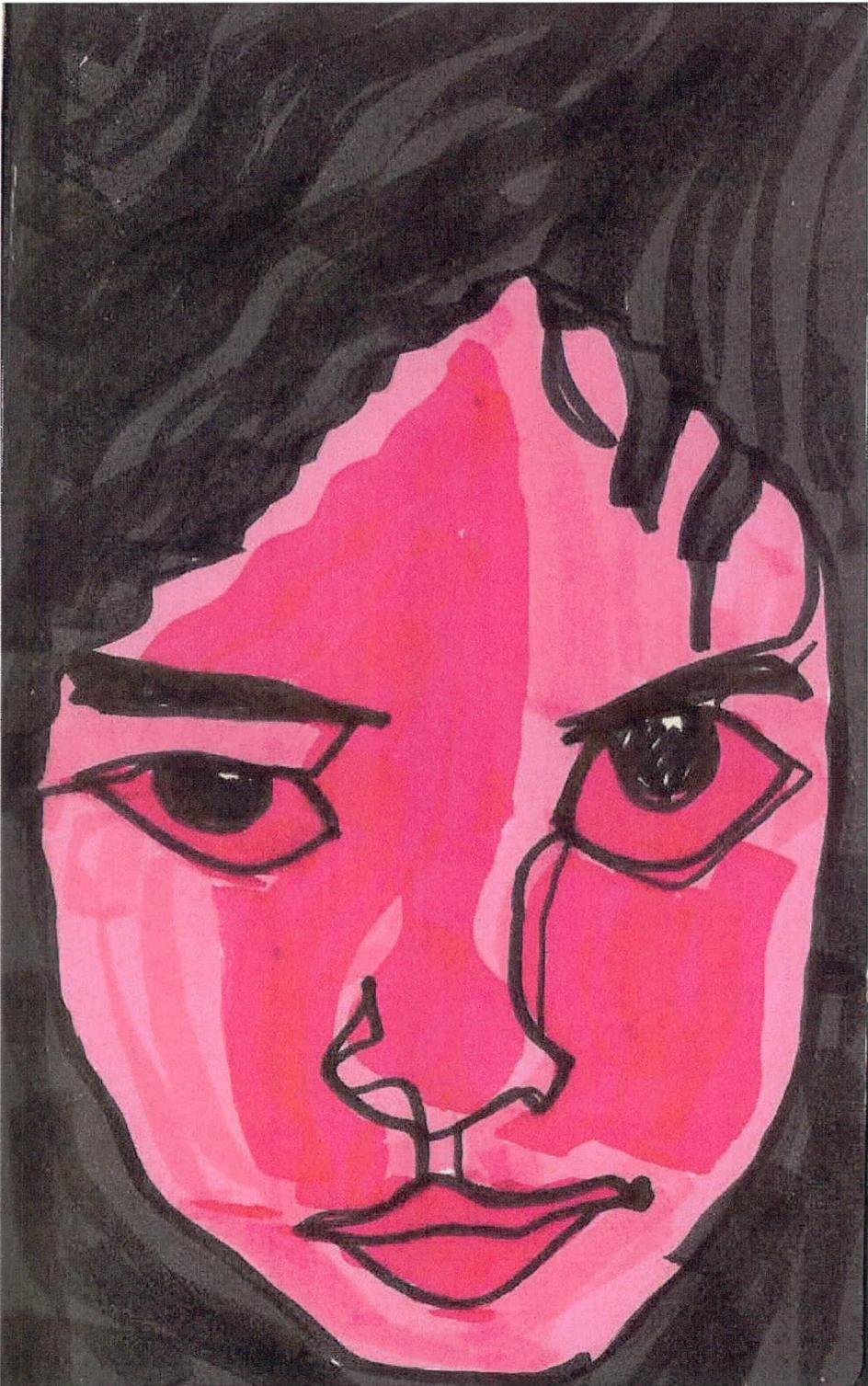
[06]

The cloaked scribe rises from the table. Only the candle that the scribe holds serves as the bearing of light in a room that seems infinite in darkness. The keyhole of light is opened by the key, revealing the vast unbearable scene of stars and cosmos in the shape of a door. The scribe walks through but this time remembering her father's astronomy hand-booklet. She nurtures it tight and proceeds to close the door. Darkness regresses, calm and salient until the next scribe's visit; ready and passionate to explain its final moments as well. The door opens again revealing a different scribe, this time wrapped in violet cloak in great length of that of a bride, spilling to the floor. Cementing its elbows to the glazed table with mirror-like reflection it begins to write: Entry: 1,000.457,679,105.

