

CROSSROADS



Literature and Art by Students
at Hudson County Community College

Crossroads

Literature and Art by Students at Hudson County Community College

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We would also like to thank all the creative students who submitted literature and art for this issue!

Editorial Policy

The student editorial board considers submissions from all currently registered HCCC students and alumni. Submissions must conform to college guidelines regarding behavior and speech, and the editorial board will not accept material that aims to denigrate based on race, sexuality, or other aspects of identity. The editorial board is open to considering all submissions, but not all submissions will be published. Decisions of the editorial board are final. All submissions will be automatically entered into the Writing Center Student Writing Contest. *Crossroads* asks for first North American publishing rights. Authors and artists retain their copyrights, own their work, and have the rights to future use of this work. *Crossroads* accepts submissions on a rolling basis. Send submissions to crossroads@hccc.edu.

Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors.....	5
<i>-Prose-</i>	
The Dream by Lorena Candelario.....	7
Special Glasses by William McGovern.....	10
Arcadia by Melissa Ortiz.....	13
The Croupier by Casey Collado.....	17
Valhalla to the Small by Kelly Ann Gettmann.....	18
After Life by Melissa Dahud.....	20
Paradise Hades by Anthony Tofiles.....	23
John the Shepherd by Hector M. Rivera.....	25
A Solid Angel by Alfredo Perez.....	28
Ritual by Joshua Thomas.....	30
To End by Sophia Anthony.....	32
The Last Good Man by Hector M. Rivera.....	36
Charlotte and Henry by Alina Fernandez.....	39
A Very Happy Ending by Kelly Ann Gettmann.....	44
Let Me Eat Cake by Khier Casino.....	47
<i>-Visual Art-</i>	
NYC Downtown and Liberty by Nick Duarte.....	50
Orange Tunnel by Nick Duarte.....	51
Melancholy by Macauley Mendoza.....	52
Image by Lindsey Melon.....	53
Images by Kallan Rodney-Green.....	54
Wasteland by Alexander Galvez.....	56
Dark Afternoon by Alexander Galvez.....	57
Mountain by Alexander Galvez.....	58
Image by Madeline Rosario Urbina Carbajal.....	59
Image by Chris Liebl.....	59
Image by Shantal Henry.....	60
Image by Diana Brito.....	61

Image by Angel Ramos.....	62
Image by Katrina Nipal.....	63
Marilyn Monroe by Kevin Avila.....	64
Bob Marley by Kevin Avila.....	65
Hand by Hager Kandil.....	66
Image by Gina Felix.....	67
Image by Fernando Nava.....	68
Image by Fernando Nava.....	69
Image by Fernando Nava.....	70

- Poetry-

Freedom by Hector M. Rivera.....	72
Gone Astray by Lamaris Arroyo.....	73
A Hyphenated America by Vanessa Rodriguez.....	74
Power to the Blade by Zaida Mohammed.....	75
Somehow by Lori S. McElrone.....	77
Paint the Roses Red Again by Melissa Ortiz.....	78

Welcome to Crossroads,

As the seasons bicker like recalcitrant children and another academic year lurches to its close, we - as a community of artists, authors, and appreciators - reflect upon the quiet and solitude of the winter months. Spring carries with it the promise of new lives and unions, but, as many of this issue's submissions explore, beginnings and endings occupy two sides of the same coin. Change is in the air, and we all deal with it in different ways.

Once again, the success of this issue is indebted to the faculty and staff who continue to make Crossroads a priority; doubly so with the introduction of our first limited print run. Crossroads continues to break new ground as we transition with this issue from prose and poetry to a fuller incorporation of the visual arts. We remain privileged to share with our college community the imagination and imagery of our peers both new and returning. May you enjoy their work as thoroughly as we have!

Dan Pavlick

The Crossroads Student Editorial Board

~ Prose ~

The Dream

by Lorena Candelario

It was a cold, November morning. He was walking up the streets of New York City. A gust of wind hit his hardened face as he searched for familiarity.

"Where am I?" he asked himself. He felt a sudden rush of *déjà vu* as he made his way through the streets. Steve had no idea how he got there or when he woke up. It's like his mind erased everything until that very moment. It frustrated him because he couldn't pin down where he was or what the *déjà vu* meant and why he was having it. He just knew he had walked these streets before. Steve looked up at the grey sky and noticed that the sun was barely shining.

Countless silhouettes rushed by him on the street. Some of them just gave him a glimpse. "Where am I?" he asked himself again. Steve stopped a young, dazed boy who was dressed in dark clothing.

"Do you know where we are?" asked Steve in a desperate voice, "I am lost." He couldn't shake the fear that was slowly creeping up on him. The boy just stared at him vacantly. He was holding a device that had a cord that connected to his ears. The boy didn't understand Steve's plea for help. His eyes were dark and empty.

The strange boy looked away in a daze. Steve felt a rush of panic come up inside of him as the boy slowly walked away. He noticed that the boy took small, measured steps as if he was trying his best not to trip.

Steve saw that the figures were connected to these devices. As if their lives depended on him. The silhouettes were mere shadows.

Frustrated and confused, Steve decided to sit down on the sidewalk in front of an abandoned electronics store. The cold concrete shocked his body. He observed that he was wearing a bright red t-shirt, blue jeans and a pair of old converses. He laughed at his attire, which was completely different from the strange figures. Steve checked his pockets to see if he could find a clue as to where he was. He felt like a stranger to himself. Everything felt distant.

He silently watched as the silhouettes made their way up and down the street. Each one of them was walking the same way that boy did. Steve started to feel the cold November weather. How did he get here?

A dog slowly approached Steve. The dog's fur contrasted with the dull, gray sky. The dog barked excitedly at Steve and sat right next to him. Steve, feeling somewhat relieved, patted the dog on the head. He was surprised at how the dog calmed his nerves.

"Do you know where we are?" asked Steve jokingly. It was foolish asking a dog such a question. If only they could talk. Steve checked his collar, it read: SCOTT 908-9Y55-4ERT4... The sequence confused Steve even more.

"I guess we are both lost, huh?" said Steve while rubbing the dog on the back. The dog barked happily. Steve grinned.

Steve shifted his attention to the strange figures crowding the streets. Why were they walking so strangely and what did they keep staring down at? Those devices seemed to consume them...

"Automatons," he thought as he stood up to ask for help, again.

Steve grabbed a tall figure by the arm. It was a man with graying hair and icy green eyes. The man stopped, completely startled. He stared expressionlessly, looking down at his arm and then at Steve.

"Sir... I apologize...I need to know where I am," said Steve. This time he was more assertive. The words came out rushed. He did not process it all.

"Yes," replied the tall figure. His voice and eyes were both distant as if he wasn't registering what was being asked.

"Well, can you...can you help me?" asked Steve. The man was looking down at his device again. He didn't have the plugs in his ears like the boy, but he was just as consumed.

"What?" asked the tall man in a voice so distant that Steve wasn't sure if he was human. The figure cautiously looked up from his device. Steve stared at the man's blank eyes. They were completely absent.

Steve wanted to scream. He couldn't understand anything that was going on around him. Why was everyone ignoring him?

"WHERE AM I? WHERE ARE WE!?" he yelled. The tall man became terrified and everything seemed to cease. Steve looked around and saw that all eyes were on him.

"STEVE! STEVE! STEVE! Wake up! You've been sleeping all day."

Alice shook Steve and woke him up from his deep sleep. At first, Steve couldn't understand why his wife was shaking him. He was still in his dream and wondered how she got there. Then he came to his senses.

"What...What is going on?" he asked hastily.

"Steve, you have been sleeping all day. Are you okay?" Alice stared at him with curiosity.

"Yes, yeah, just had a strange dream." Steve replied in a jumbled voice. Still dazed, he walked slowly to their living room. Then he sat down on the futon.

Steve just observed everything around him. The colors of the wall and cheap paintings that he bought years ago seemed much more interesting. The futon felt soft under his hands. He looked down and noticed that he was wearing the red t-shirt and blue jeans that he wore in his dream. He noticed that he was thinking too much and snapped out of his deep thought and turned on the television.

George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* was playing. He watched the scene where the zombies were outside the mall wandering around. They were aimlessly walking around the mall. Steve noticed that the zombies didn't even acknowledge each other. They bumped into each other; however, they didn't seem to care. They were alive – but dead. Steve thought how the figures or people in his dreams were similar to the zombies in the movie.

"Alice, can you come over here?" said Steve.

Alice went to the living room and sat down next to him. She was on her phone, checking the news.

"Isn't this movie so weird? I don't know why it intrigues me," he said.

"What?" she asked in a distant voice. Steve felt that dread again. Alice looked at him, confused. He stared at his wife's blue eyes and couldn't understand what was terrifying him.

That déjà vu.

Special Glasses

by William McGovern

I could almost make out the time on my alarm clock through the green glass of the empty beer bottles lined up around it like bodyguards shielding the clock from my hand that was about to swat it on its head. Thankfully for the clock, today's hangover was so impressively strong that I let it squawk on for a few minutes before I managed to raise my throbbing head off the pillow to gently quiet it. I couldn't bring myself to be anything but gentle lately. Even on a morning such as this I felt a mawkish empathy towards inanimate objects like my alarm clock. I felt for everything and everyone. Well, except for the happy ones. They can find a bridge or a tall building and jump right the hell off it. I laid my head back down on the pillow and closed my eyes. My head was still pounding but soon even the hangover wouldn't be able to distract my brain from realizing that she was gone. My heart sank into its daily position somewhere down in the pit of my stomach. He's been so stubborn since she left. At night, after my shift, I go down to the bar and pour whiskey and beer into my gut so my heart can't hide – so much that he is forced to climb out my stomach and up my ribs and sit back in the safe, dry, boney sanctity of my chest where he belongs. Here we can communicate, rap and inter-relate. Behind his security detail of Heineken bottles, my alarm clock starts to scream at me again, telling me in his cold, digital language to rejoin the world for yet another day. Another speech from him and I'll rethink my stance on gentleness and empathy for all things.

I jump out of bed and turn the shower on. The only way to assimilate yourself into the day when you're fighting a hangover is to dive right in. Rip it right off like a band-aid. The more you wallow in it, the harder it is to get out of it. Glancing at the alarm clock through the ranks of bottles once again, I notice how late I'm running. I scan the messy apartment for my backpack. I throw a banana, a bike lock and a bottle of water inside it. Where is my book? I've been reading Siddhartha again. I'm at the part where he joins the Samanas and learns to free himself from the traditional trappings of life, thereby freeing himself and finding enlightenment. If I could only free myself from this hangover; my head is still pounding. The train leaves in exactly 38 minutes. I'm 20 minutes away on the other side of town. Considering the time it takes to buy a ticket and get to the train I would, under normal circumstances, be just fine. But this timeframe might not allow me to do my daily, masochistic exercise in futility and ride my bicycle past her house, completely out of my way, and pretend to run into her – although I

never do. That doesn't stop me from spending hours every day dreaming about the myriad of scenarios in which she'll see me riding by, my leg and arm muscles flexed and slightly glistening with fresh sweat from the intimidating grade of the hill I just rode up with ease. This will remind her of how athletic I am and how she used to love my physique. It will remind her of the hours she spent listening to me talk about bicycles. She loved bicycles. She loved that I loved bicycles and how much I knew about them. She admired me for the adventurous journeys I'd undertaken on them: across the state, across the country, over the Rockies, into her heart. It will remind her how a guy like me doesn't come along very often. She'll wave to me and yell my name, but my headphones will block the sound of her calling my name, so she'll call my name a second, a third time. The third time she'll realize the sound of desperation in her own voice and how subconsciously and involuntarily she'll be drawn to reach out to me as she sees me ride by not noticing her. She'll draw back her hand because of how silly she's made herself look, but the meaning of her actions won't be lost on her. What she once had but let go, that sort of thing. This will stick in the back of her head. At the last second, however, I notice her waving to me and I take off my headphones and look around, as if I didn't even realize I was riding down her street. This will emphasize the idea that I'm totally fine with our break up and I'm very much over her. So much so, that I've literally forgotten where she lives. She'll ask me how I am, and I'll tell her how great I'm doing without seeming pretentious. Then I'll ask her how she is doing with just the slightest air of sympathy. This will also not go unnoticed and stick in the back of her head. I'll ask her what she's been reading lately to prompt her to ask me, to which I'll reply with some heavy, obscure, author. French maybe – no, Russian. Yes, Russian. She never read much of the Russians, so she won't have some misguided, pushy opinion about them (she was well read and never let me forget it). Then I'll look at my watch and tell her I'm late meeting someone for coffee before work. Then I'll pretend to blush and pretend to only just realize I've told my ex that I'm meeting another woman. I'll leave her with that awkwardness and those things I've stuck in her head and wish her the very best. I'll make the slightest motion as if I'm going to hug her goodbye, but the bicycle between my legs will stop me momentarily, then I'll point at my watch and shrug as if there is nothing I can do while she has already stepped in for the hug and is now left awkwardly standing there, arms extended, holding nothing. I'll ride off without holding the handlebars (super cool) while I put my headphones back on, getting back into the world I was in before she interrupted me to say hello. Yes, this is perfect.

