

BeanSwitch

Fall 2013

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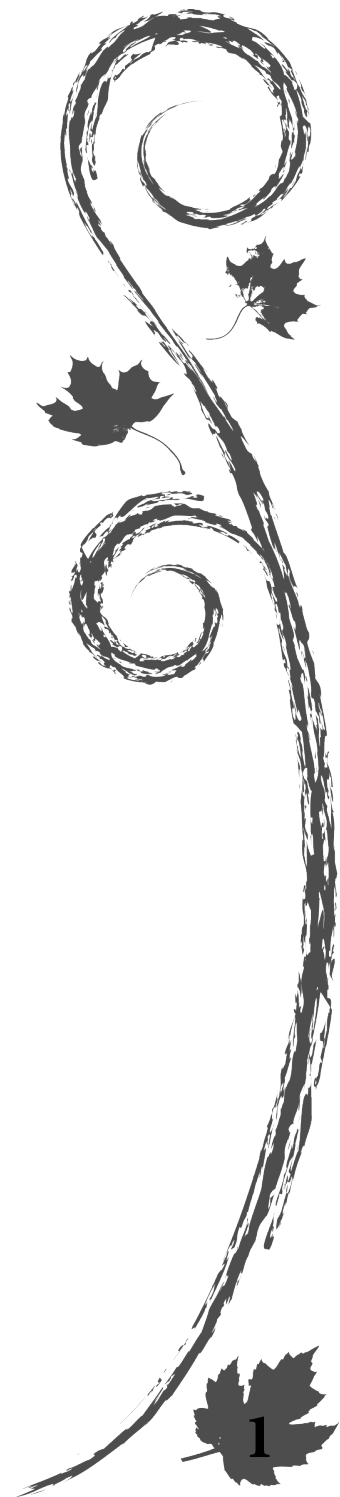


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I received a call to fight in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I wanted to know, “When will I get home?”

My civilian boss said that there would be a welcome home presentation when I got back.

I wondered, “When will I get home?”

The unit had a get together with family and friends before we left.

I asked myself, “When will I get home?”

I spent a year in theater hunting bombs and scared to death.

Every day I wondered, “When will I get home?”

When we got back to the States for demobilization

The General that met us said that we would have a ceremony to welcome us home.

I still wondered, “When will I get home?”

I have been back with my wife and family for fifteen months, now.

I have been back at my civilian job for fourteen months.

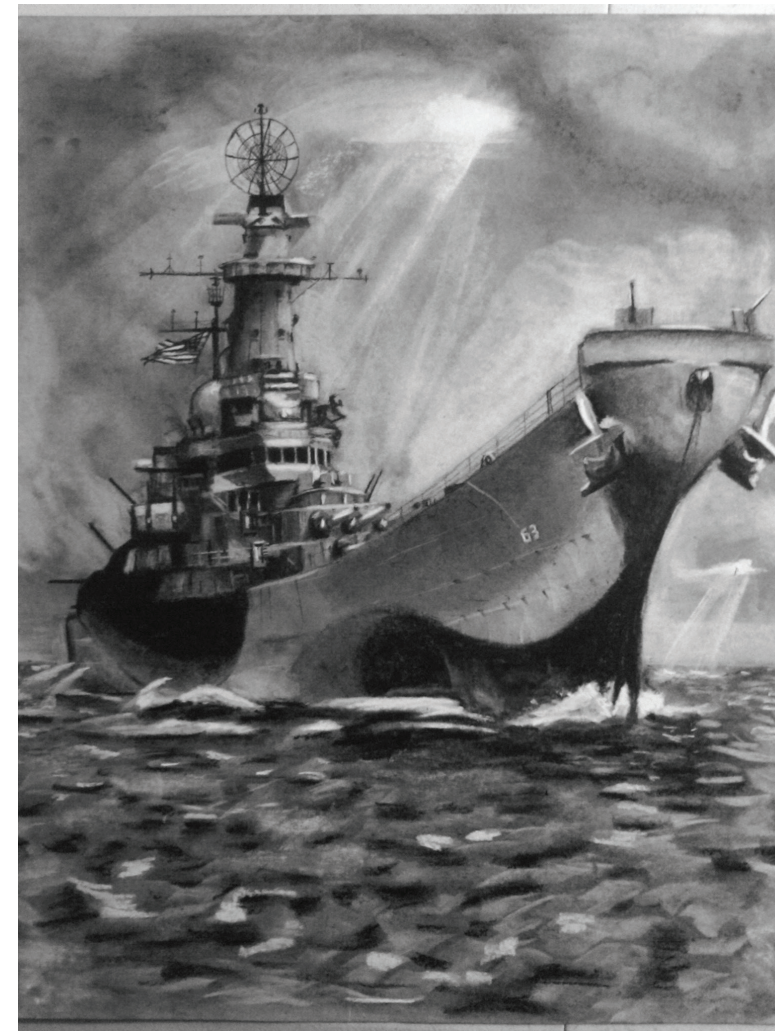
We have been back together drilling as a unit for a year, now.

But I still need to know

When will I get home?

USS MISSOURI SHAKEDOWN CRUISE, 1944

BY AARON BURKS



16” x 24”

Charcoal

The purpose of this piece was to show the battleship USS Missouri in her fighting prime during WWII and experiment with methods for depicting clouds and water with charcoal.





Jennifer Sampson balled up her stained apron as she walked out of Kate's Family Restaurant. The door made a subtle swishing sound that seemed overly loud in the quite evening air. Jennifer's shift had just ended, and she was about a ten-foot walk away from being on her way to her small, but homey, apartment. Her feet dragged in the dirt, causing the dusty gravel to coat her grimy shoes, but she could not summon the energy to lift her legs even slightly in her shuffle to her car.

She finally reached her old Pontiac that had been a junk pile in the 90s and now barely held together when it shuttered down the road. After twisting the key to the right twice and finishing with a sharp jiggle in the keyhole, the rusty door creaked open with a series of halting jerks.

Jennifer threw her apron in the back seat, and started to pump the gas pedal and twisted the key in the ignition in a complex combination that only worked a third of the time. As she did this, Jennifer considered what she would eat for dinner that night. Her fridge was bare aside from a half gallon of milk. She would have to dip into her tips tonight for food. That meant that she would be late on her rent...again. It also meant that the dusty jar labeled "Aloha Sunshine State" would again remain untouched.

Five years ago, Jennifer had started this job fresh out of high school. She had a laminated, color-coded plan that projected she would work as a waitress for four months before she would have enough money to make her way down to Florida. She dreamed of living in walking distance of the beach. She would go there every day and let the bright, warm sun dance across her skin as she listened to the whisper of the waves hitting the sand. It would be so different from this dreary town. Jennifer had soon realized that her plan had been overly optimistic. Her timetable was quickly pushed back to one year, then two. Now bills, groceries, gas, and the mountain of other expenses all but extinguished her dream. Still, she reminded herself that she was only twenty-four. She had plenty of time to make her way to the coast.

A small, black truck pulled up beside her while she was still struggling with her car starter. The man behind the wheel wore a nondescript green baseball cap with the bill pulled low over his eyes. Jennifer pressed the locks down on her door, but was not too alarmed. Kate's was a popular restaurant and the dinner rush would start in a bit. This man was probably trying to beat the crowd. She turned her key again, but her car only let out a gurgle before dying.

"Having trouble?"

Jennifer looked over to see the man looking at her. His cap cast a shadow on his features, but Jennifer thought she could see a smile on his face. She returned the smile and waved off his concern.

"It does this all the time. I should get it fixed, but I never seem to find the time or money."

He chuckled. "Maybe I could take a look under the hood for you?"

"No, there is no need really. She will start when she is good and ready."

He nodded, but continued to sit looking at her. Jennifer scratched at her nose and shifted in her seat. She tried to turn the key once again but was met with the same spluttering.

She tapped the wheel, wishing she could hit it, but knowing it would be no help. She could feel the itching of the man's eyes on her, but she kept her eyes resolutely on the orange lights that flashed on her dashboard.

"Well, to be honest, the reason I came here is because I am new to town. I seem to have lost my way. I don't suppose you can tell me how to get to the court house?"

Jennifer glanced up from her struggles with her keys. She wanted to tell the man to take a hike, but his looming presence and the relative emptiness of this section of the parking lot caused her to hold her tongue.

"Sure. You just need to take a right from here and keep going until you find Pikeview Drive and take another right. The courthouse is at the end of the street. You can't miss it."