Record open: ...



Untitled Genesis Ramirez



" Red Lady "

Red Lady Anthony Acevedo

The Crimson Lady

Kayla D. Lopez

Chapter 1

In the land of the great and diverse United States, aliens preyed upon New York City. They caught and used its people in a tremendous number of experiments that resulted in missing or deformed extremities that plagued most parts of the city. Some zones were so bad that they were quarantined in order to not spread panic among the people. However, there was no point in doing so, for there were rumors of what goes on behind the gates of quarantine. Aliens... for sure... were running the government. Like wolves in sheep's clothing, they had found a way to assimilate in both skin and manner. It was only a matter of time until riots among the people broke out. I saw the fear in their unclean faces, even in the poster smiles of rich men and women using money to shower themselves in their expensive claim to be safe when everyone else knew they weren't. The rebels tried their best to fight back against the alien invasion; however, they utterly failed in their attempts to inspire hope amongst the people. I thought the situation was hopeless. The pain of waiting all this time, staring at the faces of everyone who had lost all sense of hope, and then three days later...

BOOMMMMMM... An explosion sounded that was heard all around our world. The noise came from unplugged TVs in the broken windows of stores and supermarkets. They had flashed on and were broadcasting a building under attack... Their pictures were not very clear, but then again everyone knew what the White House looked like. The horror and pleasure in the faces of the people flashed back and forth. They were seeing the police and security of their nation attacking their own commander in chief's foundation on the screens. From my window I watched the madness and terror take over the streets of the concrete jungle. That explosion triggered the switch in the heads of those adults that were trying to seek freedom from the cage of their conscience. People, with the faces and hands of humans, turned violent and feral. They no longer were human, they were animals killing each other for the alien spawn that was among them. No one cared, no one thought of anyone. It got to the point of even children being punished for the thoughts of adults fearing one another. The madness continued on till nighttime with more explosions and fire. The city that never sleeps shown so brightly that night.

Before midnight, about half the adult population was reported to be dead, but it was the children that were the most in body count. No one felt like it was a horrible thing until 12:00 hit and lights from the sky shown through that dark blaze, illuminating the blood drenched faces of their sins. Everyone saw each other's face along with the humanity that was hidden before, even aliens among them were easily seen in the light. Their humanoid-like bodies were transparent and blue like the sky, but they had no faces. I observed one from my apartment. It lifted a dead human child and clutched it into its shaking chest, a weak scream pulsated through its face. That scream made adults nearby look overwhelmed with guilt. I'm not sure if it happened, but some say they saw a tear fall down its face before the lights went completely out. But then again, why would that matter to us? As soon as those lights went out, everything changed. There were no more dead bodies, no more adults and no more flames left of the tragedy. All that was left was that darkness before the lights came back on. Not the lights of the ships in the sky, no, it was the sun breaking against the horizon. Making light of the new destiny that was set in place. My name is Diana Allen, and it was morning of December 25th

that New York City vanished off the face of the Earth.

Chapter 2

Ever since this started, teens were the first to go into hiding, some of them left home to stay with other friends, and others stood out late under a bridge somewhere getting higher than the sky in hopes that no one will reach them. However, I'm not one of those teens, I woke up that day in my Chelsea apartment as usual with my wheelchair waiting beside my bed. I couldn't move around much ever since I lost my leg in a car accident with my folks a week ago when people were committing suicide off the roofs. They died so I was left with a missing leg and caretaker, who never came back after saying she was "going to the store" about 3 days ago. Sitting in my wheelchair, I watched all that violence unfold and simmer down from my 2nd floor window. It was like watching a movie from beginning to end, while I felt so cold and numb until that scene where the alien and child broke my ice. Then afterward it all went dark. I look out the window at the dark scene in confusion. The confusion slowly turns to fear and then loneliness, just like time when I sat in the hospital room after learning my parents died. Just then, the sun's rays shine through my window and over my face. I could not feel that cold air of Christmas time. It feels warm, giving me a tingling sensation all over from it. A smile breaks over my face in the moment until confusion comes along to smother it. The confusion did not originate from the dead bodies or adults missing from the streets, or even that New York is suddenly a desert now. The sensation I feel is in my new leg where the amputated stump use to be. I get up slowly, but immediately fall to the ground. I cry tears of joy from the pain and get back up again, standing on two feet while clutching the top of my wheelchair for balance. I look at the leg in the long mirror next to me. Marveling at it until something else catches my eye. Aghast, the locks of my long hair fall over the side of my face, my bleached hair is now a bright red and I immediately lung into the bathroom to wash it out thinking it was stained from the blood of last night, but nothing I did could make it come out at all. Just then, a loud screech sounds from out my window and I peek outside to see a single ship in the sky. Some shadows in the distance of the city streets crawl out to see what's happening, they look a lot like teenage boys. Their heads toward the sky in wait for the message that comes next. The sound of a speaker turns on from the ship and a gruff voice coughs and then speaks out to us in what is surprisingly fluent English.