Before mounting my bicycle and heading towards the train station by way of her street, headphones in, backpack on, wind in my face, I check the mailbox. I'd sent away for a pair of glasses I'd read about in the back of a magazine. Special Glasses for Ex-Girlfriends they were called – must've arrived by now. You'd think that I'd be fine with my daydreams of passive aggressive revenge scenarios, but I like to keep as many irons in the fire as I can, so to speak, so I sent away for these glasses that are supposed to block her out. They are not available in any store. The ad in the magazine promised to "filter out the sight" of that special someone. "Enjoy life and all its beauty without the awful sight of her!" it boasted. "Perfect for the guy who can't leave town but wishes she would!" it said in bold capital letters. The rusted metal box outside my door creaked as I pried it open, and there it was, a brown box with a white sticker and black writing that read simply, Special Glasses. Perhaps now would be the perfect time to see if they actually work.

Arcadia

by Melissa Ortiz

The earth had changed significantly in the last 100 years of man's reign. Great climatic change forced the mass migration of humans to the last habitable portions of land to the north; millions of lives were lost in the journey. For those who remained in the once great cities of yesteryear, death was as guaranteed as the rising coastal waters and widening sands of the desert.

In an effort to save the human race, scientists engineered a biological nanochip capable of supporting all the functions of the human brain. Information from a person's mind could be transferred to the chip without the loss of a single memory--they termed the chip Nanocog. Housed in crude mechanical representations of the human form, those fortunate enough to be chosen for cogtransplant essentially possessed immortality.

The daylights came on, abruptly ending Nadine's reboot cycle. Slowly her orbital shutters opened. The apertures within worked to bring her surroundings into focus. An exact replication of every other unit in the pod, the room was a perfect twelve by twelve square. The lighted ceiling, discolored by age, cast a shade of yellow that locked the space in a perpetual dusk. The only interruption to the smooth walls of the room came from the pocked and pitted rectangular ribbon of chrome – directly opposite the reboot hutch Nadine currently occupied – marking out the room's entrance in a burnt-orange color. Tucked beside the entrance were a small table and bench, and to the left of the hutch, a single armchair.

With all the deftness allowed by her mismatched fingers, Nadine triggered the switch and released the restraints that held her upright in the reboot hutch. A moment later, a hydraulic sigh signaled the opening of the hutch's glass front. Slowly, laboriously, Nadine made her way toward the armchair and eased her mass into it. The hutch, sensing her absence, closed the glass behind her with a soft hiss.

It was Restday. Aside from a few of the lesser biobots on mandatory duty, the corridors in pod complex LA09 were empty of all but the buzz from the fluorescent lights. The translucent walkways that connect one compound to the other were void of life. No longer did they benefit from the sun's rays. Makeshift lights now illuminated the space from within. Somewhere in the back of Nadine's mind existed the faintest hint of a time when it was the fiery orange of the sky

that lit those walkways; those days had long since passed. Like the soot that blocked the light, the sediment of a thousand lifetimes coated Nadine's nanocog, confining her to the present. Using the curved, metal piece at the end of her fingers, Nadine found the clasp and opened the small hidden flap within the arm of the chair to reveal a well-worn control panel. Her cold finger groped for the depressed area on the panel that once had an arrow indicating forward. *Jackpot.* With a mechanical hum and the clattering of ball bearings on the oxidized track, the chair jerked forward. Nadine crossed the short distance to the opposite wall. "Activate Holoviewer." At the sound of her voice, a small light began to grow into a picture that read: 4 unread transmissions 4537/17/3: yesterday's mail.

"Open one." The screen displayed shiny new pistons, wheels and cogs marching across a purple background.

A booming male voice came in, "Twenty percent off new and used thigh pistons, this weekend--"

"Skip. Open next." The screen became a field of yellow with words that ran along the bottom, presumably for those whose wave reception membranes were damaged or missing.

"Please be advised that your account balance of sixty thousand Kurgs remains unpaid as of--"

"Skip. Open next." The screen blackened, followed by a pause. All at once, the image of President Gordon dominated the screen. It took a moment for Nadine to comprehend the significance. She had been chosen; the words were lost to her ears but she did not need to hear them to know. The moment that every biobot dreaded arrived for Nadine. The message explained that her duties to The Corp had come to an end. It went on to inform her that her number had been drawn in the lottery for recycle. She had 48 hours to get her affairs in order. The last of Nadine's kin, Lucy, had been recycled some hundred years ago. The only real family Nadine had resided in the fog of memories she struggled to hold on to: the child she lost in the Great Migration, the husband – refused cogtransplantation by the The Corp – that she watched grow old and die, both buried and gone. Since then, Nadine's only real responsibility had been to The Corp.

Nadine attempted to absorb the reality contained in those words. Her number had been drawn, her duties to The Corp were over, 48 hours to get her affairs in order...No, 24 hours: it was yesterday's mail.

Nadine sat in her chair, resting the wheels, cogs, pumps and pistons that were her inner workings. What use did her forced movement and application of oil have to them now? For all Nadine cared, she could rust and lock up in the very position she sat. Then maybe the recycling center would not want her, maybe she would be unfit for the smelting furnaces, maybe – just maybe – instead of fizzling away in a vat of chemicals meant to harvest the precious metals within, her nanocog would be knocked loose and tumble out of her top unit. There, beneath the hustle and bustle of the machines at the recycling plant, in the company of dust bunnies, she could remain content for another thousand years.

The sudden end to everything was not what frightened Nadine the most: it was the question of what came next. There must be something after. When the number of a biobot belonging to the upper class was drawn at lottery, an option to conserve one's nanocog was offered. It allowed them to construct their ideal afterlife and have their nanocog "live" in that world for eternity. They called it Arcadia. Nadine quickly washed from her mind any notions of ever being able to afford such a luxury.

Reaching an arm below the chair, Nadine grabbed the handle of the oilcan that rested on the chair's platform. Abandoning reserve, she doused her joints and moved them back and forth, in and out until each joint moved in smooth silence. She rose from the armchair and made her way out into the stillness of the corridors, through the gloomy light of the walkways, heading toward pod complex LA01, to where the tseirps conducted business. For those without the means to simply plug into an eternal paradise of their creation, the ancient rituals and chants of the tseirps held the only hope for something beyond the nothingness; even without proof they hoped. The tseirps claimed that, if and when these ancient chant and rituals were done correctly, the overseer of Niflheimr would grant you access to eternal life. And the more frequently you had this done, the more likely you were to be granted access.

Wider than those of the residential pods, the labyrinth of corridors in LA01 was eerily silent. Nadine slowed her pace as she approached the entrance. A biobot draped in a plain chestnut-colored robe was seated behind a simple desk. Behind him on the wall – at least an arm span's length wide and painted in hues Nadine had nearly forgotten – was a beautiful lighted panel depicting a white dove with an aura of golden light surrounding it; a warped recreation of the image reflected off the man's pate. Sensing her presence, he looked up from his work and rose from his seat. With a warm smile, he beckoned to her to enter. Nadine paused a moment, then stepped in.

"Good Restday," he said, his voice – smooth and even-pitched – possessed an almost musical quality. "I am Brother Simpton. How can I help you?"

"Yes, uhm, good Restday, Brother...Simpton," she said, coming closer to him. "My name is Nadine and I was hoping you might be able to...uhm, help me."

"I will do my best. What is the nature of your problem?"

"I got a message from The Corp yesterday. Tomorrow, I'm up for recycling."

"Did you bring anything with you today?"

"This is all I have." Nadine held her hand out and opened it. She was holding a small blue crystal. "My money hold contains fifty thousand Kurgs and two small circular bands of gold. The gold is selling at a good price and you should be able to get something for them. This key will grant you access."

"Have a seat; let us see what we can do for you."

"Thank you."

Nadine stepped up and onto a small square platform that was just large enough to accommodate her and told the tseirp that she received notification that her number had been drawn at lottery. The tseirp glanced over to Brother Simpton who held up the key, verifying payment.

The tseirp tugged at a thin cord around his neck, pulling it further until a carved piece of wood depicting two short, crossed lines emerged from beneath his loose fitting ivory robes. He held the piece of wood before Nadine and signaled for her to kiss the oddly shaped object. Even if she did not understand the reasons, it was Nadine's only hope, so she complied with the request and he began. *Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo ...*

The Croupier
by Casey Collado

And, in quick succession a string of expressions were dealt. Similar to the way a croupier treats cards, he shuffled through each emotion, affectionate, angry, then guilty. Without hesitation each expression sprang out of him, blissful, lonely, hostile, so on and so forth.

The questioner nodded in agreement.

"Indeed- you *are*."

Valhalla to the Small

by Kelly Ann Gettmann

All I can hope is that in my next life, you will not be there. I hope that there is no you, and no others like you either. If the life I arrive in after this one includes beings as foul as you, I know that I have done something truly and severely wrong. It would be a punishment to live again in such close proximity to your kind. After all of the pain and torture you have submitted my people to, I should surely think that the blissful afterlife would not allow any of your kind. Not the big, or the small, or the hairy; not the loud, or the quiet, or the smelly; not a single inkling of any one of you belong in that life.

I pray with all my heart that your sticky, dirty, pink goo remains as far away from me as possible when I go. I watched that goo steal away my brother. One moment he was by my side, and in the next you whisked him away on the bottom of your sticky, dirty, pink goo collector. Perhaps after this life you will stay here and rot away with your sweet scented temptations; your giant sized food that is all too good to resist. The trap you and your look-alikes set across your red and white checkered blankets. The whole colony of us will set out to capture just a few crumbs of the remnants of treats you all drop, and only half of us will make it back home. It's like a damn suicide mission for us.

My imagination has also foreseen a wondrous place where none of those murderous, furry companions you all have by your side exist either. They remain so obediently at your feet standing on all fours, waiting for whatever command you might give them next. The vibrations from their loud, deep roars of death will no longer be capable of penetrating our feet. Nor will their strange-looking feelers be able to blow those terrible smelling gusts of wind into our colony's home. Their spiked feet of pain and misfortune will no longer be able to claim another innocent soul. Your grimy, pest-ridden beasts will be a thing of the past. The annihilation of our homes and fellows will cease, because none of you horrid and disgusting creatures will exist in our new lives.

All of the many splendors we could never steal away from you before will be showered down upon us in such glorious amounts. We will not be subjected to scavenging through the dirt for your wasted crumbs. Nor will we skulk through your homes in desperate search of food to end up in those alluringly scented death-traps you have set down to murder us in. It will never again be possible for you to back us into a corner and suffocate our lungs with your

misting shower of utter demise. Nay! The millions of us will work together to hoist whole pieces of pie and cookies, which we will feast upon for several nights. And there will be no end to the leafy greens that we will devour. Endless lines of shrubbery will be placed all throughout the land, and we will never go hungry again.

Every day, the sun will shine on in eternal bliss, because you, my most severely hated enemy, will not be permitted to enter the oasis that is my afterlife. Although many of us have been frightened of entering into the sunlight before, we will walk out with courage now. Because your miniature look-alikes, whose eyes become giant behind the round glass of their "toys," will not be around to burn us alive with the fiery rays of the sun. I will never have to cower in fear or glance constantly over my shoulder because your kind will simply cease to exist. My family and I will flourish, and there will be nothing to prevent us from constantly increasing in numbers. In the next life, we will finally be the unstoppable force we were always destined to be, and not even one being of your likeness will be capable of getting near our untouchable greatness.