The man rubbed at his neck. "Maybe you can show me on my map? I would really like to know exactly where I am going."

"Well, I suppose I could mark it on your map." Jennifer chewed her lip. Despite her agreement, she could not make herself let go of her keys.

The driver seemed to accept her help because he suddenly leaned out of his car window, holding out the map with one hand and the other hand reaching as if to open the door to Jennifer's own car. The movement allowed the light to shine on his features. He was handsome, if average, with a square chin and high cheekbones. He had deep set, haunting eyes and a broad nose. A thick, sinister scar ran from his temple down the curve of his neck. She had a sudden image of a terrible, clawed predator. She clutched her keys too tightly in her hand and twisted hard.

BANG!

The car suddenly sprang to life with a thunderous roar. Jennifer jumped, and the man retreated back inside his car. A few people who had been sitting outside the restaurant smoking turned their heads towards the noise. A few of the older men even started to rise from their place on the bench. The man in front of her tipped his hat.

“I didn’t mean to scare you miss. I think I can find my way from here. Much obliged for your help,” he said, and with a smile he started his car. Within a few seconds, he was turning right on the main road and disappearing in the evening rush.

Jennifer sat still in her car. Waving away the men advancing from the restaurant, she shifted her car out of park and started out of the parking lot. She hesitated briefly at the turn-off before heading left. It will take her twice as long to get to the market, but some of the tension left her shoulders as her car putted along the road.

Jennifer tried not to think much about the brief exchange. She had long ago become accustomed to attention of all sorts of guys from her years as a waitress, and it was unfair to judge the man in the green cap based on a sinister appearance. She had always believed in seeing the best in people, and the man had been polite as he asked for direction. She focused on getting food and getting to her house.

By the time she got to her hovel of an apartment, Jennifer had decided that she had overreacted to the situation. She felt guilty for being rude to a man who had been nothing but polite to her. She really hoped he had managed to find his way around the town. It was not surprising that he had lost his way. The town was so full of twisting and intersecting roads it took a lifetime to become familiar with them. Maybe she would see him around tomorrow during her shift and be able to apologize.

She turned on the small television, tuning into the local station as she started to fill the pot so she could boil the noodles for her spaghetti. A few minutes of the familiar line up of nightly shows had her smiling as she deftly chopped up tomatoes for a salad.

“We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. News Channel 7 has just received news that there has been a break in the case of Snow Creek Killer. The Snow Creek Killer has already murdered four women and is considered extremely dangerous. A witness has come forward and provided the police with a sketch of the suspect. Police urge the public to call immediately if they recognize this man or have any information relating to the case.”

Jennifer glanced at the television. The knife fell from her hand. On the screen was an artist rendition of a man in his thirties. The nondescript sketch looked like any of a number of men. The only distinguishing feature was the thick scar cut across his face curving down his face to his neck.

Jennifer’s shaking hands picked up the phone, her eyes focused on the eyes that seemed to stare at her through the screen, penetrating even in the sketch. As she pressed 9-1-1 firmly, she wondered how much a bus ticket to Pensacola would cost.

CASTLE

BY KARA KIDWELL



Photography

Kidwelly Castle is a Norman castle established around 1115 A.D., made of earth and timber. It was rebuilt in stone in the 13th Century and still stands today in Kidwelly, Wales.



AS THE DOGWOOD BLOOMS

BY BETH CROCKER



16" x 24"
Charcoal

My intention for the piece was to represent my past, present, and future. All the key elements of faith, art, and love of nature are present to show what have been constants in my life and will continue to be.

She looked past the man who was trying desperately to get her attention. It was no matter to her, who he was, or what he wanted. Her goal was simply to get home after her long, tiring day.

It seemed all days were long; dragging on as if she pulled behind her every step. *Anvils of my previous life.* She laughed outwardly, drawing the attention of those close by. Quickly averting her gaze toward the floor, she went back to her thoughts, still smiling. *Anvils.* She remembered anvils always falling on the cartoon characters' heads of her youth, funny she should see her past as anvils, wearying her every step through the slowly passing seconds of her painful days.

The fact that she had escaped death, literally, still left her shaken. The fact that she made her escape to become a whole new person in a whole new place also probably had a lot of weight behind it. *Weight.* Suppressing another chuckle, she entered the subway train from the platform, becoming just another nameless face in this smelly, overheated crowd of strangers. She must be tired for such silly things to be making her laugh so easily. *Laughter has become as much a stranger as the people around me.*

It continued to surprise her how she had become such a skittish person, jumping at the smallest sound, hiding among crowds in a place she hated, just so that she could feel the sense of anonymity she required. In her thoughts, she lamented the person she had once been, an outgoing person who was often told, *I never knew a stranger.* Now being a stranger herself everywhere she went was what gave her a sense of peace.

As she got lost in these thoughts, images of her husband's rage flashed before her. Squeezing her eyes tightly, senses on full alert, she realized this onslaught was because she had heard her name being called, not the name she now assumed, but the name she grew up with, married with, and abandoned in an effort to save her own life.

Looking around frantically, she noticed the man from the platform and immediately made her way toward the door of the car. The train, dense with rush-hour commuters, filled with the putrid smell of filth and sweat, she pushed against in her effort to reach the door. Before reaching it, the train had begun its rapid decrease in speed and everyone, it seemed, was now on their feet making the crowd more difficult to penetrate. Determined, she pushed through the last of them just as the doors came hissing open.

HE CALLED HER BY
HER REAL NAME
BY JENNIFER PARRISH



Once on the platform she took quick, determined steps toward the stairway alighting to the street. Her heart pounding, images flying through her head of Paul's eyes bulging, spittle flying from his screaming lips, she saw his set jaw, his clenched fist ...

Racing up the stairs, barely reaching the cement of the sidewalk, she bared down, swallowing hard, pushing the memories deep into the pit of her stomach. As she did, she chanced a glance behind her, and seeing a man among the throngs of exiting passengers, began to run in earnest.

"Damn it," she said approaching the corner to find that the crosswalks in either direction were both impassible. Thinking she might just chance it, after all, a jay-walking ticket would be welcome if it meant she would be standing in the safe vicinity of a cop, she went to take a step off of the sidewalk heading northbound when someone reached out and grabbed her jacket by the shoulder and suggested, "If you'd like to live you might want to wait for the sign." The man had almost gotten a face full of fist, spit, and nails if not for the fact that she realized she was being pulled out from in front of one of these God forsaken speeding taxis, and only just in the nick of time. Saying a demure "Thank you," she did a quick search of the corner and did not catch a glimpse of the man who knew the name of her past and, in knowing it, could potentially endanger the safety of her future.

Anxious, heart pounding, she stood, willing the little person in the box in red to change to the white walking image which would allow her to make her way toward safety. A moment later she was stepping off into the throngs of crossing traffic, blaring horns, and freedom.

After a few minutes and as many blocks, Sam breathed deeply and slowed her pace. It was beginning to drizzle. She had really had enough physically and emotionally and she needed to rest and warm up. Spotting a small coffee shop ahead on the left, she ducked inside to the aroma of rich java brewing among the thick smell of baked goods containing cinnamon and the inviting smell of chocolate.

Seats and tables were available along the window and though Sam hated to be so exposed, especially after what just happened, she felt fairly sure she was safe for the moment and longed to watch the approaching storm. As she sat, she peeled the black sweater from her damp skin. It was light so as to not over-heat her in the summer temperatures, but kept the chill of the air-conditioning at work from making her cold all day. As she put her purse on her lap, she looked at its ratty appearance. Once, what seemed like so very long ago, she had owned nice things. Nice clothes, which hung perfectly on her slim, toned figure,

now draped in an ugly, grease stain covered frock of a server at a downtown diner. She had shoes, that were not only stylish, but comfortable that lined the back of her closet in rows, where now, she wore holes in her cheap discount store sneakers, the bottoms peeling away so that she had to invest in a bottle of crazy glue to keep them from flap, flap, flapping as she bustled back and forth between kitchen and customers. Her boss, an angry lady, *I swear she's been pissed off since birth*, had given her hell about her shoes. They were the only pair she currently had and with what tips she was making, she was barely affording the roof over her head. She and ate at work, if she ate at all.