"Well well, lookie at what mankind has come to. Tearing each other apart for us. That personally makes me feel so special." I cringe so much from his sick sarcasm, especially when he continued by naming some of his favorite highlights of that night. "I really am glad that you guys showed so much entertainment last night but sad to say, my superiors want to cancel your show. In a year Earth will be destroyed, unless you guys still left in Manhattan can prove yourselves worthy of your pathetic lives. I'll explain it simply so you guys don't fry your brains. There will be two teams created to bring a new society to this Madhatten" he chuckles so much from his pun that he starts coughing violently, but continues on, "It's girls versus boys. No children or adults included, it's just you teenage brats. That's 'cuz you gentleman and ladies are the future, you have your own mind and ideas, yada yada yada. OK! So here are the rules... Boys, you need to create a working society, dominate all the women and make them your slaves. Ah, but don't get too excited guys and keep your pants up for what's next. Girls... ladies, you have to avoid getting dominated and kill every male teen you see, got it? Pretty simple right? And that's all you have to do to save yourself and your precious Earth. Oh, and if some of you are wondering where your precious family is, they are being detained in this ship

until your mission is done with, so I suggest you hurry up before we get bored and decide to 'probe' and 'experiment' with them. I sure wouldn't mind opening a few heads of screaming humans to see what makes them tick. If you think that's messed up, then maybe you should trade places with us freaks and watch your own wife, your only child, nearly your whole god-damn clan receive that same treatment from your damn government!!!" The angry voice drops the mic and after a minute it returns, saying, "I've never been one to keep a grudge against all humans so I will say good luck to you brats; however, in all honesty I hope you fail so I can watch this place really burn. ...Till then," the message ended. My eyes widen from panic as I watch a whole army of boys crowd the streets.

Dragonslayer

Michael Klopot

The world was a haze and he slumbered in peace, although there had been interruptions. There was a funeral, to be exact, for a man who was like a father to him, and then a manhunt for his killer. Of all his memories in the fog, Bors de Ganis remembered that most clearly: his fellows gathering out of cryogenic stasis to hold solemn vigil for Arthur. The manhunt for the traitor Mordred was the last bit of action he took part in for... how long? He could not tell, as he was snug between the veil of consciousness and deep sleep. The days and years blended together into a grey nothing.

Yet it was a good sleep. The world did not trouble him as it had troubled some of the others for as long as he slumbered. He drank deep, from the well of repose, like a greedy creature. He had dreams and memories to keep him company, to ponder and reflect upon, a whole lifetime – stretched long beyond the means of a mortal man – to review and relive. But the fog was lifting and the world around him was growing clearer and sharper by the second. He could make out the frosted edges of glass before him, the window into the cradle that held him and, be-

yond, the shapes of people. There were bright lights, too. They were pointing at him and they made his head swim and his eyesight go blurry from the sting.

"He's waking up," spoke a voice, low and distant.

"Energy reading's seventy-five percent. Vitals stable."

The cold coffin groaned as it was lowered from the ceiling by mechanical hands. Within, Bors watched, groggy, but growing more aware as the moments passed. His sense of serenity vanished, paving way for trepidation and dread. The last time he was woken, the people had assured him that, should everything go smoothly, he needn't wake up ever again. They wouldn't need him, they promised. But these people were different from the ones before and he knew that something was wrong.

A woman dressed in a suit and spectacles stood in front of the others. From the way they interacted with the strange machines and glowing lights of the chamber, Bors supposed they were technicians. She turned and said something to the man nearest her, then took a step forward. The metal cocoon came to a stop with a thud and the hing-

es hissed.

"Ninety-one."

"Open it," said the woman.

The cocoon obliged, the glass door sliding open, parting way for the contents within. Bors rested there, the last of his slumber slipping away in a network of wires and nozzles. A technician tapped away at a few keys and the wires holding him coiled and popped, pulling away from the plugs embedded into his skin. Freed, Bors took a wobbly step.