After Life

by Melissa Dahud

His eyes opened for the first time in days. The darkness was overpowering, and the cold crept through his skin and into his bones. His body felt light as a feather, yet it appeared to be falling at incredible speed. While usually he would have torn his vocal cords in fear, now he simply stared calmly into the endless void he found himself in. Nothing seemed to bother him. All his worries had vanished and left behind a peaceful feeling in his soul. A soft smile appeared on his lips as he felt himself falling even deeper into the darkness, and as he fell deeper he began to see a light. The quick shift from dark to bright blinded him, and while he could not see, he felt the strong impact against the ground. His eyes shut tightly in an attempt to adjust to the brightness. He blinked a few times until finally his eyes rested on the endless wasteland that stood before him. He felt no pain from the fall, just great discomfort.

The peaceful atmosphere he had just been in shattered into a feeling of overwhelming rage, remorse, and regret. Vignettes of his life flashed before his eyes, taunting him. His mind failed to make sense of all the events he was experiencing. It seemed he had lost control of it, and nothing he did was good enough to regain it. A strong force drove him to his feet. He stumbled forward a few steps until he realized his feet were restrained by heavy metal chains that dug deep into the ground. He lacked the strength to rip the chains from the crimson soil beneath his feet, yet something pushed him to keep trying. His knees gave in, and as he caught his breath, he began to feel his senses coming back. He felt the pain around his ankles from the chains that held him back, and the emotional pain from the horrible memories that played endlessly in his mind: his children crying as he pushed them mercilessly, his wife screaming for help as he struck her repeatedly, the blood he tried so hard to wash from his hands but couldn't, the bodies he dragged out the back and tried to burn. The sensation was unbearable. Tears began to fall from his eyes, forming small paths down his cheeks. He felt helpless, abandoned.

In his struggle, he came to a sitting position and looked to his feet where the chains held him prisoner. He reached for them and tried to remove them, but to his surprise the chains were growing through his flesh and out of his legs. They were embedded in his bones. Somehow the metal had melted onto them, becoming one, and every time he pulled, the metal threatened to break the bone. He pulled on them, but a piercing pain shot through his body as

he did so and forced him to let go. His face hit the hard dirt beneath him. It was cold, as if death had ripped every living particle out of it. He breathed in the small dust particles and coughed. His lungs were weak, his heart weaker.

He stayed on the ground contemplating his life, crying over the painful memories he continued to see: his family, his friends, his possessions, ripped away from him. He never stopped thinking about his actions and the price he had to pay. If only he had been more careful, he thought, maybe none of this would have happened. As he tried to wipe his tears, he saw, out of the corner of his eye, a long, deep trench running in a straight line beside him. About two feet away was another. It didn't take long for him to realize that those trenches were made by chains like the ones anchoring him to the ground as they were forcefully pulled through the ground.

He gathered strength and rose again, and as he did so, he noticed rows upon rows of trenches. He followed them with his eyes and as his gaze neared the horizon, a putrid, overpowering odor of rotting flesh surrounded him. Once his eyes finally reached the faraway horizon, he noticed figures moving toward it. Some were crawling, others attempting to walk. For a moment he had been able to block out the pain he was feeling, and suddenly curiosity got the best of him. His mind was set on reaching the horizon. Perhaps the pain would end once he reached it.

He tuned in to his surroundings once more, regaining the excruciating pain of the horrid images in his mind. He gathered all the bits of strength left in him and began to pull his feet forward. The chains stood strong, unwilling to let him move. He persisted, afraid of pulling too hard and injuring himself. He knew in his mind that the pain would be too much to handle. His eyes closed, he took a deep breath and forcefully he pushed his left foot forward. The chains pulled at his bones and ripped the skin around his ankles, making them bleed, but the physical pain had usurped the emotional pain he was feeling, and this one was much lighter. This motivated him to move on. As long as he didn't stop trying to push forward, he could forget about all the things he'd lost, and all the people he'd harmed – the ones who'd lost their lives because of him, and those whose lives he'd taken away.

Progress was slow, but after what seemed like months to him, and after countless falls, he was able to reach the horizon. There it stood. The wasteland he had been in came to an end, and so did the tracks made by the chains of those who had journeyed out before him. Several times he looked back and saw others, just like him, falling from the dark sky and

immediately being grabbed by the chains that shot out of the ground and violently pierced the ankles of the fallen. He couldn't bear to watch, so he just kept walking. He took a few more steps and finally stood inches from the edge. His mind couldn't even imagine what was to come, and there was no way of finding out unless he took another step. Perhaps the pain would disappear, or perhaps it would become worse. It was a risk he was willing to take. He lifted his foot over the edge and looked down at the endless darkness below. As his foot moved forward past the dirt, the chains released his bones and retracted to the ground. Unable to balance himself, he fell forward into the darkness. His eyes widened as he continued to dive deeper and deeper into the abyss, but slowly his mind began to empty. All the light around him slowly faded to black. Something within him told him not to be afraid, and he wasn't. He was calm. All the pain was gone, and he was simply falling freely into nothing. He didn't know it, but this happened many times before. He had reached the end of the cyclical journey that would continue on for eternity. His eyes became tired and closed slowly. It was time for the cycle to begin once more.

Paradise Hades

by Anthony Tofiles

On the brink of death I held the Name of God close to my heart. Two weeks passed and only a sip of water. The cold winter weather wore and tore away at my endurance so that I could no longer keep the overwhelming pace of my asceticism. Behold! I fell into ecstasy and was granted a vision of the life to come with Archangel Gabriel being my guide. Paradise is not a material realm, but a spiritual one that we can't see with our physical eyes. Paradise does not exist in time or space. Yes, Paradise is up and yes Hades is down. I could not yet go to Heaven, which was distinctly above Paradise, for the Day hasn't come yet. Note what you are about to read; accept it in the sense that earthly things are the weakest kind of depiction of heavenly things. The miserable earth, the sun and moon, the clouds and stars, were all beneath my feet. I then went through a gate that shone more brightly than the light of the sun, and entered a building where the whole floor shone with gold and silver. I can't possibly describe this light. A multitude of people filled the place, neither male nor female, in all directions stretching so far that one could not see where it ended. The angels were commanded by Archangel Gabriel to make way for me, moving aside the crowd in front of me. I was at the place where my gaze had been directed even when we were far away. A cloud hung over this place more brilliant than any light, and yet no sun, star or moon could be seen. The cloud shone more brightly than any of these. I was greeted with great respect by a number of beings as a sinner. Some were dressed in priestly robes and others in ordinary apparel. The angels told me that these are the saints that the Church honors so greatly on earth, some whom are martyrs and other holy men. I felt no need for food or drink as a most sweet fragrance wafted over me. I beheld walls of gleaming splendor of amazing length and enormous height. I took sweet delight walking in this Paradise of joy and happiness. There were a multitude of gardens filled with tall trees, which with their tips swaying, rejoiced my eyes and I smelled a great fragrance from their branches that came forth. An earthy tree can't compare to the beauty of these heavenly trees. An innumerable amount of birds flew in these gardens, with wings golden and snow white, and of various colors that I've never seen before. They sat on the trees of paradise, singing so wondrously that I was beside myself from the sweetness of their voices. A youth walked before me with a face as bright as the sun, clothed in purple, the color of royalty. I followed him and I beheld a most magnificent, splendid Cross, great in stature and like a rainbow. Around it stood

fiery singers like flames singing sweet hymns glorifying our God Who had once been crucified. The youth who went before me went up to the Cross and kissed it and signaled me to kiss it also. The second I kissed it I was filled with unutterable spiritual sweetness, and I smelled a fragrance more powerful than that of Paradise. I was at the firmament of Paradise and when I looked down I saw the abyss of the sea.

“Fear not, we must ascend higher.” Archangel Gabriel said.

He gave me his hand to grab and when I grabbed it, we were above the second firmament. I saw wondrous men in their repose and joy feasting. I can’t communicate this repose and joy well enough. The human tongue is incapable. From there we ascended further up to the third Paradise where I saw and heard a multitude of heavenly powers hymning and glorifying God Almighty. Of course, since I am still a man alive, I could only see the heavenly powers but not the Father. We went up to a curtain that shone like lightning where giant and frightful youths were standing with the appearance of fiery flames wearing metal armor, the metal looking nothing like the metal of earth.

“When the curtains open you will see the Master Christ. Bow down to the throne of His glorious power,” said Archangel Gabriel.

I was overcome by terror and joy unspeakable. Behold! A flaming hand opened the curtain and like the Prophet Isaiah I beheld my Lord. He was sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and above it stood the seraphim (Isaiah 6:1). He wore a purple garment; His face was most bright and His eyes looked on me with compassionate love. I fell down before Him, before the bright and beautiful, fearful throne of His glory. This beautiful joy overcame me as I beheld His face. This joy is inexpressible; I don’t know how. I then found myself walking through paradise again. I looked to the angel and asked: “Where is Saint Mary the Mother of God?” The angel told me: “Did you wish to see the Queen who is brighter than the heavenly powers? She isn’t here; She has gone away to the sorrowing world that lies in deep misfortune to help the poor and suffering. I would have shown you Her holy place but...” Then I heard a voice that said: “Let this man go back into the world for our churches have need of him.” And again: “Go in peace. I will watch over you until I bring you back once more to the Heavenly Jerusalem, your true abode.” I found my soul in my body thereafter. I exclaimed: “Alas, alas O Master! My Lord! How I wish to die right now to be present with You!”

John the Shepherd
by Hector M. Rivera

The hooded figure darted from shadow to shadow blanketed by a bright noon day. The gutted, torn buildings gave birth to crooked shadows like some demented Dr. Sues nightmare. Empty rusted cars provided his cover as he slowly neared his prize. It was being guarded by a behemoth of a street marauder who had taken up residence in a corner dry cleaner, now since decimated by the dirty bombs that had given birth to ultimate anarchy ten years prior.

Time seemed to slow as had happened during all the other countless, violent confrontations. John had been forced to mete out justice to many a rapist on the streets. He had saved many women and saved many children and had made many enemies, for he clung to a defense of innocence that should have perished with all the other sheeple who trusted their taskmasters so blindly.

His prize was a few cans of beans near a makeshift campfire. The behemoth's skin was marred by dirt and refuse. He was a punk rock pig enshrined in his spikes and fashion firsts. The behemoth lounged like a lion after mating with a harem of lionesses. The giant of a man did not notice John's passage nearer and nearer to him.

John jumped from shadow to shadow like a brown sparrow in a rose garden. He stopped to catch his breath in the shadow of another car nearer to the mouth of the giant's den. He crouched quietly as a cat and waited. The wind blew. The clouds drifted softly and quietly and quite uninterested in his latest challenge. He scanned the ground at his feet and beheld a blade of grass that poked out of a crack in the asphalt. John began to weep and readied himself for what was ahead.

The behemoth began searching lazily for a can opener that escaped him. "Where the fuck did I put that shit?"

"It's behind you." John seemed to appear like a wraith. He was covered in a long, hooded, brown cloak. His boots were desert combat shit kickers. His cargo pants were olive green and as broken and comfy as a bed of ferns in a tranquil forest. His shirt was worn and open at the neck, brown like the hood. His belt was equipped with sheaths. Malevolent machetes dangled in their homes ready for blood.

"Hahahahaha. You just fucked up squirt. You know who I am?" The behemoth grinned and exposed his rotten teeth. If his tongue was visible, perhaps it would dart out and smell the air like a lizard.

Un-phased and hands on hilts, John said, "You are a killer of children. An ambusher of men. A devourer of Eve." Slowly, his close combat swords hissed out and somewhere in John's mind he thought he heard a snakelike "Yesss."

Gone was the mirth of the behemoth and sweat beaded his brow. "I have one. A boy, young and ripe. Take him...Take him and go!" Urine leaked beneath him and the golden color was rich with fear.

John spit on the ground. "On your feet demon." A whisper – or maybe it was a threat – but most assuredly, it was a promise of doom. The behemoth began to stand but seemed to stumble and through the confusion and in an instant produced a 9mm pistol from the ether of his filth.

John veered left, and in a vibrating blur, returned his swords to their tombs. The behemoth's head tumbled like a boulder and thudded on the ground like a granite headstone. The impact was followed by a shrill cry of a boy child. The loinclothed form of a young dark haired boy trembled his way out into the open with his dog collar and chain twinkling in the noon sunlight. His lips quivered and could not determine whether John was his salvation or new master.

John bent to his knees, opened his arms wide and bowed his head. "My lord, I am here to save you. I am a protector of children. A shepherd for the weak and abused. Many a lady and Lord have I saved. Come my lord and I will take you home."