Settling in a bit, she smiled. *It's nice having a cup of real coffee, instead of that crud they call coffee at the diner.* Storms had always been a peaceful retreat for her. She wished she could see it in its full glory, but with all of the buildings in the way, she had to settle for looking up and watching the dark forms in the gap overhead. Lightning was tearing across this gap from time to time and though she could hear the rumbling sound of the thunder only faintly, she dared close her eyes for a moment to try to feel the electric in the air, the vibration of her spirit as the thunder rolled through. It may have truly been the delivery truck blasting by on the street, but with her eyes closed, she could propel herself back to a moment when the streets were empty and peaceful, the view was of trees and open sky, and the rumble she felt in her body was from the thunder.

The day's events slipping away from her, she began to relax, when right next to her, in a soft, male voice, she once again heard her name. Blood like ice, she froze. Afraid to open her eyes, she considered the layout of the shop she had entered. She wondered if any of these people would help her if she called out for it. She wondered... who the hell had found her.

It wasn't a voice she recognized, so willing herself to open her eyes as he repeated her name once more, she braced herself for anything. It was a face that had a peculiar familiarness about it, but she could not place it. The man smiled, a look almost of pure pleasure mixed with relief as he asked if he could sit with her. She only nodded her head in ascent because her voice had left her, it simply could not push beyond the knot which had affixed itself in her throat.

"You don't recognize me, do you?" the man said.

Again, shaking her head in reply, as she fought for the return of her voice should she need to use it to call out for help, she searched her memory.

"I'm Michael. Michael Simmons? We went to middle school together, I left in our freshman year of high school."

Scrutinizing him a little more carefully, she could see it. His dark hair, light eyes, and the well-formed frame, not too thin, not too muscular. It had been a long time. She managed a smile that reached her eyes and he took a deep sighing breath as if relieved she finally recognized him.

"Michael," she said.

"Long time, no see, huh?" he returned.

"You can say that again." She nearly laughed as she recalled one of the last times the two of them had spent any real time together. It had been in eighth grade, and she had had a big crush on Michael. He apparently had had one on her as well. They would talk, flirt, and goof around before their history class together. One day he chased her, nothing scary, only good wholesome fun, until, in heels, as she ran from him down the stairs, she slipped and twisted her ankle, nearly falling to the landing. If it had not been for Michael having reached her and his strong arms having the ability to practically pluck her from the air, she would have hit the landing hard. They had laughed, all out of breath as he half carried her back to class where they had to explain to Mrs. Anderson that she needed to go to the nurse because she had slipped on the stairs and hurt herself. They left out the part about him chasing her. They didn't believe anyone would have understood. He offered to assist her to the nurse's office.

After being picked up by her grandmother and taken to the doctor for x-rays, she was diagnosed with a sprained ankle. Trying to favor it over the next day or so, unfortunately, sprained the other ankle. Michael had felt so guilty. Smiling with mischief, she announced, "My feet still hurt."

The tension that had seemed to be lingering on their rather formal "re-introduction" disappeared immediately as he laughed and said, "I'll rub your feet for you if you want. I still feel terrible about that. I was so worried your ankle was broken when you didn't come to school the next day."

"Nah, my mom just wanted me to follow the doctor's orders about staying off of it for a day or two."

"I was glad to see you back, like I'm glad to see you now. What brings you to the city?"

Becoming immediately tense, the light in her eyes fell away. He could obviously tell that she had become uncomfortable and began talking about his reason for being there. She

felt relief for the moment because she would not have to try to explain. She could not lie to him. He wasn't the kind of person you lie to. He was sweet and accepting. He did not judge and he had always been supportive. A sense of ease re-settling over her, she listened to his adventures of being a published author and felt a sense of growing pride that this boy, this man, who had once been a beacon in her life, had found a way to be a beacon in countless thousands. With his book tour, eventually, millions! He was a great guy, he so deserved it.

As the time wore on, her exhaustion began to settle back on her slumping shoulders and sagging eye lids. He apologized for keeping her so long. Sam stretched her shapely legs and rolled her neck around a couple of times as she told him it had just been a long day at work, but she was glad to have had the chance to catch up with him.

"But I haven't really gotten to catch up with you," he said as he put his hand out for hers in an effort to help her rise. "Will you meet me here again tomorrow? Around the same time?"

A little apprehensive, she said that she would, careful not to promise just in case she changed her mind. She never broke promises and she certainly wouldn't want to start with Michael, but she wouldn't even know where to begin with her life's events, how she ended up in this God forsaken city instead of the rural mountains of New York she always loved. How could she possibly tell him about the disgusting things of her past that had weakened her, made her into a shell of the girl he once knew? How could she let him see what a fool she had been, what a coward she had become?

No, best not to promise, because this is probably good-bye.

SMALL TOWN SECRETS

BY MELANIE O'NEIL



Photography

The day was beginning to wind down as the sun painted the blades of grass in red and gold. Beau sat in his spot on the top porch step and watched as small grasshoppers would wink in the sunlight with each leap and disappear back into the jungle of their unkempt yard with his arms crossed and resting on scrapped knees. His chin came down and propped on his arms. He knuckled the bruise spreading across his cheek and tried to hold back the tears. It didn't hurt, not really. But the slight pain brought him back to the moment in the school gym where Ryan, the tallest boy in all of Ms. Adams' class, had shoved him down. Beau's cheeks grew red and he could feel the pain of his face catching the floor again; he could hear the laughing of his friends and classmates.

The creaking of the screen door opening and slamming shut made him jump. Beau quickly wiped his face on the sleeve of his oversized sweater and looked the other way as his mom took a seat beside him on the porch step. The rubber boots she always wore while going to pick blackberries in the forest at the edge of their yard squeaked as she leaned over and nudged him.

"Hey, little man. How are you feeling?" she said.

Beau shook his head and turned his face further away from her. He sniffed, tears still escaping from his eyes. His cheeks burned more deeply. He didn't want her there looking at him, he only wanted to curl up until he and the weight in his chest disappeared.

"Beau," she said, taking her hand and smoothing back the wisps of blonde hair that refused to stay down against his head, "you want to talk about what happened today?"

"I got in a fight is all. It won't happen again, I promise," he said.

"All of ten years old and you think you can take on the world," she said.

Beau looked at her then and saw half of a smile. The red eased from his cheeks but he still felt the weight needling at his heart. The smile disappeared after a moment and her arm went around him, pulling him close to her.

"Ms. Adams told me what you said before that boy pushed you down, Beau," she said.

"I swear, I didn't mean it, Momma. I promise I didn't," he said, pleading with her to understand.

"I know you didn't, Honey, but that doesn't mean what you said to him didn't hurt," she said.

CHILDHOOD MEMORY
BY RACHEL HURST



“But everyone knows that his mom left. It’s no big secret,” Beau argued back quietly.

“That’s not something you talk about, Beau, and it isn’t Ryan’s fault for her leaving,” she said, lifting his chin up to meet her eyes, “Just like it isn’t your fault for Dad leaving us either, Honey. It’s not anyone’s fault.”

He felt the weight twist again and used the end of his sleeve to wipe his eyes.

“It doesn’t feel good to hurt others, does it?” she said.

Beau shook his head. She pulled him close in a tight hug and said after planting a kiss on the top of his head, “If you’re going to be anything in this world, Beau, you’ve got to be kind.”

Aspiring hopes and dreams that soon will be fulfilled

Bended down on one knee praying to God for a miracle to happen shortly

Cutting through barriers, to see a promise land over Jordan

Daily devotion to keep me rooted in the word

Eternal life is a goal I plan to achieve

Faith is the substance needed, it always keeps me going

Grace sustains me in my every day journey

Harmony keeps me synced with his holy word

Imagine a sweet place, and only calm words

Joyful noises being sung unto his name

Kindness being spread

Love being shared

Money is not a thought in this place

No one is worried about what is left on earth

Once into the gates,

Praise is all that is heard

Quick to hear, and slow to anger

Realizing I’m grateful to make it in

Songs pour out of my heart

Triumphs I’ve overcome with his

Unconditional protection and grace

Valuing my life

With his arms he opened wide

X-rayed my soul and saw it was pure

Years of distress but now I’m here

Zealously serving

A-Z POEM
BY KACHE' BROOKS





This was just too much! For years, food had been disappearing, towels wet and hung oddly, appearing used, not at all the way she had left them, blankets moved in the living room, pillows shifted. Something was wrong and Camille wanted to move. She had spoken to the landlord, Silas, many times, asking him to change the locks on her apartment. He had blown her off, acting like she was some sort of nutcase.

She was sure if she had been a man, or at least had one living with her to back her up, Silas would have taken her seriously. As a woman, living alone, Camille's landlord was condescending when he talked to her.