"Sir Bors," said the woman, primly. "You can hear me?" He looked around the chamber, eyes glazed briefly with memory before snapping back to comprehension. He towered over the others with square shoulders and firm arms. He nodded in response.

"Readings?" she turned back to one of the techs.

"All clear. He's stable."

"Sir Bors, Adeline Thompson. I'm in charge of overseeing your activation," said the woman, extending a hand. The giant did not seem to understand the gesture. "Sir Bors, I need you to think: do you remember the last time

you were awake?"

"Mordred," Sir Bors rasped in response, throat aching from disuse. "He killed Arthur. There – there was the ceremony. And we hunted."

"Right," Adeline said.

"Memory is stable. Carry on with phase tw - "

"The people. They said I wouldn't need to wake up for a long time – if ever."

Adeline gave him a queer, brief look. She cleared her throat. The others in the room, the technicians and others still with duties that Bors couldn't guess, waited in silence. He turned, eyes sweeping over the circular chamber that once held the Round Table. The Table was long gone and a strange device now occupied the spot where it had rested. Suspended on the ceilings, held in place by clamps and thick black cables, were fourteen of the metal cocoons. Each and every one was empty.

"There's been a change. A situation." said Adeline Thompson.

"You're the last of the Knights, Sir Bors, and we need you."

"The others?"

"You can account for Arthur and Mordred," she gestured to the empty tanks. "All of the others were... retired from

service. Save for you and Sir Lancelot."

"I do not see Sir Lancelot, my lady," Bors mimicked her gesture.

"Therein is the situation. Sir Lancelot was activated briefly before you were. He has... stopped reacting to our commands and stimulus," Adeline said as a technician handed her a pad. She showed it to Bors, but it was alive with scrolling letters and symbols he didn't understand. "He was taken out of his chamber due to a dragon sighting. He was armed, released, and has since gone dark. We believe he may have made contact with the beast.

"Sir Lancelot was the best of us. It isn't in his nature to shirk a sworn duty."

They spoke as Bors was escorted to the armory. It was the only room he had seen that hadn't changed: the omnipresent wires and cables crisscrossed the chamber, but the walls were stone. There were swords and maces in racks along them that were horribly corroded with age. There were suits of armor, too, and newer weapons Bors did not recognize. Men measured him and put on his plate mail, which was untouched by age or advancement. The magics of Merlin and the blessing of the Lady of the Lake had preserved it.

The smell of the steel brought back another flood of memories: his squire-hood, the tournaments and championships of arms with his cousin, Lancelot, the taste and caress of a daughter of a king... He had sworn that she had a bewitched ring that had forced their union, but there was no magic, only lust, passion, and fear. Most of all, he remembered the quest for the Grail, in which so many squires and pages lost either their lives or their innocence. He himself, after so many ages, was still unsure whether that quest was worth it.

They called it the Holy Grail but it had brought them nothing but evil and ruin. The promise of immortality and glory left a bitter tang in Bors' mouth. The Knights had drunk from that cup, expecting eternal youth and vigor, but it conferred no blessing. Still they withered and watched as the ages crawled by. They were relics of an age long since past, relics beholden to technological saviors to hunt and destroy anything else that may slip through the cracks of time. The mythical, these people soon learned, were very much real.

That despair was exacerbated by the weapon they were giving him to correct the problem of Lancelot: golden Excalibur, sword of the King.

"If you believe Lancelot can see reason, then by all means," Adeline was saying. "But if not, remove him. With luck, we could solve two problems in one go. Good luck, Sir Bors."

He was loaded into a metal bird and flown to a city called London. There were camps strung throughout the countryside of those evacuated at the sight of the dragon. Bors watched as he flew closer and closer to the metropolis. He remarked how little of his country he recognized. No more were the fens and green pastures, no more the fields of flowers and forests of oak. What he saw was concrete, and glass, and steel—unyielding and terrible in its expanse.

They circled high over the spires of London, seeking a sign of Lancelot. A towering column of smoke was the only thing they found in the ghost town of London. As the helicopter landed, Bors saw him: Lancelot, smeared with gore and blackened with soot, standing with his arms raised to the sky by the raging bonfire.

"Confirming visual on Lancelot," whispered Adeline's voice in Bors' ear. He knew not what terrible apparel it was but he wasn't surprised in the least.