The boy ran and embraced John and his tinkling chain was sheered by the weight of his faith.

On the outskirts of town, a camp was to be seen and rightly the most odd looking camp indeed. Thirty children peopled this makeshift village and all tended to a mobile camp the way soldiers would work at their base of operations. John knelt by the pond near their camp and he prayed with his eyes closed. "Thank you for my dark days, Lord Jesus. Thank you for the justice you mete out. Most of all, Thank you for your mercy, for I deserve none of it, yet you cause your rain to fall on the just as well as the unjust. Amen."

The dark-haired boy, now fully clothed and fed, crept behind his savior. "Are you praying?" He voiced this unsure if it would elicit wrath.

John tilted his head to take in the boy and rubbed his eyes from the glow of his innocence. "I always pray when I find a lord or lady to take care of. I am your servant. Have you eaten?"

"Yes, the oldest boy Jarrod had a stew and fed all the other children with it. It was delicious."

John smiled broadly and warmly. "Jarrod was the first. I would soldier for him till the end of my days."

Quizzically, the dark-haired boy looked at John. "Aren't you in charge here?"

John Smiled warmly and yet grimly and said, "Only God is in charge of man. I serve and I will do so till my last my lord. What is your name?"

"My name is Barnabas. My family was killed on the road entering this city."

John approached the boy and put his hand reassuringly on the boy's shoulder. "No worries, my lord. We are all family here. All of us, now thirty, are family. We will help each other and God willing we will find more lords and ladies on the road to tend to. You don't have to pray if you don't want to Barnabas. I do enough praying for all of us." John walked off and in the earth of the camp his footfalls seemed to echo like a deep and powerful drum.

Barnabas watched John as he left, and under his breath thanked God in heaven.

A Solid Angel

by Alfredo Perez

The microwave I had borrowed from my neighbor for the past two years slides off the counter as my apartment building begins to collapse. Is this some act of terrorism? I have not kept up with the news for the past couple of years. I have been asking God for a way out of debt since I have been so behind on rent, and I suppose in some sick way God finally got around to providing an answer to my prayer.

Peacefully and slowly, I lower myself – lying comfortably down, pressing my face onto the cold floor while bracing myself for certain death. I don't have much to live for. The one I love will never embrace me with real life arms, and yet there he is. Sweet, powerful hope grips me despite the fact that my world has abruptly gone to complete chaos.

I cannot recall another point in time that I have felt such a burning love before. I'd had a dream about him recently. He was towering, tall and strong, and yet he had seemed so fragile. Not once has he shared any words with me, silent and holding steadfast to his mysterious ways, and yet I learn so much from his beckoning silence. Furiously, he spins upon his strong limbs, against the strongest winds, all too aware that he can easily be broken. Shattered fragments of a broken mirror parade on the ground as my apartment building readies itself to surrender and lay down into a deep slumber with me. A puzzling question races through my mind: what would I do if I could start my life over since that day? Another question follows: where would I now be?

As I lay in utter stillness, I reflect upon the fact that, despite all my mistakes and flaws, he had never left my side. Oh, how I wish I could intertwine my soul and heart with his, to be so lucky as to spend forever with him. He is what renews my hope and faith into every day no matter how impossible the odds. To me, he represents the very wind itself. Moving our human forms along, shifting us, shaping us and then suddenly stopping us in our tracks, only to repeat the beautiful process called life, without our consent. We the people are powerless in his gaze. For a brief moment, I am no longer in my terrible predicament. I manage to escape through my mind; for this exact moment I taste complete happiness. I am in the carnival once again – on the Ferris wheel. I am thrilled to be on the very top like an eagle soaring in the sky. The wind is dancing through my hair and my deep eyes drink in the beautiful town all around me. I marvel silently to myself at how peaceful it looks from this view.

As I return my focus back to the cart I am in, I have a realization that the woman had brought me a gift. As she reaches down into her bag, all the glorious colors spill out and make a tremendous physical form of the rare happiness that I felt that very day. Everything was so perfect, untainted, untouched. Nothing else mattered; time stood still, the world, it seemed, took a much-needed break. Why, oh why could I not just remain there forever? Yearning to embrace him, I reach out, as my ceiling begins to crumble into raindrops. Something has happened just below me; the floor creaks and groans, as if telling its own story as it begins tearing, crashing through the many levels of the building. I manage to steal a glimpse of myself as a child holding on tightly to my love and running against the dark void of emptiness, an endless game of tag. We are both fearless of the ferocious winds, but oh! – how easily we are broken.

I grab him by his strong form and hold him in front of myself while my body begins to rise, drifting above the floor. He spins with such vivid colors. This image that I see before me is a blissful painting of pure tragedy. Teardrops not only float above me, but also fall around my wondrous spinning pinwheel.

This is the end, or is it the beginning? At least I will leave this world with happy memories. I whisper, my voice soft as velvet, that I love him right before the building gives into its battle with gravity; it catches us, pulling us into a sweet, infinite embrace.

Ritual

by Joshua Thomas

When I arrived in the city of Camagüey, I really had no idea what to expect. A family had already been assigned by my sector to take me in. They greeted me at the facility where saucers descend as if I was one of their own, despite my peculiarly pigmented complexion and otherworldly attire. It was a family of six: Susana the mother, her oldest son Roberto who was 26, her other boys, twins, Toño and Marko were 22, Susana's husband Juan, and their daughter Elena of sixteen. On the drive home, vendors thronged the streets brandishing their products, "*Tres Pesos!*" they shouted, waving succulent red spherical objects, and tightly wrapped leaves containing an herb-like, potentially psychotropic substance (for all I knew) inside, which the buyers then proceeded to light and smoke upon purchase. This was an Amazonic region by comparison to the confinements of my industrial motherland.

The moon emerged from behind the massive fruit trees vicinal to the Rodriguez residence as we pulled into the dwelling, its lambent beam along with Juan's rambunctious braking method jerked me out of my soporific state; Elena let out a stifled shriek in attempt to pass off her sonically aberrant laugh for a sneeze. Upon entering, Roberto showed me to my room. As I began unloading my bag he said, "*¡Oye! Vete a dormir, que mañana vamos a tener un día festivo.*" The only decipherable word in that gibberish-like sentence to me was sleep, and since it was rather late, sleep sure didn't seem like a bad idea.

Not waking to the usual vociferous din of horns, chatter and churning machinery was quite quaint; with a pseudo-operatic rooster croaking in the distance, I was rather reluctant to rise. Several minutes later Juan entered the room with what he referred to as a *guayavera* shirt, and said I was to wear it today. I tried pronouncing the name innumerable times, to no avail. I believe "guava berry" was as close as I came to enunciating it properly. "Uh, *dondey veymus?*" I asked him, noticing a slight twitch in his upper lip at my comical and highly erroneous articulation.

"*Jaja tu vas a ver,*" he answered, pointing in my direction and then directly at his right eye, I figured it meant, "You'll see."

After entering his four-wheeled contraption along with his family, we traveled for what seemed like 10-15 minutes, finally arriving at a spacious and extravagantly decorated salon. From outside you could feel a rhythmic vibration under your feet, its cadence rather boisterous

and enigmatic. "*Ahora vas a conocer la familia entera,*" Juan bellowed exuberantly, elation rapidly smearing itself across his angular face. I was about to meet the rest of his family. As we entered, a cacophonous cheer rang throughout the building. Everyone approached at once, affectionately greeting not only Juan and his family, but me as well, as if they had known me their entire lives. The contrast in community and solidarity was ineffably juxtaposed against mine.

Upon having sat down and indulged in pork, rice and beans, Juan turned to me and said, trying ever so discreetly to compose himself, "*Las cosas están muy duras aquí,* things very hard, *no tenemos mucho, pero,*" he paused, "*¿sí nos tenemos a nosotros,* ¿gui have ichoder, *me entiendes?* Dis have happen every guik," he choked, referring to this get together. Acrid tears slowly trickled down his rippled visage, "*Cada semana tenemos que estar juntos, si pudiera ver.*" He swallowed, hurriedly averting his swollen eyes for an instant, "If gui could see ichoder everyday, gui would, *pero no podemos.* Undeystend? *Tenemos que estar juntos,* gui has to be together." I understood, we smiled at each other and enjoyed the rest of our time together.

To End

by Sophia Anthony

I do not have a name, and long have I stopped yearning for one.

She shouldn't have answered the door. He had told her, many times, to be careful about these things: people lie; don't you know that better than most? One slip up and you're back on the street. Drugs don't mix with your pretty face, now do they? Just keep quiet and look twice, for nothing is as it seems. You can't trust anyone. They're all going to hurt you now that –

She shouldn't have answered the door.

At first, it seems innocent enough. Two officers: a muscular man and a pixie-like woman. The policewoman is all smiles and cheerful hello's, asking with outstanding manners where her roommate is. She tells the policewoman, expecting that this will be another minor offence that he can talk his way out of, all smooth and charismatic.

He rounds the corner, effortless grace halted as the policewoman suddenly isn't so nice anymore. But he is always quick on the balls of his feet, and her eyes have trouble keeping up with the way he ghosts into the bathroom. The policeman grimaces as he shoulders the locked door off its hinges, yet he is already dropping from the window, tossing a casual grin at her before letting go of the wall tiles and skidding down the roof of their penthouse –

She freezes for a split moment, her mind racing through heights and chances and possibilities of not crushing into the pavement.

And then she is running.

The police are hot on her heels, but this is a fact she can barely process. Her thoughts are fixed on one person, one name.

She turns a corner, jumps a set of stairs, and there – *there* is the door. Oxygen is no longer in her lungs. She doesn't spare it a thought, she can't divert her mind from her goal because if she does she might stop to think about why these cops are here, what they want, what he did, what may happen now.

She sees him.

He'd dropped from balcony to balcony, she understands now, and the relief makes her giddy. She drops to her knees by his side, and gathers him in her arms. It takes her a moment to realize that he isn't moving.

As the police officers gather around her, she screams his name. There is no reply. Azure eyes remain shut against the world, pale lips parted. The pixie woman tries to pull her away but she thrashes around wildly, knowing that now it is over and nothing is important anymore. She just wants to be where he is, wherever that is, heaven or hell or all the places in between. He chokes her name, the sweetest sound falling from his lips and floating into her ears. He can only just about open his eyes, and there is blood on his forehead and skid marks on the second floor balcony where he slipped, but none of that matters when his chest is rising and falling like it is.

The policeman steps forward at the same time the pixie pulls her away. He growls and tries to stand, only to fall back down again.

Finally, he breaks.

He pulls a gun out from his jacket, and waves it about. Policeman-woman-bystander-himself-anyone, *do you really want him to shoot?* 'Cause he will if you don't *give her back*. The bullet slices through the air, though not from the gun she expected. It buries itself deep in his shoulder, and his blonde hair covers most of the pain on his face, but not all of it because she can still see it right there, calling out to her like a siren. He stumbles forward, one hand clutching the wound. It's the same: *give her back*.

A second shot from the policeman's gun is fired, but this one misses as she pushes the pixie – PC Cole, here to help! – away, far, far away and throws herself across the space between them.

They crash to the ground and the concrete slices her calf. She doesn't care, as long as that second bullet misses its target.

She knows that she cannot change what is about to happen, but the air in his lungs is more precious than her own. Handcuffs and bullets are two very different things.

This time, they manage to drag them both away from one another. He has no more fight. She has no more need. His eyes are pleading - Can you get us out of here? Can you do this? For me? When she shakes her head, her tears sparkle like prisms falling in the air between them.

Do they need to escape? Surely not. Just overreacting, of course. All this for a minor crime? Denial, oh sweet denial. It slips from her fingers when the policeman speaks in a bear-like voice. Most of it passes through her, unheard, but some words stick to her like glue.

Murder...Father...Needle...Execution...Rights...

A scream or a yell or a cry – what it is doesn't reach her, only the raw sadness which it conveys. Blood – *his* blood – is on her lap and hands.

And no matter how many tears she cries, they just can't seem to wash away the sea of red.

His father's killer has a horizontal scar across their palm. She remembers him telling her that, but she feels no need to check as the law is upheld and sentences crush together around her.

She arrives at his execution ten minutes early, walks into the steel room and holds his gaze as the local priest preaches of hell, damnation and salvation. Neither of them believes what he is saying. They've seen too much to ever believe again.