"This here's why woman folk shoun't live alone. Yer emagination gits the better of ye. Why don' ye go git yerself a nice husbun'?"

Not having been raised in this area, Camille, at first, was enraged by Silas' assumptions that what was going on in her apartment when she was either not there or sleeping was in her head. Now, almost two years later, she had made enough friends and talked to enough people to understand that Silas was just a lost cause of "old school" thinking and had resigned to change the locks herself. That, or move. Such a suggestion, to "git herself a husbun'" made her laugh. What would that do exactly? No one seemed to be able to explain why all of these things were happening, and they only happened when she wasn't there or not conscious to see what was going on! A husband would be working and sleeping too, so how in the hell could that possibly make a difference?

She now knew the answer to that of course. After spending so long in this area and getting to know what "old school" mentality was all about, she realized that Silas thought she was imagining things. He believed that if she had a man in the house, she wouldn't be afraid.

"Well, I'll show him!" Indignantly, she set up two small nanny cams she had purchased online. She hadn't been the type to believe in ghosts but she couldn't come up with a better answer for her conundrum either. If someone really was coming in and out of her apartment, wouldn't Silas see that person? He was always piddling around outside and, being such a gossip, he didn't miss a beat. She knew that first hand because of the time he came to her in the morning and asked her why she hadn't put her garbage in the can the night before, reminding her:

"Ye know ifin ye don' git yer trash in da bin, we'll be havin' all sorts a critters."

She had thanked him for the reminder and went back inside for her small bag of refuse. It had irritated her more than she felt grateful but at least she understood what her neighbors meant when they said: "Silas don't miss a thing!"

Well, Silas had better mind himself. She had done a lot of thinking about this situation she was in and thought there were painfully few explanations. If Silas wasn't seeing anyone come in and out of her apartment when he "didn't miss a thing," then there were, in her mind, only two other explanations. Either she had genuine ghosts, which she doubted, or it was Silas himself that was invading her space. Though she couldn't imagine this man doing such a thing, because as condescending as he was, he was still a gentlemanly sort, nothing creepy. She really didn't believe in ghosts though, so what else was she supposed to think? She had finally convinced Silas to change the locks once, and when it continued, she had changed them again herself. She had to give him a copy of the key according to the lease agreement, so, what other possibility was there that made sense?

After setting up the cameras and making sure they were both recording she left for work. She felt very satisfied that she would have proof of what was going on in her apartment in her absence and felt a combination of elation of finally having that proof and a sickly dread over confronting Silas and maybe even calling the cops. He was a nice man and would never really hurt anything. After a few hours at work considering all of this made her feel very ill at ease. She could not concentrate on her duties and so her nerves getting the best of her, she decided to leave work early and head home.

Her neighbors had a visitor, and as is often the case, they were parked in her spot in front of her apartment. Arriving home far earlier than she normally would, she didn't begrudge them the spot. She knew they would be out of her way by five when she usually got home, so she parked across the way in a visitor's spot for the other complex.

As she began to put the key in the lock, the hair on her neck prickled. Slowly pushing it in all the way and turning it as quietly as possible, she heard the quiet snick of the lock like it was thunder! Her heart was hammering in her chest and she thought for just a quick second that maybe old Silas was right after all. Maybe it was all in her head.

As she pushed the door open, her eyes found the remote cast clumsily on the floor and the blankets strewn across the couch. Hearing a noise, she bounded up the stairs to catch Silas red handed when, as she got to the landing, it suddenly occurred to her that she had seen him working in his garden. She reached in her bag for her gun and, turning toward her spare room, saw a pair of legs disappearing into the attic.

"STOP! I have a gun and I'm not afraid to use it!"

The feet, nearly up the final steps of the folding ladder ceased immediately.

“Back down, nice and slow,” she commanded.

As the man descended into the room she took a good look at him. He was rather scrawny, but looked as though he had, at one time not long ago, been a handsome specimen.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?”

The man explained that he had been the last tenant in her apartment. He had lost his job and though he tried really hard to find another, he had not been able to find one in time to not be evicted. He sounded well educated and was soft-spoken.

She looked at him curiously and asked the most obvious question.

“Are you telling me that you *live* in my attic?”

“Actually, the attics connect in this complex. I have tried not to be too much of a burden on anyone, but I have to eat!” He seemed on the verge of tears as he pleaded for her understanding. “I only meant to be here for a couple of days until this other job came through and then I was going to put the down payment on another apartment, unless Silas would let me rent this one again. I didn’t realize that there would be another tenant so quickly. Then the job fell through and I just didn’t know what to do, you had moved in, and I had nowhere else to go.”

Camille considered her situation. Knowing this man had been here for two years and never harmed her, she suggested something crazy.

“Why don’t you move your stuff from the attic into the spare room today. You can stay here and try to put your life back together again.”

“I know I have put you out so much already without your knowledge, I couldn’t expect such a kindness from you. My deepest hope is that you will let me leave with as much as I can carry and not call the police.”

“Don’t be silly. You’ve been here all along anyway. If you were going to hurt me, I suppose you would have by now.”

“No! I would never! But...”

“Okay then, let’s sit down over coffee and we’ll talk some more. Maybe even go through the paper’s Want Ads.

Casually, as if this were an everyday situation, they made their way to the kitchen.

“How about I make the coffee? I know where you keep everything!”

MY APOCALYPSE

BY BETH CROCKER



18” x 24”

Charcoal

My intention for this piece was to portray my own personal nightmare or apocalypse - a world without companionship and beauty.

Let me hold your hand.
So that I may tell of peace.
Locked down by the feeling.
I crave a release.
My heart is clear.
ever pure.
I feel real love.
Through melancholy I crave no cure.
A living Picasso painting.
A work of art is she.
At first I begged of love.
Now I plea.
She, a metaphor of living poetry.
O what love could be.
The glare in her eyes.
Her love surreal.
All it heals.
When her love over spills.

“Morning, Mom,” Lydia said as she walked into the kitchen a few minutes later.

“Morning, Dear, I fixed pancakes for breakfast,” Mrs. Wilson said, smiling at her daughter. “They’re on the table.”

Caroline Wilson was a slim, attractive lady in her early 40s. She had dark hair, green eyes, and a contagious smile. She was always looking for a way to make the day better, and she usually succeeded.

Lydia smiled back and sat down at their oak table.

“OMG! You put chocolate chips in them!” Lydia said happily as she put a stack of pancakes on her plate.

Mrs. Wilson began to fix Lydia’s lunch. “I thought it might make the day a little brighter.”

An hour and a half later Lydia walked out of her history class. Mr. Darrel, their teacher, had given them a pop quiz over what they had learned the past four weeks. Confident, Lydia finished the quiz first and turned it in. At the end of class Mr. Darrel had given the quizzes back to them. Lydia smiled as she looked at the grade; it was an A.

“Looky looky, if it isn’t the teacher’s favorite student,” someone said, as Lydia walked down the hall to the next class.

“Oh great, my least favorite person,” Lydia thought, as she turned to face the voice.

The voice belonged to Melissa Jones. Melissa had brown hair, brown eyes, and was wearing the latest fashion – a miniskirt, halter-top, and plenty of makeup. This was a big contrast to Lydia’s blond hair, blue eyes, and simple style of jeans, a nice shirt, and no makeup. Melissa was leaning on the arm of the cutest guy in school and was surrounded by several girls. Lydia tried to avoid her as much as possible.

“Cat got your tongue again today?” Melissa smirked.

Lydia opened her mouth to respond, decided not to, and walked away.

“I thought so,” Melissa called in triumph. The girls around her began to giggle.

When Lydia got home that evening, she dropped her bag in the hall and followed the smell of spaghetti to the kitchen.



“How’d it go today?” Mrs. Wilson asked, looking up from the salad she was making.

Lydia went to the sink to wash her hands. “Same as usual.”

Mrs. Wilson stopped and gave Lydia a hug. “It’ll get better, Lydia.”

“I hope so...”

“It will. Now set the table please before I die of hunger,” Mrs. Wilson winked at Lydia.

That night Lydia sat curled up in her favorite chair in her room talking to her dad on the phone. He called her every Friday night to see how she was doing.

“Your mother’s right. Things will get better. Just you wait and see,” Mr. Wilson said after Lydia had told him everything that had happened that week. “Remember to do one thing for me though: keep standing tall and proud. You’re my daughter and you can do anything.”

Lydia smiled, “Thanks, Daddy, I’ll remember.”