He drew nearer to the man

that was once his cousin, his companion, his brother in arms. The smell that rolled out of the Flames was a familiar one. It was death. Something had gone very wrong.

"Hail, Sir Lancelot." It was all he could manage.

Lancelot turned, surprise flashing across his face. It melted away to joy and he flashed one of his endearing smiles.

"Sir Bors? You're awake? What fortune! I had hoped our handlers would wake you once I stopped listening to their commands."

He pointed to his left ear, or rather, where the left ear had been. All that remained was a mangled stump and a thin wire hanging limp from within his skull.

"What is this? They told me you stopped listening to them." Lancelot laughed. "Do you remember our oath, cousin? To watch over the world of men, to bring evil to the sword wherever it rise? I awoke with that notion close to my heart and in this short span of time I've seen nothing but horror and wickedness."

"The beast?"

Lancelot grinned again and shook his head. "Beast? There is no beast, cousin. The dragon? Is that what they called

it? Guinevere is as much a stranger in this land and time as we are. No. I'm talking about this," he swept his arms wide. "These towers of glass and greed, this pustule on the world. Our world, cousin. Have you seen what they done to it? Mutilated her, bleed her dry."

"He's delirious." Whispered Adeline.

"And?" Said Bors. "There is nothing we can do, Lancelot, except keep true to our oath."

"That is precisely what I intend to do, sir. Destroy evil wherever it arises. Starting here, with this aberration. The dragon, Guinevere, she's promised me her aid in this endeavor. To return our world to how it was. Don't you want that, too? There is no place for us here."

Bors did want it, so much so that he was ashamed of himself. Yet all he did was grunt and shake his head, drawing Excalibur from its sheath.

"You stand against me, Sir Bors? I'm surprised. I will not fight you, but she will."

Something massive thundered overhead, drowning the street in shadow. There was a shriek, and a rush of heat, and the helicopter exploded into a ball of fire. Lancelot lifted his arms high and screamed, voice full of rage, sorrow, and joy. Bors

took a step and the last thing Lancelot saw was the flashing of Excalibur's steel.

Guinevere circled high above head, a green serpent winding around the towers of glitter and glass. The sun reflected off the panes and the dragons wings; a brilliant August red. She bellowed and the sound was all rage, fury, and frustration. Bors' heart wasn't sinking only due to the size of the creature but by how much he sympathized with her. His mind and heart ached for his simpler world, where he and this dragon belonged; his lost age, where men had honor.

'No,' he struggled to think through the cacophony. 'These are wicked thoughts. There is still good in this world.'
He wasn't sure if he believed himself but still his limbs carried him forward.

"What are you doing?" Adeline's voice was no longer a whisper. "That fire will kill you -"

The rest was lost as Guinevere landed and belched a jet of flame. Bors raided his shield and advanced but the fire was too much. The shield melted like ice, as did his arm, revealing the metal that supported his skin and skeleton. He grimaced and recoiled, raising Excalibur high as Guinevere shrieked her challenge.

"Retreat!" Urged the voice in his ear.

Bors did not retreat. He advanced, step after step. "Arthur," he shouted. "Gawain. Geraint. Gareth. Gaheris. Bedivere. Galahad. Kay. Mordred. Lamorak. Tristan. Percivale. Lancelot."

With each name, his brothers flashed before his eyes, besides him even in death. As the dragon bellowed, smoke rising from her jaws, Sir Bors plunged into the maw of darkness.

Nights on the 6 Train

Kashawn Henry

Just to say hello,
It would be a labor that requires the courage of Hercules.
Just to say hello,
Would drive me crazy thinking of ways to keep your attention.
Just to say hello,
Would require a leash made of diamond to keep my heart from leap out of my larynx.
Just to say hello,
Would be a feat that I'd be proud of regardless of the response.
So... hello.
But to ask you out,
I'll need Sampson and Atlas to give me strength.
Just to take you out,
I'd need liters of Jack and Johnny just to keep cool.
Just to hold your hand,
I'd need gloves made of sand and salt to keep from soaking yours.
Just to give that first kiss,
I'd need a miracle to make my lips fit to be graced by a goddess in human form.
But fuck it I'll go with God.
Now making you mine,
Zero division will have a value before I find the right words to say.
To ask you to be my wife,
I'll have to mull it over for an eternity but shorter than a millisecond.
To see you on that day,
Vision would be the only sense that matters from then on.
To give you my child,
Would give me joy that is only rivaled by the feeling when I first saw you.
So what are we waiting for?
But this is your stop,
You're gone forever,
But just like that,
A new muse is in view,
She's gorgeous,
But just to say hello...