He hesitates a moment when asked if he has any last words, but she feels nothing when he says he has none. For he truly doesn't. Words had never been much between them, only thoughts and feelings.

I love you, his eyes are saying, and she stills. And if her voice cracks when she finally opens her mouth to reply, and if her tears fall in steady streams, and if her fingers clench tightly around the arms of her chair, imagining them to be his hands, well...no one there will care anyways.

She walks out of the room before she can see the needle being inserted into his skin. She walks out of their life and her heart and his memories.

He doesn't say anything because he doesn't want to break her with the weight of his words and apologies. Even though the density of his feelings is like lead on his tongue, he doesn't voice them; he cannot. He wants to tell her that he's never liked seeing her cry, that the world seems a darker place without the hollow of her smile, that all the things that make up the stars can't compare to the feeling he gets when he wakes up by her side. He is sorry, for himself, for her, for the fairytale ending that could've been. He is sorry, but the needle takes away his pain, and with it, his life.

The roses are limp in her hand, their color drained away, but their thorns unyielding. Tiny rivulets of blood run in the gaps between her thoughts.

Maybe she's trying to remind herself. Maybe she's trying to redeem herself. Maybe she's lost her mind.

Her footsteps are light, merely slight whispers on the soft grass as she moves. Her laughter is breathless, a sound that remains suspended in mid-air before falling away into

obscurity. She dances underneath a moonless, starless black canvas, muddied white dress rising gracefully around her delicate ankles. The insanity is almost delightful and the illusion is almost tangible.

She places the gun in her mouth, and feels only joy as she pulls the trigger.

I do not have a name, and if you find it, will you tell me?

Some call me 'Mama', some call me 'Wife'. That is all. My self is gone; first buried under those titles, second pummeled by the fist of a husband, third suffocated by the lack of guilt for allowing my only son to take the fall for me.

I do not have a name, but I do have a horizontal scar on my palm.

It is what marks me.

The Last Good Man
by Hector M. Rivera

The last good man was 32 years old and tied down to a gurney. It wasn't a hospital that was his home, but a deep underground military base. His captors had been testing him for weeks. He, like his unfortunate comrades, was a Special Forces troop – otherwise known as a lab rat. Sadly, he, like his comrades, followed orders unquestioningly and saw the needle they offered not as a gross and inhuman violation but just another fear to conquer. He was a brave man and a noble man and his courage was matched only by his profound naiveté. The last good man was a hero to the nation and given a hero's welcome. Each one had been given the top-secret treatment and each one had reacted according to the predicted outcome.

Some of the soldiers did not show the telltale signs of each attempt right away. Some of the men would descend into delirium whispering the names of their sons and daughters, and others spoke of dark shadows chasing them. Some of the men, now reduced to shaking and shivering boys, even called for their mommies. The transformations occurred immediately after the flatlines blazed across the computer screens to which their vitals were being monitored. First, the death-rattle would rasp out of the mouth of the deceased joe and then a violent convulsion. The scientists had seen it before and were not really inclined to rush into the very sparse room. All that lay in it was the gurney, the heart monitor and the thrashing of what should have been a corpse. The injection they had given him was mercury-like and black as pitch. It was a blob of gloom in that horse needle they so lovingly shared with their volunteer.

The man's eyes turned as black as the mouth of a cave that led to hell. His veins bulged out a freakish green. His skin took on a translucent hue. The look of the toxic veins along with his sweaty and pale skin was a mockery of the person this creature used to be. His muscles grew with the black sludge that now sloshed through his giant throbbing veins. A roar escaped his lips that would have shaken any jungle and caused trickles of urine down the legs to any alpha-male in the forest.

The scientists looked on, not even the hint of sweat on their brows. Their lab coats were so pristine white that in their darkened observation room they could have been mistaken for ghosts forced to walk the halls of where they committed their most heinous crimes. They looked on and their pupils could not be seen in the dark room. Just the glare against their spectacles made them all seem to possess large white ovals instead of eyes. They looked on.

The creature strained and strained and now the thing so much stronger from the injection of dark death seemed to make his gurney explode. Nothing hung from his limbs but the eviscerated remnants of his bonds. The creature stared across the room and knew his captors were on the other side of the one-way mirror. He could smell them. He charged across the room, slightly stumbling on the debris of the gurney, and walloped the mirror with his now bulging arms. The window did not give.

On the other side the lead scientist named Dr. Murphy did not even flinch as the behemoth slammed against the sneaky window to his torments. He merely said, "Eliminate him." A yellow gas began to flood the room of the monster's last moments un-alive. The monster looked at the gas as if an enemy had entered the room and he retreated to the furthest part of the space from the gas. Seconds later the entire room was flooded and a curious vision presented itself to the scientists. The beast began to melt. First the hair began to smoke. Then the skin seemed to liquefy and drop off like an overused soap dispenser. Before his muscles followed suit his hands went up to cover his face. His eyeballs burst and leaked through his disappearing fingers.

The beast let out a scream. His final and most fierce of screams as certainly the beast must have sensed that even his un-death's death had arrived. The roar seemed to dissipate into a bubble of regurgitated internal organs that crept up the creature's throat and then nothing: just a bubbling goo on the floor.

Dr. Murphy looked pleased. "The experiment was a complete success folks." He said this with the warmest of smiles. "With the use of this gas we can insure the defeat of any insurrection by our invading hoard force. We have solved several military-related drawbacks. Now with the injection we can make a nearly impervious offensive juggernaut. Once the compartmentalized Special Forces soldier breeches enemy lines, he will give himself the shot. Upon taking the shot he will undergo the change we just witnessed. What you did not see is that once the change takes place the carrier of the injection has a hundred percent communicability of the injection dispersed through his pores. Once one of the opposition force is infected, all will follow suit, and when all are converted, we fly over the enemy-converted and spray the yellow solution gas, and viola...military campaigns are literally ended with a mop."

Some clapping erupted from behind the scientists in the observation room. It emanated from the shadows and eerily grew in volume as it approached from its dark shadowy blanket. A four-star general appeared from the gloom followed by his roach-like entourage. "Well done,

Dr. Murphy. This operation is a complete success. My superiors will surely be pleased." It appeared to Dr. Murphy that a stiff handshake was headed his way but all that erupted from the hand of the general was gunfire.

Charlotte and Henry
by Alina Fernandez

The butterflies gathered all around the immense tree stump as if to let her know *this is the place*. She took the cue and waited there. But half the day went by and still she waited, when in the distance she heard the guardsmen afoot and closing in on her. She wondered if she could reason with them, then she wouldn't have to run. If only they would soften their hearts toward *her* perspective. But her father was the king and they had their orders. As she pondered her circumstance she thought of how easy it would be to let them take her in and go ahead with the wedding. Her betrothed, Prince Xerxes expected she, Princess Charlotte, would be his wife by the next evening's sunset and he had already given her names for the three boys he presumed they'd soon begin to have. The prince's father and mother (the king and queen of Brynn), would gain the added military strength of their in-laws' kingdom. And her parents would gain greater wealth and territorial standing. To deny the prince would mean sure humiliation and scorn for her parents and even onto the entire kingdom. However, her betrothed was not her beloved.

The forest had always been her sanctuary; its vastness and tranquility always her comfort. This day was no different. This day she planned to wait in the forest for an answer to her prayer. After a large breakfast, she used her customary morning walk to escape by meeting her waiting maidservant at an outdoor servants' station away from the castle and used it to change into a commoner's bodice and kirtle, a bonnet, (to conceal her long hair), and a shawl. "Ma'am I understand why you're leaving, and may you find your every happiness...but...the king and queen will be terribly distraught when they find that you're missing."

The princess placed her hands on the maidservant's shoulders, "I'll be terribly distraught if I don't leave," she said. "I must go now to make the most of the day. Thank you. Thank you so much and be well." She gave her maid a hurried hug and departed with only bread to appease later hunger.

After a long walk, she entered the woods and everything about it gave her peace. She was hopeful when she first arrived at the stump, but now they were close enough for her to hear their voices and she was frozen with indecision. She heard one guard say, "I smell a sweet fragrance, not that of an animal." He stopped and turned his head to look around the forest.

And when he didn't see her, he yelled out, "Your Highness, it is not safe for you to be out here alone. There are wolves here."

She bent down low behind the stump, barely breathed for fear of causing sound, and waited for them to pass her by. But they didn't. They found her. "Your Highness, it is good to find you safe. By order of our King, we must bring you to him."

Passion is like adrenaline in that it gives one an edge. Focus, steadfastness, and courage are born out of it. It was passion that provoked her to risk her safety and her own throne for the man she *did* love and wanted to marry. He was not a prince, but a nobleman nonetheless. He was a duke in the small kingdom of Sian – too small to advance her father's kingdom. Instead, it would level it, and the thought of joining the two kingdoms as though they were equals was ridiculous. She knew that, but her heart ruled her. Now that she was cornered and she could not run away, she decided to use her rank to try to convince them to let her go. They would at least have to listen to her and they were not to manhandle her.

She got up from behind the stump and stood up straight. The three herculean men, armored only in breastplate, bowed their heads and stood at attention. "Your Highness," they acknowledged. She knew they expected her to walk toward them to be escorted home to the castle.

But instead, with her arms straight down and hands resting on her thighs, she looked at them and claimed, "I have something to say." *This is my only hope for happiness*, she thought. She would have to impel them to empathize and agree to let her go or face what she perceived to be a sorrowful life. "If you take me back, I will be bound by my father's agreement to marry Prince Xerxes tomorrow. I barely know him but am expected to be his dutiful wife." The guards' stares caused her to feel the weight of her circumstance all the more. "You must grant me this wish to be left alone here; it won't be for long. The prince has been cold in our dealings and I can't imagine living with him for the rest of my life, especially not while I...while I love another." Her countenance altered now from commanding to downcast, and she began to weep as she lamented her possible fate.

One of the guards responded, "My Princess, do not grieve. Please Your Highness, take courage and do not despair. We will take you back safely and you can plead your case."

His words stung her at her core, shocking her back to the present, and her tears immediately stopped. "Haven't you heard me? What I want in this matter is of no consequence to the king. I won't go back!"

"But there are others looking for you, Your Highness. The king sent out an army. If we let you go, you will be found again. And if the king hears we've allowed you to leave he will have our heads. Perhaps the king will have leniency with you and abolish the wedding. Or perhaps one day you *will* love the prince."

"You do not understand. My father will not abolish the marriage because he sees the prince as a fitting match for me, and his kingdom an acceptable alliance. I've begged him until my tears would not allow me to speak. I've begged him and now I plead *with you all*, please walk away from here and give no mention of our encounter. It is the only way."

Another of the guardsmen, eager for the king's accolades and in hopes for a reward, swiftly picked up the princess and held her at his side horizontally. She tried to slither herself free, but he overpowered her.

"Put me down! Are you mad? Let me go, I command you!" But her fury didn't disturb him in the least.

"Princess!" he said. "His Majesty gave us an order to bring you back. It is for the good of the country, and you'll see it is for your own good too!"

The other two guards agreed she should return to the castle. "Forgive us, Your Highness. It is for the best," said one.

"Your Highness, we plead your forgiveness," said the other.

"I'll have your heads for this!" But they paid no attention to her as they continued on the path back to the castle. En route, they discussed, (over her complaints and demands) how fortunate they were to be the ones to find her, and how they would most likely be promoted to be the king's direct guards rather than remain the foot soldiers they were. This was desirable since the king's direct guards enjoyed a higher social status and had some authority over footmen.

The princess saw them first. She had never seen so many butterflies. They resembled an iridescent rainbow, and they were dancing to a tune only they could hear, but she imagined the music was somewhere in the breeze. Thousands of them swarmed around the guards and huddled onto their eyes, ears, noses, and mouths. Shooing the insects away brought more of them about. The guards were blinded. Deafened. They could barely breathe. As they crushed the butterflies in their fists and between their fingers, even more would replace them. The princess was finally freed when the guard was too vexed to hold her anymore and she fell to the ground. The men ran away, but most of the butterflies stayed with them until they were out

of the forest and well away from the princess. Charlotte got up, composed herself, and patted the dirt off her skirt. The remaining butterflies led her back to the tree stump where she sat and waited once again. And the butterflies retreated into trees.