That weekend Lydia convinced her mom to get a dog. The lack of friends had finally gotten to Lydia and she thought a dog might be just the thing to cheer her up.

On Sunday, Mrs. Wilson took Lydia to the animal shelter to look at the dogs. Lydia took quite a while deciding which one she wanted.

Lydia finally stopped in front of a cage that held a one-year-old German shepherd named Jasmine. The poor thing had been abused and left to starve.

“This one,” Lydia said decidedly.

On the way home from the animal shelter Mrs. Wilson said, “I heard that the Children’s Hospital is having a children’s Christmas play and thought you might be interested.”

“That sounds like a great idea!” Lydia answered happily.

“Good, the kids will love having you around,” Mrs. Wilson smiled.

“I love being around children!”

“What other activities do you think you will be doing?”

“I’m not sure yet... I thought maybe I’d volunteer at that animal shelter we went to today.”

“That’s a wonderful idea!”

The weeks flew by quietly until one day a boy sat down next to Lydia while she was eating lunch and going over the script for the children’s play that would be held on Christmas.

Lydia looked up as the boy sat down. It was Aaron Collier, the guy that Melissa always hung out with.

“Hey, um, I know we’re not exactly friends and I know Melissa is pretty mean to you but

I have a question,” Aaron said awkwardly.

Lydia stopped eating her lunch, but said nothing as she waited for his question.

“Would you be willing to help me with math?” he asked.

“Sure, I wouldn’t mind,” she said quietly.

“Thanks so much!” he said, relieved that she didn’t bite his head off and surprised that she had actually agreed to help him.

“You’re welcome. Come to my house after school and we’ll get started. Here’s the address,” she said, writing it down on a piece of notebook paper.

Aaron thanked her again and left.

“Lydia! Someone here to see you!” Mrs. Wilson called up the stairs shortly after dinner.

“Hey,” Aaron said when Lydia came downstairs.

“What?” Lydia asked confusedly, noticing that Aaron was looking at her oddly.

“What’s with the costume?” he asked, motioning to the old style dress she was wearing.

“Oh, this. I’m helping the children at the Children’s Hospital down on Fifth Avenue put on a Christmas play. They all wanted me to be Mary, Jesus’ mother,” Lydia explained. “Shall we get started?”

Aaron looked at her with awe as he followed her to the kitchen. None of his friends were willing to even go into the Children’s Hospital, let alone volunteer to help the kids put on a play.

Reaching the kitchen, they were greeted rather noisily by Jasmine.

“Gorgeous dog,” Aaron commented, sitting down at the table after Lydia had put Jasmine outside.

“Thanks, we got her not too long ago at the animal shelter where I’m a volunteer,” Lydia answered. “It’s just down the street from here. Now let’s get started or we won’t get anything done.”

The more Lydia helped Aaron with math, the more he learned about her. He couldn’t believe he’d just stood by and watched all those times while Melissa teased her. He was surprised that she took the teasing without flinching. She was so different from all of his friends.

It was the Tuesday before Christmas and Lydia was accustomed to coming home from school to the smell of something baking, Christmas music playing, and a tail-wagging dog greeting her. However, today was different. No smells greeted her nose. No music played softly in the background. No happy dog jumped up to see her. Still carrying her backpack, Lydia searched for her mom. She found her on the couch in the living room with the phone

in her hand. Her face was ashen and her expression was like that of someone lost in another world.

“Mom! What’s wrong?!” Lydia asked, dropping her bag as she rushed over to her mom.

Mrs. Wilson slowly looked up at her daughter.

Lydia gasped, “Is it Daddy?”

“He... He’s been severely wounded... They’re bringing him to a hospital here...” Mrs. Wilson said, her voice broken and distant.

“Oh Mom...” Lydia said, sinking to the floor. Her eyes filled with tears; this was the last thing she had expected. “This can’t be happening,” she thought. She looked up as her mother started to speak again.

“He gets in late tonight... We can see him tomorrow evening...”

That night Lydia cried herself to sleep. She felt like her whole world had fallen to pieces around her.

“I won’t be able to help you with math today. I’m going to the hospital to see my dad,” Lydia told Aaron at lunch the next day.

Aaron, recalling that Lydia had told him one day that her father was a Marine serving overseas, was immediately concerned. “Is he ok?”

“He was severely wounded... Other than that I don’t know much.”

“Let me know what you find out.”

“I will,” she said, as she turned to walk away.

“Hey Lydia! Are you out in La-La Land today? Mrs. Lane had to call your name three times to get your attention,” Melissa called out as Lydia walked past her coming out of math class.

“Lay off, Melissa, she’s not a bad person,” Aaron said before Lydia could answer.

“Oh, so you’re going to take her side now? Is it because she’s helping you with math?” Melissa sneered.

“No, I’m taking her side because I’ve gotten to know her,” Aaron said, standing a little straighter. “You would do well to get to know people before you go picking on them.”

Melissa’s face turned beet red. “Well you can consider us through. I’m not hanging out with a guy who protects a girl who won’t even talk.”

Aaron watched her storm off before turning to Lydia.

“I’m sorry for not saying something to her sooner...” he said. Then, putting his arm around Lydia’s shoulder, he walked her home.

“Thanks,” she said through tears, as she walked up the porch steps.

“Anytime. Go see your dad now.” Lydia nodded absently.

Two hours later Lydia walked into the hospital with her mom.

They learned from the doctor that a roadside bomb had hit Mr. Wilson and his team. Mr. Wilson had gotten the worst of it. His left side was severely damaged, and his left leg had to be amputated from the knee down.

“You can go see him, but he’s still unconscious,” the doctor said, pointing to a room a few doors down.

After spending a few hours there, the two went home for some sleep. Mr. Wilson was still unconscious when they left.

For the rest of the week Aaron never left Lydia’s side at school. He made sure that Melissa didn’t bother her, and he introduced her to a few girls he knew who only followed Melissa for fear of being teased.

Lydia appreciated his companionship and his comforting words. It made her feel better to know that someone cared about her.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Wilson’s doctor called.

He said that Mr. Wilson was still unconscious and seemed to be getting worse.

Hurrying to the hospital, Lydia and her mom stayed all day.

“Don’t give up on me, Daddy, I still need you. You have to meet Jasmine and my new friends. You have to see me graduate. You have to see me get married. Come back to us, Daddy...” Lydia said, holding her dad’s hand that night.

Late that night the doctor came into Mr. Wilson’s room and said, “He seems to be stabilizing now. You should go home and get some rest. I’ll call you if there’s any change.”

The next afternoon, Lydia came home from walking Jasmine and found a surprise. Melissa was sitting on the porch steps of their house.

“I need to talk to you,” Melissa said bluntly.

“Alright,” Lydia said, sitting down next to her.

“What is it you do that has Aaron and everyone else caring about you?” Melissa asked.

“I can’t really tell you,” Lydia said.

“Why not?” Melissa asked, slightly annoyed.

“Because I have to show you. Follow me.”

Melissa looked at Lydia suspiciously before following her.

“Hi, Mrs. Carey, I brought a friend today,” Lydia said to the lady in charge as they walked

into the back room of the animal shelter.

“Wonderful! The animals sure have missed you lately,” Mrs. Carey answered with a smile.

Lydia smiled back and led the way to the dog kennels. She pointed to a brown and white mutt. “That’s Rosa. She was hit by a car and left by the road with several broken ribs and a broken leg.” For the next hour Lydia told Melissa about the animals while the two played with them.

“So you care about animals, big deal,” Melissa said, as the two climbed the steps to Lydia’s house.

“One more thing,” Lydia said. She scribbled an address and a time on a paper and handed the paper to Melissa.

“What’s this?” Melissa asked.

“Just show up on Christmas,” Lydia said.

Melissa shrugged and turned to leave, “Alright.”

Christmas morning, Lydia stood behind the curtain on stage and looked for her friends. She saw her mom, Aaron, and a few others.

“Oh good! She came!” Lydia thought when she saw Melissa in the crowd.

The play was a huge success. The children had learned their lines perfectly and all performed wonderfully. The applause they got was deafening.

As Lydia came from behind stage, she met her mother. When she saw her mom’s face Lydia asked, “What is it?”

“He’s awake!” Mrs. Wilson said.

Lydia gasped and jumped up and down. After hugging her mom she ran off to find Aaron.

“He’s finally awake!” she told him happily.

“That’s great news!” Aaron said.

Melissa, walking up to them, asked, “Who’s awake?”