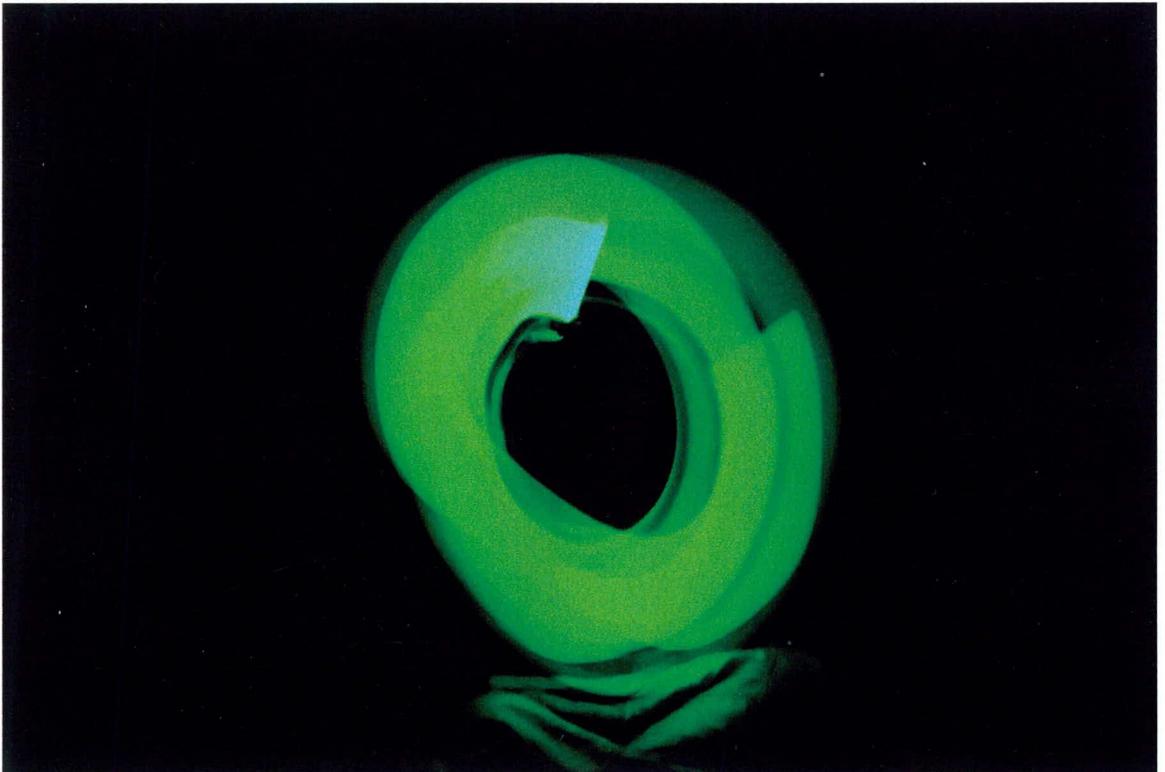
Untitled Riky Alejandro Tenesaca

The Guild 53

Tunnel of Darkness

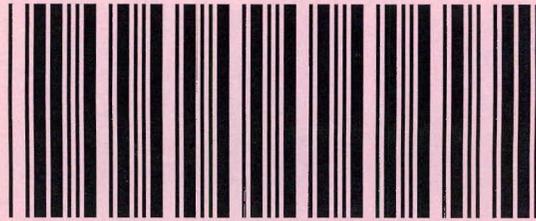
Anonymous

My hands trace each cold bumpy brick
Reading the Braille of wanted escape as I
Slowly drag my feet in uncertainty
Feeling every little sound each step creates
Stale mystery floating in the air pushing me in puddles of refusal
Unaware of blinks and breaths
Searching for promises, I let my hand give way from the wall
Clawing at the air to find something else to hold onto
When walking gets too tiring I want something to pull me through
Pull me up through the layers that bind me
My insides are full of tears tired of trying
Down in this tunnel there is no distinction of in or out
I left my faith on the walls and all that's grabbing my hand is doubt
Questioning if I'll ever win, he tells me to hold on but I'm through with losing
So I Just Let Go
And fall back into the darkness of reality
And I'll keep trying to find my way
Until silence bursts my eardrums



Untitled Nick Hildago





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Separator Sheet

CASO Scanning and Image Processing

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