The wait was longer than she expected, but at least she managed to stay out of view of any other guards. Alone and famished, she ate all the bread she had. It was dusk and she, deep in the forest and with the light dwindling, began to worry that her beloved Henry was lost and would wait till morning light to resume his journey to her. She lay down to rest and counted stars to keep her mind occupied, but a faint rustling in the thicket caused her to stop and take notice. Her father must have sent his elite men, she thought, and if they'd found her, she'd have no hope to negotiate or fight against them. But she had come too far to be brought in by greedy guardsmen. She wished they would speak so she could figure how far away they were and in which direction she should escape. However, she knew they'd stay quiet, purposing to ambush her. Each was aware of the other and it became a game of cat and mouse to see if she would get caught or if she could elude them in the dark. Convinced they were too close, she was forced to move; move carefully. She crawled away and attempted to reach a bush hidden in the shadow of a tree with the intention of hiding behind it until they were gone.

She was inches from the shrub when she heard a low growl, and then another. She looked up and saw that a perfectly still pack of four gray wolves surrounded her. Their eyes, illuminated and fixed on her, were disconcerting. Although wolves weren't known to attack humans, it was believed hungry wolves would. And she realized she was in the posture of a feeble and easy prey. She could not outrun them, so she picked up the rocks and sticks near her hands and stood up as slowly as she could. The smallest in the pack must have taken the movement as a threat because he sprung up and hastily lunged at her. As he came at her, Charlotte showed her teeth, then yelled and threw rocks at it and at the rest of them. When the charging wolf reached her she yelled and kicked him while the rest of the pack looked on. He whimpered and returned to the pack. This gave her confidence to continue to yell and throw the rest of her ammunition at them. But while she kept her gaze on them, she backed up as she pelted because she didn't know what she was going to do once her hands were empty. On her third slow step backwards, she tripped on a small log and lost her balance. They charged at the moment she was down on the ground. She rolled herself into a ball, still determined to scare them off with a loud cry, but as the first wolf was about to reach her, her determination wavered and her voice weakened to a sob of anguish. The second wolf followed her mate and

the pups finally jumped to their prey. The two larger wolves were a foot's length away from her back when they both yelped in quick succession and fell on their sides. Both their offspring turned away from Charlotte to sniff and lick their parents.

Surprised by the sudden end to their aggression, she lifted her head and saw Henry running toward her holding a bow and several arrows. "I'm sorry I'm late, Charlotte. Are you hurt?" he said as he embraced her and helped her stand.

"I'm not hurt. I'm so glad to see you! Oh my love, if you wouldn't have made it at this precise moment, I--"

"You don't think I'd allow you to be eaten by a pack of wolves, do you?" he said with a smile. "Help me with them, will you?" He quickly pulled the arrows out of the wolves' sides and carried them both, one in each arm, to the tree stump. Charlotte and the pups followed. He laid them on the tree stump and the butterflies appeared. They hovered over (but did not touch), the wolves who were still alive, but weak. The pups watched as Henry lovingly caressed their parents and as Charlotte helped him nurse their wounds. The alpha wolf moaned, howled, and licked Henry's hand, and the beta wolf joined in on the howl. The princess, touched by the beauty and in awe of what she had just witnessed, swelled with tears. The butterflies encircled all of them now. And the forest was at peace again.

"Charlotte, I have given much thought to your wedding and have come to the conclusion that you *should* marry tomorrow."

"I--" was all she could manage to speak. Is this what she had put her hopes into? Is this what she almost died for? Didn't he love her? She felt foolish.

"I think you should marry *me* tomorrow," said Henry as he bent down on one knee, "I have never known a love like this, or a woman like you." He kissed her hand. "You have my heart," he said.

Her heart leaped. She laughed blissfully, "I will gladly be your wife, Henry!" He swept her up and kissed her lips, enveloping her in his arms. As he led her to his kingdom, the wolf pack – their now devoted guards – followed. And the butterflies danced in their rainbow pattern as they escorted the duke and his princess out of the forest.

A Very Happy Ending

by Kelly Ann Gettmann

Oh, my pooch Buster! How it was so sad to see you go... NOT! I have never been happier in my life to see such a pathetic animal put to sleep. I wanted to skip all the way home after I had left the veterinarian's office. All of the receptionists at the desk looked at me with bug eyes when I walked past with a grin plastered on my face. Even the veterinarian himself must have thought I was just a tad bit off. I walked in one morning and begged for him to take you out. I told him about all of the horrors I had to put up with while having you around. He just stared at me in disbelief. I guess not many people come in requesting to kill their pets too often, but with a pet like you, how could I not?

Every morning when you jumped into bed with me and licked my face I wanted to vomit. It wasn't cute. It was never cute, not even when we first got you as a puppy. Your breath smelled like a fat, old, sweaty, hairy man rolled in some three-week-old garbage that cats use as a bathroom. It was disgusting! Needless to say, you always managed to lick my nose, which lodged your heinous slobber into my nostrils. For the rest of the day, all I could smell was a fat, old, sweaty, hairy guy who rolled in some three-week-old garbage that cats use as a litter box. Gee, thanks a lot pal.

Oh! And don't let me forget about how much of a damn creep you are. Yes, I saw you sitting outside of the bathroom door. I caught you deeply gazing at my junk, you weirdo. You'd lick your lips and lock an intent stare on my manhood, looking it up and down as if it was one of your doggie treats. And when I used to live with Angela, forget about it! Every time we would go to jump in bed and fool around, there you were. Just sitting at the foot of the bed, staring, staring. I could not stand the staring! It wasn't a peep show! It wasn't porn that we had specially directed for you, you sick freak! I had never felt so violated by an animal in my life.

Not even Angela could stand you. That's why she left. She told me, "It's me or the dog." I didn't have the heart to get rid of you at the time. You were still so young and cute. Plus, I worked a lot: this way we could afford the new place. I never understood what the big deal was. You didn't seem so bad to me... But then she left me because of you, and once we were alone together, I understood why she made me choose. I wish I would have caught on sooner than I did. I mean, you were her dog. She was the one who bought you from the pet shop and

brought you home. How did I not see that warning sign? I mean, who spends fifteen hundred dollars on a dog, and then just gives it up just like that? She didn't even try to put up with you; she just straight-up left.

After Angela left me, I was so angry at the sight of you, I tried to get rid of you the best way I knew how. I got your leash ready and watched as your tail began to wag in excitement. I brought you out to the car and glared at you in frustration as you sniffed every inch of the lawn as we crossed it. I remember tugging at the leash trying to move you along; this way I could get the whole fiasco over with. We hopped in the car together for what I had hoped would be the last time. I took you to the park, opened the door for you, and you jumped out in glee. I watched after you as you began running through the grass, smelling trees, and chasing squirrels. You sickened me – even when you looked back with those puppy dog eyes waiting for me to follow you. I wasn't planning on getting out of the car. I wasn't planning on playing fetch. So I drove away from you and left you there. I prayed the whole drive back that you would not find your way home. But you did, and I was in pure misery as I opened the door the next morning to let your sorry mug inside. I had obviously trained you far too well.

From then on things just got progressively worse. Everything that you did irked me in the worst of ways. The way you scurried through the house on your four legs with those annoying nails of yours pitter-patting across the linoleum floors. The way your mangy, golden fur shuffled across your body when you ran through the backyard. The jingling sound of the identification tags that hung from your collar was absolutely maddening. The way you sloppily devoured that garbage of food I would dump into your bowl every day, and the slobbery film you would leave in your water bowl. All those things and so much more made you become so unbearably disgusting to me.

I hated the way you would sit at my feet while I rested on the couch after work. I watched, despising you, as you gnawed vigorously at those stupid rubber chew toys. And I hated you even worse when you got a hold of the squeaky toys. That squeak, squeak, squeak was the constant reminder of your existence. I could not stand petting you either. Your fur shed more than any other animal that I know, and it got everywhere. I could not go a day without vacuuming, and I went through lint rollers like a girl from the 80s went through hairspray. And when you jumped into bed with me every night I wanted to scream. I felt your beady, little eyes fixed on me as I slept. I would lie awake and listen to your beastly breathing until it slowed, and then when I was sure you were asleep, I would move to the couch for the night.

The only reason I would dress you in that absurd yellow raincoat was because I couldn't bear the smell of you when you got wet in the rain. And that monogrammed sweater was not put on you to keep you warm on those cold days, it was put on you because I knew that you could not stand having it on. I saw the way you would fuss and fight when I pulled it over your head, and if I had to be miserable, so did you. I knew you didn't like it when I had company either. So every chance I had, I would invite my friends and family over. It was a blissful occasion to spend hours without you, because you were hidden underneath my bed the entire time they were around. I wished each time that you would just stay there forever, and live hidden away in silence.

I'm sure now that having you not living at all was the best thing that could have happened. I can open my door when I get home and happily know that you will not be there to ambush me. I will not have to wake up to your stinky slobber, or fall asleep under your terrifying gaze. I will never again have to put up with you, or any of the horrible things you put me through. Perhaps now I can give Angela a call and notify her of the joyous news. Perhaps she'll take me back. Maybe she'll forgive me and decide to move back in. And maybe, just maybe, this time we'll get a cat.

Let Me Eat Cake
by Khier Casino

It was my first birthday, May 25, 1992. Sweet baby Jesus, look at my ginormous forehead. I give the impression of being like a descendant of a Klingon in the Star Trek universe. From my attire, you can tell I had an affinity for amphibians or my mom possessed a wry sense of humor and thought my face resembled a croaker. A few times a year, I donned these frog-printed overalls, many of which were given to me as presents by aunts and uncles who were in attendance that day.

My mom put out plenty of bread so the adults had something to replenish themselves with when they knocked back the booze they smuggled into a one-year-old's party. I'm kidding, of course, but it was odd how the egg salad looked a little lonely. My mom makes the best pancit, appropriately known as "birthday noodles" in Asian countries such as the Philippines. There was also an orange-colored punch bowl in the corner, which my grandfather probably spiked. He has long gone to heaven, but I will never forget him and the wit that he truly passed down to me. God love him.

Then, there was the cake. Blowing out my one measly birthday candle, I was ready to smash my face into the heavenly pastry. All I needed was a fork and my bib cleaned and I was all set to pounce. I threw a baby bitch fit when I could not get what I wanted: a freaking fork. I was hungry, bitter, and The Beatles telling me "today is your birthday" and that it was "their birthday too yeah," was not helping. I was determined to get at least a morsel, a molecule of the cake into my tummy if it was the last thing I did.

If you looked closely at the icing on the cake, you'd notice some decorating genius forgot to put the letter 'H' in my first name. The pronunciation of my name is similar to that of an Indian desert and French cocktail, so I've gotten used to other people misspelling it. "Oh, you found me a fork? How dare you?!" (Evil glare). I ended up downing a piece of that sweet, sweet cake with a silver spoon. Man, there was nothing on God's green Earth I loved more than cake. I still love it to this day.

Post-cake cramming, I was prepared to take a lengthy afternoon nap. I could not move after I gobbled all that high carbohydrate food, which was a good sign. I was born and raised in a healthy family, but honestly the word "healthy" should be in quotations, let's face it. In the

Casino household, we actually thought McDonalds was a well-balanced meal because it had potatoes, protein and a shake, which was dairy.

My childhood upbringing definitely had something to do with my food intake. I took comfort in food when my dad left my family early on, but let us save that story for another time. I mean, I am a skinny guy, but when I can eat three sticks of butter without throwing up, you know there is something wrong with my metabolism. I once ate twenty-four deep fried Oreos at a fair and felt completely fine. The feast I delighted in on my first birthday was the beginning of my unhealthy eating habits, which continue to this day. It is difficult, but I am trying to eat healthier. Baby steps, baby steps.