“Her father – he’s a Marine and was hit by a roadside bomb while serving overseas. He’s finally awake after being unconscious for over a week,” Aaron explained.

Melissa looked at Lydia in shock.

“I’m so sorry!” she said, throwing her arms around Lydia, “I had no idea...”

Lydia, surprised, hugged Melissa, “It’s ok.”

Melissa backed up, “No, it’s not ok. I was so mean to you when I didn’t know you or what your life was like!”

Lydia put her hands on Melissa’s shoulders, “It’s ok now, because we’re going to be friends. Yes?”

Melissa smiled, “Yes!”

“Wonderful! I’m going to go see my dad now, so I’ll see you guys later!”

An hour later Lydia charged into her father’s hospital room and nearly suffocated him with her hug.

“Easy Tiger!” her father laughed.

“You didn’t give up on us! You came back!” Lydia said, smiling through tears.

Mr. Wilson brushed away her tears. “I’ll never give up on you.”

When Mr. Wilson was finally able to go home, he was greeted by a large welcoming committee. Lydia, who had told her father everything that had happened to her, had organized all her friends and was throwing a welcome home party.

Mr. Wilson looked at Lydia when he came into the living room and saw everything, “See, it all worked out.”

Lydia ran to her father and hugged him, “Yes it did!”

The End

CRACKED

BY MELANIE O'NEIL



Photography

Once upon a writer's dreaming, while I pondered my life's meaning,
over many a faint and tumulus year of chores –
While I wrestled, fully restless, with my work that felt so endless,
as if to only leave me breathless, lying limp upon the floor.
“Tis all there is” I muttered, sprawled limp upon the floor –
“Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, so clearly I recall when in the spring I had a moment;
as each hope lay sprawled like pictures scattered across the floor.
Earnestly I wished for freedom; - hardly had I sought to become
a listless soul who was so numb – numb right to my very core –
For the life I had not lived yet which if lived I would adore –
Nearly forgotten evermore.

And the shaken, battered person waiting for the world to worsen
Shot up – startled upon the sight of a newly opened door;
So at once, I took to meeting, lots of people, I barely breathing
“Tis some grand adventure waiting then my life won't be such a bore –
Some new grand adventure waiting then my life won't be such a bore –
This it is and so much more.

Suddenly my course seemed certain; I would go to school in Martin,
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, it is your admittance I look for;
But you see I have been wasting, all the dreams I could be chasing,
To end life like I was facing, I face instead your entry door,
Open heart I'm at your mercy” – then you through open wide the door; –
A promise there and so much more.

Deep in learning I began to, find a meaning that was new, true,
Dreaming, believing like I never dared to believe before;
Writing would be in my future, and my heart no longer suture,
from the memories of its torture, unburdened at my new door;
Stories and poems, “I will thrill the masses with my tales, galore!”
All of this and so much more.

*Inspired by “The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe
Hearing an oration of “The Raven” in seventh grade English class is
what spawned a lifetime love of the written word, inspiring me to read
for the pleasure of it, and more importantly, to write with my own voice!*

THE WRITER

BY JENNIFER PARRISH





I can look to the sky
Find myself—
And God—
In the perfectly scattered strings,
Powdered puffs of pink and white,
Wisps of angels' trails,
Still breathing in the night sky.

And I can wistfully tell Him—
He's created a beautiful world.

I can watch the young boys laugh,
Hear their unrestrained peals of thunder
Spike through the air
Like a hundred tiny, tickling fingers.

And I can silently thank Him—
Thank Him for giving them to me.

But—
I squirm in the frigid, biting cold,
Hear the claps of bark on bark
Feel the bitter, stinging leather—
The wrath of a thousand fathers.

And I can only churlishly ask God
Why?

A BAPTISTERY MURAL

BY ALEX TATJANA



6' x 7'

Oil Paint

This mural was a replacement for the outdated and depressing image that lurked
above the tub of a church in my hometown.



ALBINO GHOST

BY ALEX TATJANA



18" x 24"

Oil Paint

I was imagining a person who was so mute and so insignificant that the light just shined right through him.

SUNSET WATCH

BY DESIREE' DOUGLAS



11" x 17"

Acrylic Paint

The purpose of this painting was to capture the viewer's attention and focus it on the beauty of our wildlife. This piece features two photos. It is meant to be placed in front of a lighting source. One photo shows the piece before the light is on and the other shows after the light is on and you can see the details stand out and it gives the painting the lighting of a sunset.

COMPOSITE VESSEL 3

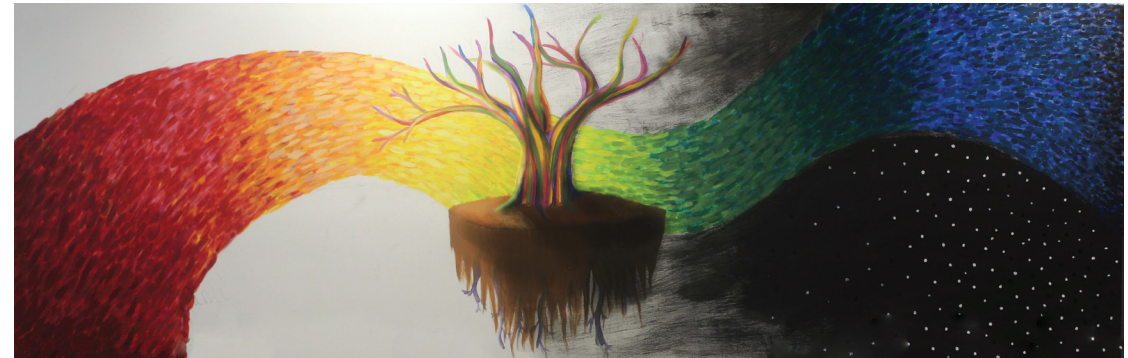
BY STEPHEN CROSBY



Thrown and coil built earthenware, applied slips, and sgraffito. Fired to cone 04 Electric.

AERODYNAMIC

BY SAMANTHA MOBLEY



13' x 4'
Acrylic Paint



BALANCE OF LUCK

BY DESIREE' DOUGLAS



12" x 16"

Acrylic Paint

The purpose of this painting was to bring a balance of luck to my life in a time of need. I completed this piece in high school for the congressional art show during a stressful time in my life. The two koi fish represent luck while the yin yang creates a balance. It won county and I went to state where I met ex-congressman John Tanner.

OUT OF THE LION'S DEN

BY BETH CROCKER



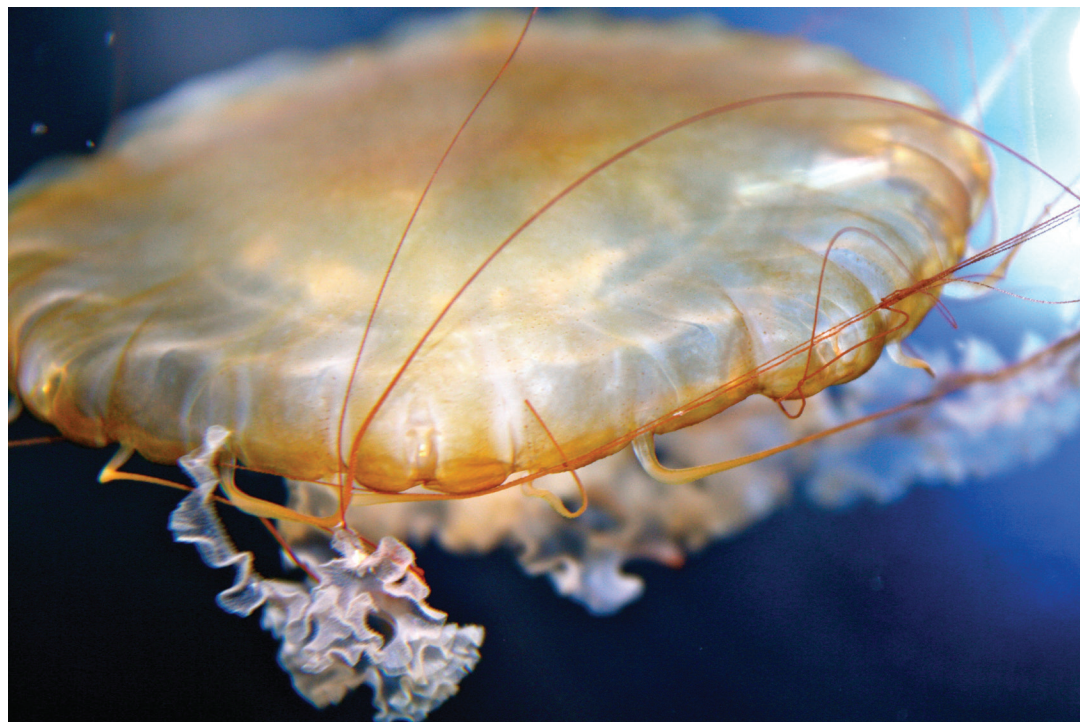
22" x 28"

Oil Paint

My intention for this piece was to represent strength, determination, and faith all in a feminine figure. With the use of lioness features, I wanted to further emphasize the strength and instincts of females.