~ Visual Art ~



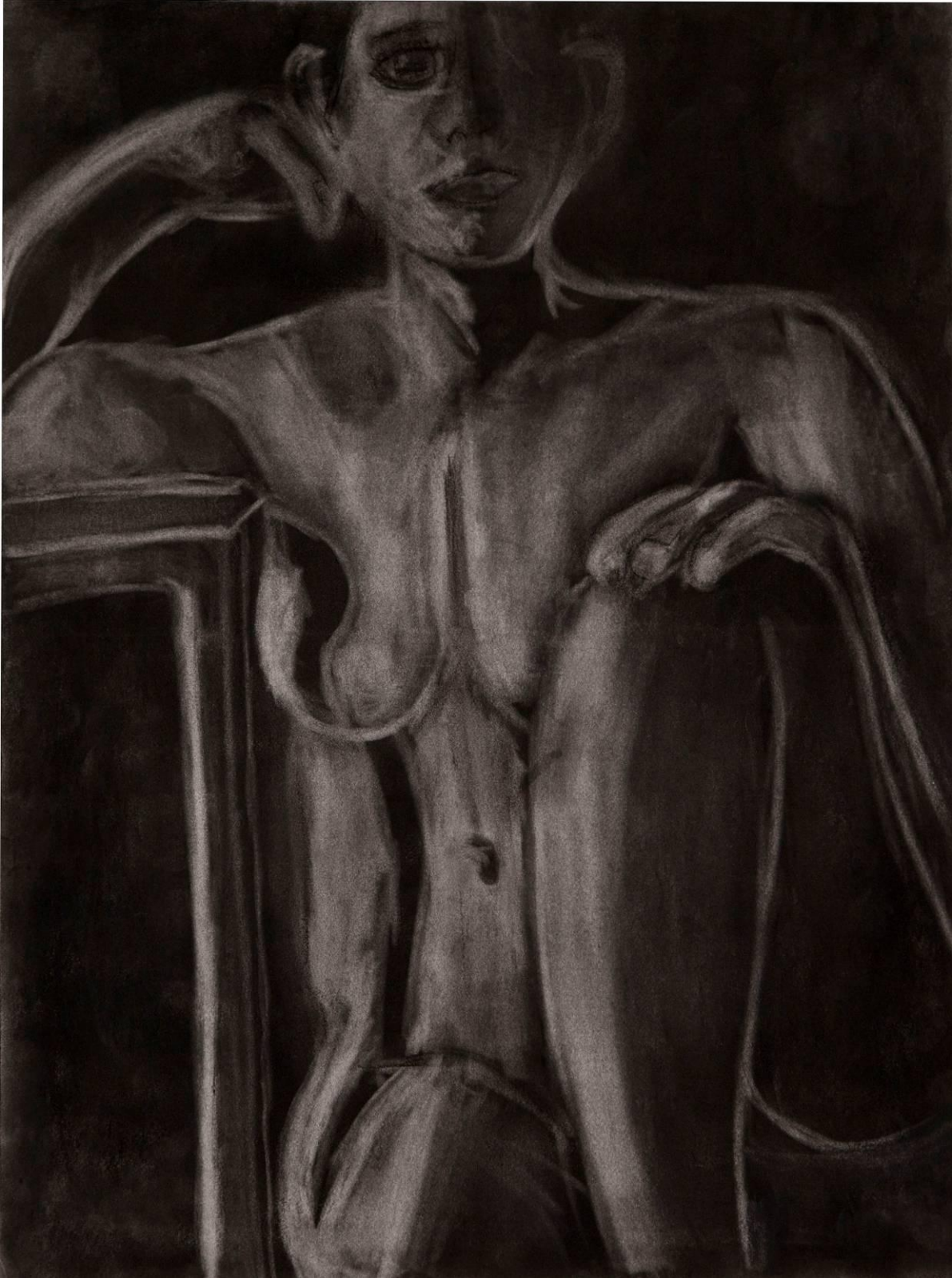
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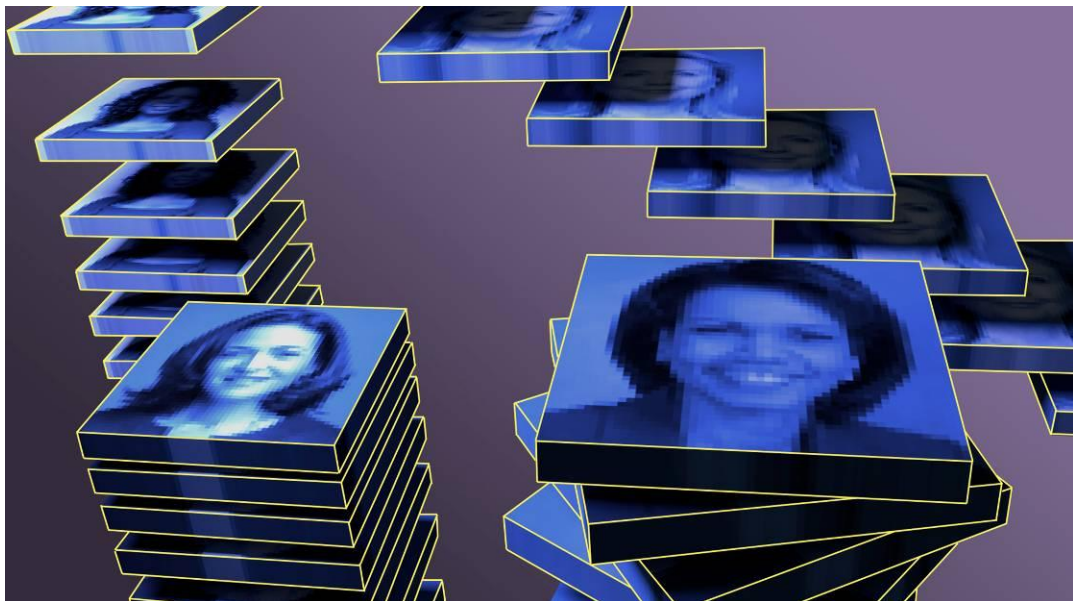


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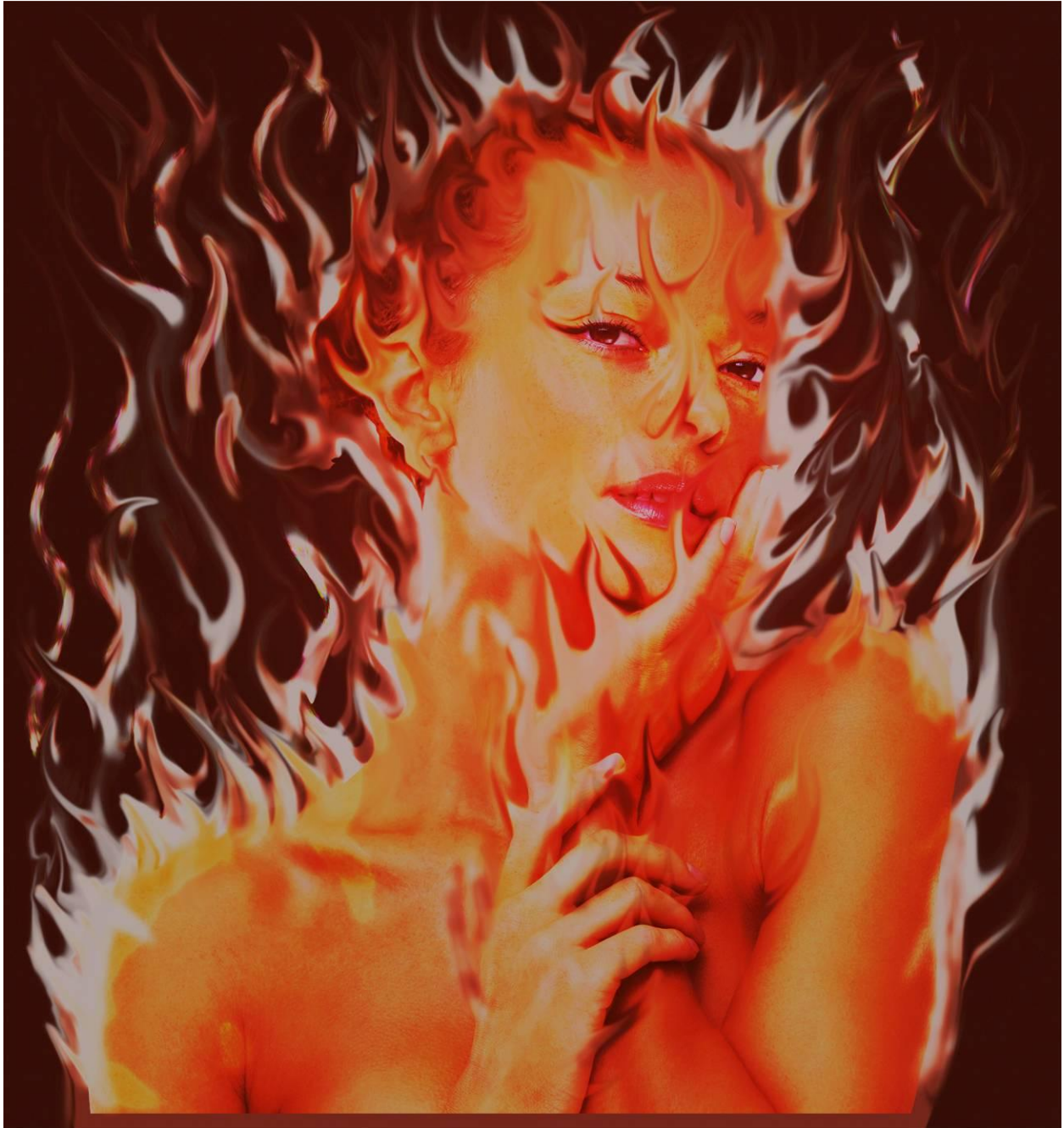


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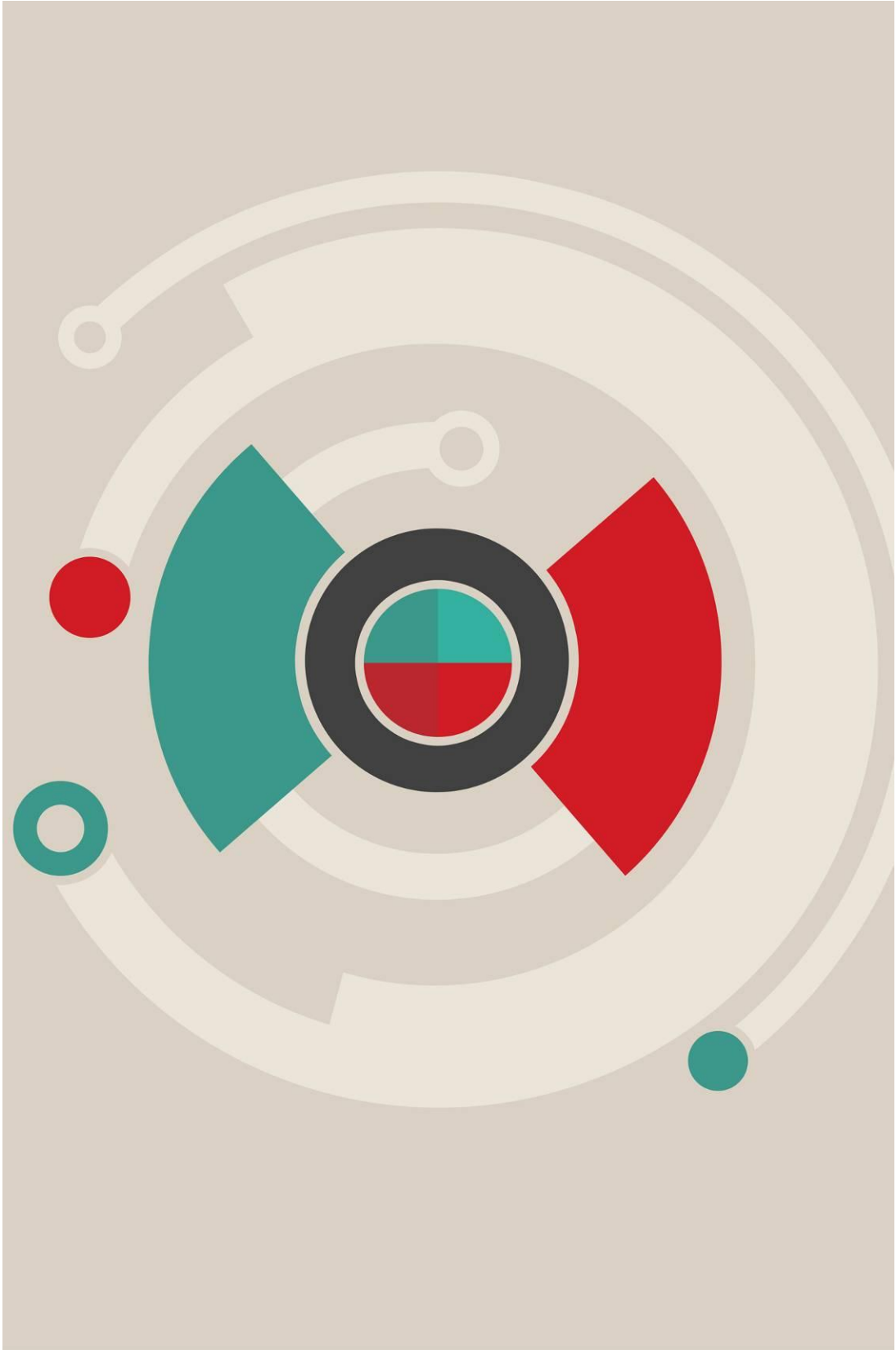
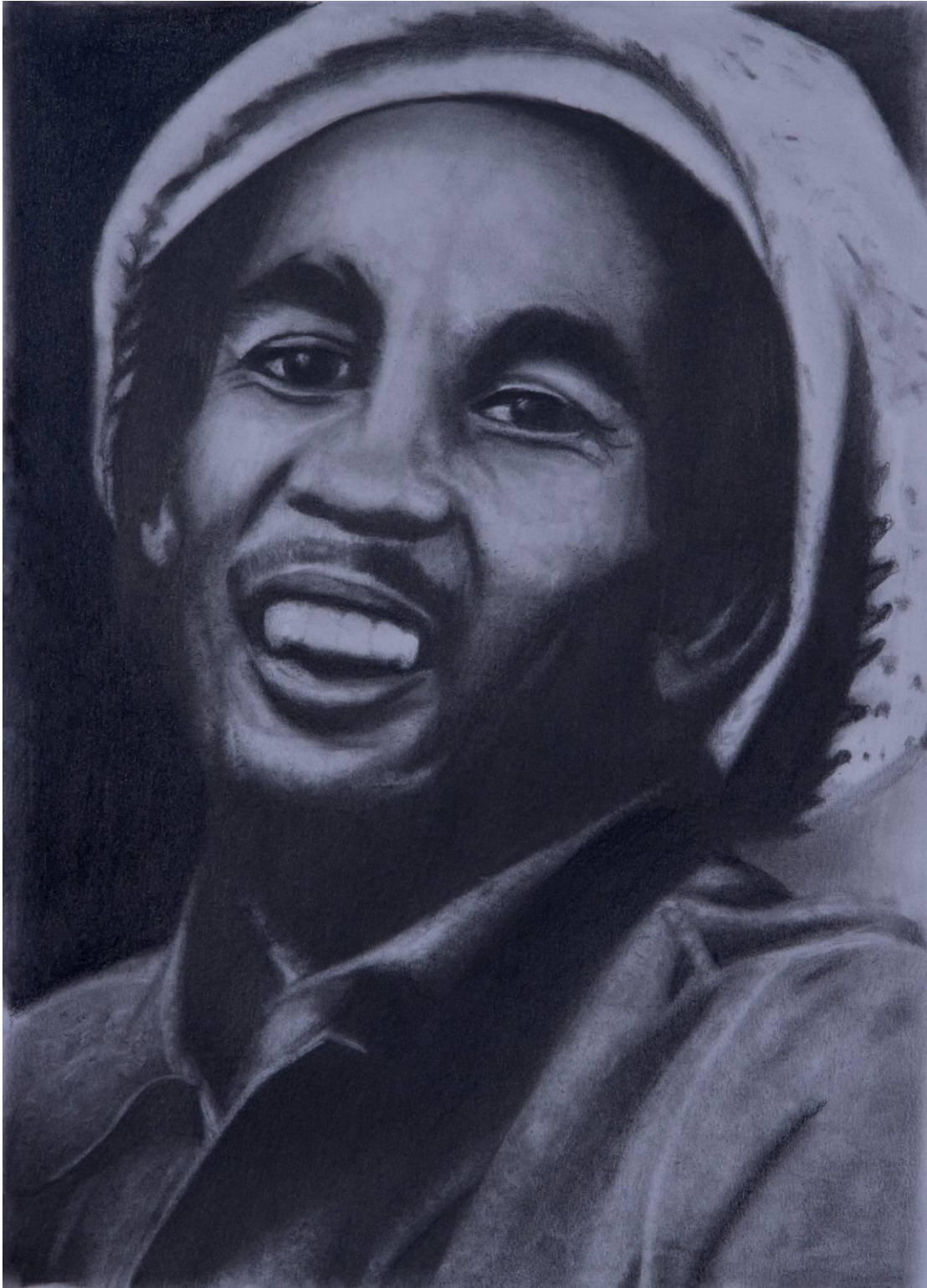


Image by Katrina Nipal



Marilyn Monroe by Kevin Avila



Bob Marley by Kevin Avila



Hand by Hager Kandil



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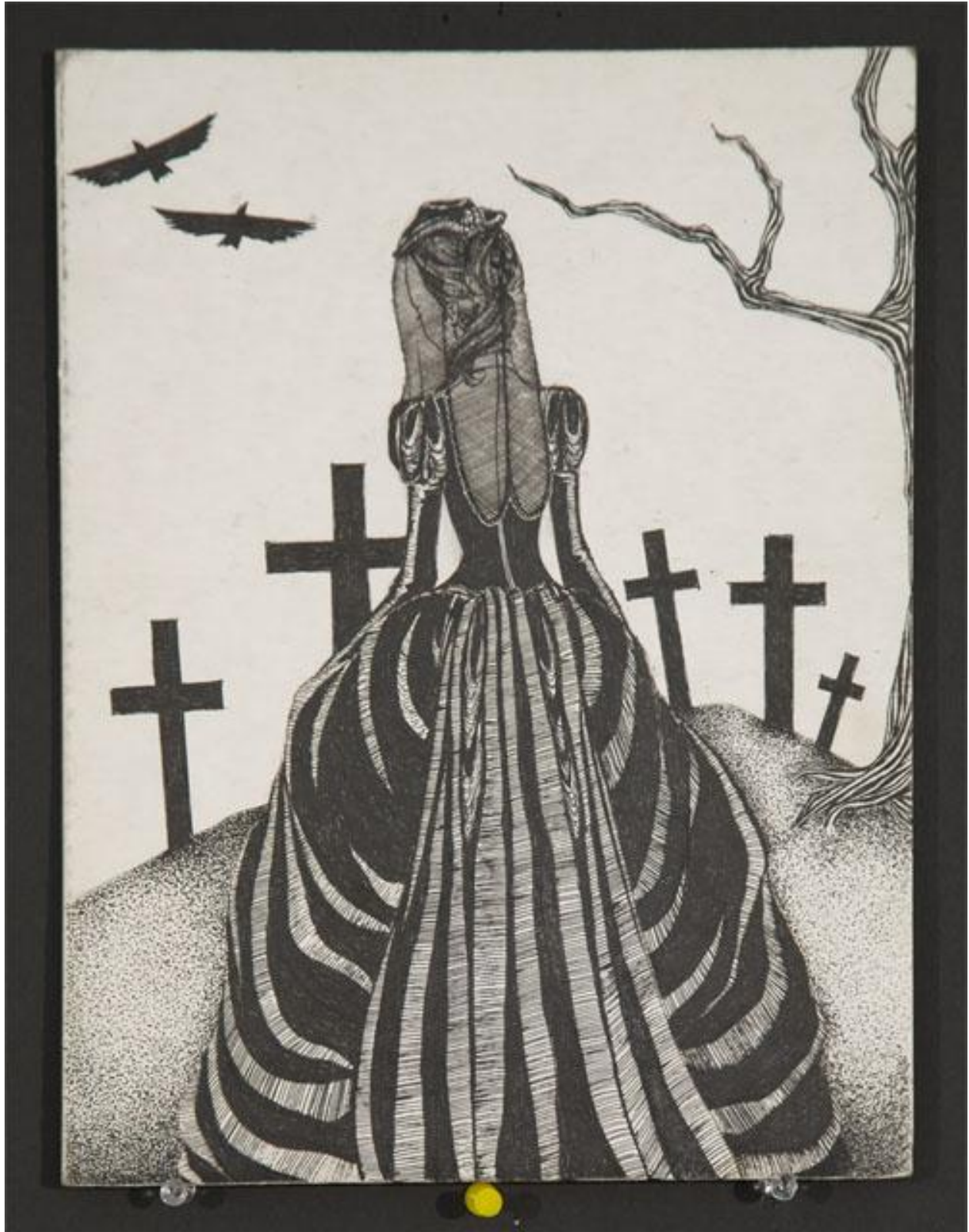


Image by Fernando Nava



Image by Fernando Nava



Image by Fernando Nava

~ Poetry ~

Freedom
by Hector M. Rivera

Freedom is
not

standing
on a
line

waiting to
kneel

to be
shot

Gone Astray
by Lamaris Arroyo

Consumed by fear
She cries out
Pursued by her reflection
She turns away
Afraid to face herself
She runs
Refusing to see the truth

She's falling deep
Quickly losing herself
Unfamiliar
Now a stranger
Of foreign identity
Lost in the realm of the unknown

She's gone astray
Drowning in her fear
Falling apart
Running from herself
Withering
Fading away

A Hyphenated America
by Vanessa Rodriguez

We are all American
Under the red and white stripes of our flag
We take pride in our land of the free
And we are ready to fight for our home of the brave

Our nation's foundations were brought from abroad
And formed a cohesion of diverse, assimilated pieces
We make tradition out of cultural universals
And also respect the differences of our heterogeneous society

We are a nation of immigrants
Of different times, generations and reasons
Some fled the autocratic monarchy of Great Britain
Others the devastating famine of Ireland, or the cruel dictatorship in Cuba
The violence and chaos in Mexico, or the poverty and hunger of Poland

The reasons for arrival, many
But on the apertures of our welcoming America
Were the hopes of those
Those who would seek the American dream
Those few brave enough to dare to dream

We are indeed all American.
Hyphenated-Americans!

Power to the Blade
by Zaida Mohammed

Barely able to remain open
For another hour
Quickly change into my flush pink
Cherry patterns bottoms.
Accompanied by a pink and white
Spaghetti-strapped top.
The days' events, combined and replayed
Within the blink of an eye
Before I know it,
I am in a different zone
I am in a different world
Within an ever so peaceful bliss
Until my eyes flutter open
Only to see your skillful troublous face
As you lay on your right side with your
Perfectly arched slender body,
With your head propped by your arms
Silently gazing up at me,
Patiently awaiting my undivided attention
Spiraling into a shock of instant
Confusion and surprise
At the sight of your deceitful image
Vibrant-obscene begins erupting like
A volcano toward you
Questioning your uninvited presence
Making no motion or attempt,
You digest my acknowledgement.
Immediately recalling your premeditated betrayal
Of my deeply devout trust

I grab hold of the thick steel three-inch blade
And begin slashing you.
While shouting at you to depart instantly from here.
For you are wanted no more.
As it is said,
Once a cheater always a cheater

Somehow

by Lori S. McElrone

I cannot use words to describe how I feel

My love, my life I just lost

I cannot be thankful in this ordeal

why the world--unfair, be-must?

I just wish my life was mine

and our love not forbidden.

that our souls were heavily intertwined

but why chance we cannot be given?

I wonder what will happen now

our talks, our laughter, the tears?

You said it must be sacrificed somehow

to ease all temporary pain and fears.

I want to spend my life with you

yes you, and after this life.

I know that both our loves are true

and we know, this, we cannot hide.

I love you and I know you love me too;

but you say, "goodbye for now,

when one day our hearts are one, not two,

God might work it out somehow."

Paint the Roses Red Again
by Melissa Ortiz

Alice, take me on an adventure.
I'll jump into the rabbit hole
And gladly watch the blue sky
grow distant.

I'd brave roots that scratch
bugs that sting
If only you would let me in.

I'd drink the potion Alice,
I'd grow big and wide and tall.
I'd eat the cupcake Alice,
and not mind being so small.

Have you spoken with the Caterpillar?
Has he asked you who you are?
Is he always in that garden,
or is he sometimes in the stars?

Save some magic mushroom,
you can fetch me while I dream.
We will run away from that Cheshire Cat;
pretend play,
Hide-and-seek.

We'll paint the roses red again,
Have a party where time stands still.
Play flamingo croquet
Just me and you,

until...

Here comes that grinning cat again,
as do the cards and queen.

To wake me from my time with you,
you're only in my dreams.

The White Rabbit must have been mistaken,
when his watch told him to hurry.

Perhaps he just misread it
because he came too early.

Then you stepped into that rabbit's house
although you're not his maid.

Those rocks and dirt they throw this time
will not turn into cakes.

You cannot outgrow this house
and so here's where you'll stay.