UNDERWATER

BY SARAH MARTIN



8" x 10"
Photography

My intention was to try and capture a jellyfish in motion.

TREE LINES II

BY DIANE SHAW



60" x 42"
Acrylic Paint

The intention of this work was to challenge myself to see if I could effectively interpret nature by first starting out with the unpredictability of paint drips.



FRISCO SKIES

BY JOEY DESANTIS



24" x 48"

Oil Paint and Acrylic pPaint

The purpose of this painting was to emphasize the scenic town from which I grew up, and the sky depicts a tranquil sunset.

VIZENTARO (A GREEK GOD MOMENT)

BY ALEX TATJANA



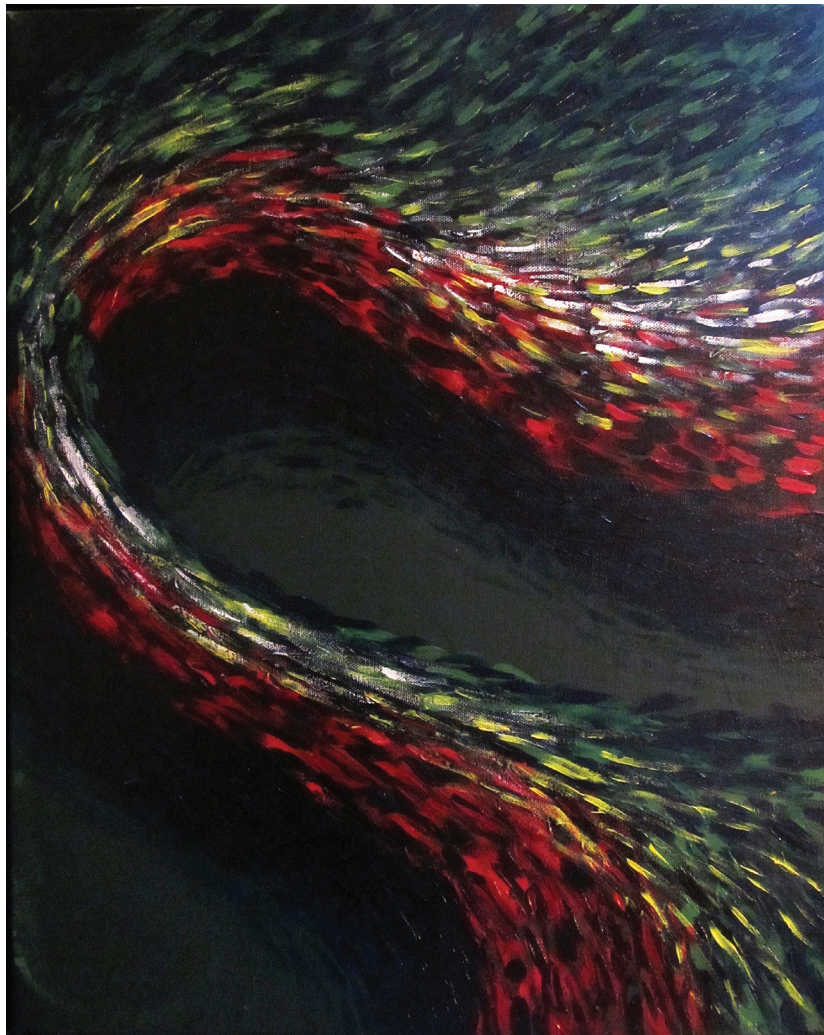
18" x 24"

Oil Paint

This was a moment of character development: a step towards a less doll-like look.

ANXIETY

BY SAMANTHA MOBLEY



24" x 16"

Oil Paint

Representation of all the worst emotions you feel and their nonstop attack on your equilibrium.

He wears his scars
Like a tattooed sleeve.
As the pills ran out,
Up came the dry heaves.

Because no one understood
What the white ones did,
And whatever the effects,
He always popped the lid.

No scream, talk, or therapy
Could capture the release
Of the little bullets "X"
That never seemed to cease.

When no arms unfolded
To carry him home,
In went the downers,
Taking him to places unknown.

Because when the sun set
And the moon said, "Hello,"
It was too hard to look
And simply say no.

It started out so early,
Like puberty's ammunition;
And though it killed the problems,
It also slaughtered ambition.

Stuck between boy and man
Was a secret prescription
To fight off dark forces
And bring on more friction.

And though it became habit,
It started for a reason;
But it grew out of proportion,
And flew with the seasons.

Then God called unto his son,
"All that is white is not pure."
And in this case of addiction,
There was no fast-acting cure.
The message was not received,
But growth became evident
From the handled substance
That seemed so "Heaven-sent."

This poor, lost angel
Could hear the choirs sing,
Until, in falling from grace,
He finally grew his wings.

And unlike that of Icarus,
He did not let pride win;
In all that he lost before,
He found a new place to begin.

WHAT WILL CARRY HIM HOME?

BY TOSHYA LEONARD



GOOD-FAIR-BAD-
WEATHER FRIEND
BY KACHE' BROOKS



Wrap me in your arms
Never let me go
Take me to the highest of peaks
Swirl me through the valley deep
Warm my legs
Cool my freckled face
Whisper your secrets
Whistle your tunes
Dance with me, around me
Sometimes you can be so sharp, so cruel
But at the same time, so calm so cool

LIFE OF A FAIRY
BY AERIN LANGLOIS



Photography

While lying on the early spring ground, I saw an alien world that we as humans rarely take time to observe. There was a unique beauty that transformed the simple leaves and sticks into a breathtaking masterpiece that belonged to the fairies of lore.





REMEMBRANCE

BY JENNIFER PARISH



In front of a simple structure of roughened wood she stands
dressed in a white dress starkly contrasting her dark skin
cinched at the waist with a thin belt
arms behind her back
submissively.

As she perches at the top of a rickety set of steps that lean to and fro
she does not look at the woman speaking to her from below
also dressed in white covered over with a white sweater
topped with a black hat nearly the color of her skin
cane in hand.

It could be mama in front of that porch swing solemnly listening
to the directions from my grandmother that she will
surely follow in her absence
she, in travelling clothes,
about to embark.

The opened travel trunk skirting the edges of the picture
as if grandmother's belongings are also eager
to be free of this small domicile
even if only for a while.

My mama, gazing down at an unmarked mound of dirt and grass
that lies right in front of the simple square structure
triangular roof – looking like a child's blocks
carefully stacked together.

Hanging behind the swinging seat is a makeshift window
of four panes still mounted in an old door perched
a couple of feet above the floorboards
mama seems reserved to stay and
stand upon.

At the base of the porch a straggly plant struggles to survive
while the tree leading its way out to groves beyond
would be covered in peaches soon
that mama and I would pick
and preserve.

Mama always knew when to grasp the ripe fruit and pluck it
just as she picked and held on to my father in days when
mixed marriages were not given blessings
but instead
burnings.

In front, the mound is of no real interest and yet mama looks to it
as if remembering the stories of our ancestors who
fought bravely in war without recognition
or remembrance -
except by us

or perhaps the night we spent watching the glow of the flames
out front when the men in white left and the burning
continued as we watched
unable to put it out -
or sleep.

The jugged picket fence wending off to the right made
by my grandfather's tired hands runs away
as many would do if they could
and yet mama stayed
strong and firm

leaving lasting memories like scars on my heart
that I would not heal for anything
as I remember the stories
the people -
mama.

*Visually inspired by: Eudora Welty Photographs-85. Jackson/1930's
Intellectually inspired by: Natasha Trethewey-Native Guard*



Joyce turned sharply on her heel, whipping back to face her fiancé-- boyfriend.. Hell she didn't know what to call him anymore. Tucking several strands of black hair behind her ear, she met his gaze. Heavy dark grey eyes locking with unwavering hazel brown eyes. For a moment all was silent, still. The only sound filling the room was the sound of the heavy angry breathing between the two. Jacob towered over her, but somehow she was able to keep ahold of his gaze. It felt like the calm before a storm. A storm that had been brewing between Joyce and Jacob for the past four months.

The most recent fight, before this one, had nearly ended their relationship. Joyce could remember it like yesterday. That was the moment she witnessed the change in Jacob as well as felt the shift of their relationship.

Jacob's stocky body stood directly in front of Joyce, blocking her view. His large hands reached down tearing the remote from Joyce's grasp.

"Is that television more important than our relationship?!" Joyce had no answer. She only stared at his cold hazel eyes. Watched as his strong jaw line flexed as he shouted again at her, "Damn it, answer me!" Again, Joyce stayed silent as she pushed herself up off the couch. Physically she was worn out and mentally she couldn't handle another shouting match against him. She just could not do it anymore. Her stride faster than her normal sluggish movement, she was in a hurry. At first Jacob stood still, watching her leave the front room, pass through the living room and turn the corner. She was heading upstairs, away from him. He stalked after her and as she neared the top of the stairs he hesitated before shouting up at her.

"That is it, Joyce. I've had it! I can't take your new attitude. You are always mad at me anymore. I can't do anything to make you happy! Give it back." Joyce stopped instantly. Goosebumps rising across her pale skin as his thick southern accent rang in her ears, softer yet firm. "I mean it, give me the ring back. Joyce... I can't marry you..." Her stomach turned as her heart shattered. Reluctantly, she pulled the small princess-cut engagement ring off her slim trembling finger. Once Jacob had the ring, she grabbed her keys and stormed out the door unsure of where she was heading, anywhere away from him, away from that apartment. She drove her small car to the old park, only blocks from their apartment. It was there that she sat for nearly two hours crying until her eyes were swollen. Jacob had left after her, searching for her, but eventually ended up at his friends' house. It was there that he

drank so much, that he passed out on their front lawn.

Four months after that night, the couple still struggled.

Jacob cleared his throat and tugged on his old baseball cap, and Joyce snapped back to the present, staring at him. Her eyes still cold and calculated with anger, and his reflecting the same.

"Damnit. Why are you acting this way? It isn't like I don't have another night I can spend with you. You act like I did it to hurt you." Joyce shook her head slightly, picking at the hem of her faded blue jeans.

"I never said you did it to hurt me. I'm not acting any way!" Her voice squeaked as she fought back a shout. Her grey eyes glanced away from his, "You promised me. You promised me this weekend you would stay home. Stay with me. Instead, once again you went to their house." Joyce had recently picked up more hours at Lowe's, and even began to start working on the weekends. She also was a full time college student. Jacob was a truck driver and his home time was only on the weekends. So they hardly had time together anymore. Why couldn't he understand that she wanted his attention while he was home? Was it too much to ask of him? Jacob folded his arms across his chest and leaned back against the lip of the marble counter. Rolling his muscular shoulders in attempts to relax, he then sighed low and heavy before speaking.

"Let's go out to the bar tonight. Play some pool or darts. I'll even let you win." Joyce's shoulders fell, continuing to wash the plate off, until there was nothing left on it. She shut the water off and glanced over her shoulder slowly, speaking barely in a whisper.

"Just you and me?" Her eyes locked back onto his, hoping his answer would be yes, but she highly doubted that was the case. She couldn't remember the last time they had gone to the bar alone. It was always with his friends.

"..No.." his tone low as he shifted his weight and pushed off the counter, "Thomas and a few others will be there..They invited us out." Thunder shook the apartment and the power flicked on and off for a moment. The kitchen turned pitch black, so she wasn't able to see him even though he was only a few feet away from her. They stood in darkness, silently. He cleared his throat once more, waiting for her response. Joyce said nothing until the lights flicked back on. Her back was to him once more as she grabbed the muddy green dinner plate from the stainless steel sink.

"You have to be kidding me?" Jacob rubbed his face hastily as he slumped back against the counter, listening to her. Joyce kept her back to him and leaned over the counter. "I love you, with all of my heart. This is getting ridiculous. I feel as if this, us, is hopeless. You never

see my side. It is always about what you want..." Water splashed up onto her baggy sweater.

"Jacob, I know that when you ask me, I can never give you an answer, nor tell you what I want. I just want to be with you. Whatever we do doesn't hardly matter to me. Just as long as we are together."

When she asked for his attention, she felt like she must have asked for too much because he never gave her his undivided attention. She never asked for anything anymore. Joyce's cracked hands grabbed a cup. She briefly ran it under the water then put it on the top rack of the dishwasher. She heard Jacob's heavy footsteps as he crossed the kitchen. He slid his arms around her small figure, and pulled her back to his flat chest. Jacob's lips pressed to her neck as he placed a small kiss under her earlobe and whispered against her chilled skin.

"I'm tired of fighting with you, Lover. Please, stop. And just hear me out." Joyce closed her eyes for a moment as she rested her hands on the lip of the counter. It was in small moments like this fragments of Jacob's former self emerged from his slumber. Her stomach rolled as she felt his hot breath against her neck. His fingers sliding under both her sweater as well as her thin tank top against her bony hips. She knew what he was doing, because he had used this course of action so many other times. Joyce pulled away slightly, and fought the urge of giving in to his temptation.

"Jacob, I have heard your side a thousand times. I have listened to you. It is you who needs to hear me out..." She hesitated, unsure if she wanted to say it and before she gave it much more thought she blurted in a raspy voice, "...You used to..."

His body tensed, his large hands gripping her hips harder, no longer in lust now, in anger. He stooped over her so he could reach her neck, but he stiffened and stood erect. His stubbled jaw line flexed slightly as his face molded into a scowl. His internal struggle becoming visible in his strained hazel eyes. He jerked his hands off of her soft skin, and threw his hands up in the air, as if to say he gave up. Joyce turned gracefully in one motion, and simply looked up at him. And although they were standing so close to one another, the distance between them was evident.

"Damnit! I haven't changed, I am the same person. Where you got this stupid notion, I don't know, but it is beginning to piss me off. If I am so horrible and have changed so much, why do you stay with me?!"

"You have changed. You are not the same person I fell in love with! That person left four months ago. How can I stay with you? If you have to ask that question, then honestly I have no idea why the hell I'm here!"

Joyce watched Jacob flinch at her words, and she shuttered from his. Collectively their words cut deeper than either intended. Heavy truth ringing deep within one another's statements. They both knew their relationship was falling apart, neither knowing how to fix it. Joyce watched as Jacob turned away from her walking out of the kitchen. She assumed he was heading for the door. Instead he stopped in the small hallway leading to the front room, jerked a picture frame off the wall. Within seconds he was back in front of Joyce, who had not moved from her spot. She glanced at the picture of them, then at Jacob, her full lips pressing into a hardline. She remembered the day that photo was taken...

It was snowing that day, heavy enough for the snow to stick on the ground. It was frigid out, way too cold for her. But they lived in Tennessee, and if it snowed one had an obligation to go out and enjoy the snow while it lasted. She had kissed him as they walked down the slick sidewalk. Catching him off guard she had somehow found the strength to push him into the snow covered grass. His gloved fingers grasped tightly around the arm of her jacket. With little effort he was able to pull her down with him. Their laughter was loud and uneven. She looked down at him, and his face was thinner and younger, his eyes brighter and carefree. She remembered him pulling her closer as their lips met. But just as she had tricked him, he did the same. He shoved her off of him into the snow and threw snow at her as she collapsed into the snow...Jacob kept throwing massive snowballs at her until she begged him to stop. Even now she could still feel the crisp air on her cheeks, the way the chilled wind cut through her black trench coat. Her stomach ached from laughter. That was then when their love was pure and just beginning.

Things were different now...

"I've changed? You are the one who has changed." He shoved the picture frame nearly into her face, forcing her to look at the picture closer. Joyce felt the hot tears building up. She blinked them back.

"Remember when you use to be playful?! When you actually went out and enjoyed life?! Now all you want to do is sit in the damn house and argue with me!"

"Stop, I'm begging you." Her slender body wedged between Jacob and the chilled marble counter behind her. She looked at him through grey eyes, in hopes he would listen to her.

"No, Joyce. I won't stop. You can cry all you want, but you brought this upon yourself. You couldn't just let it go. You had to be stubborn..." Jacob's southern accent thickened as he grew irritated. "You can never just accept my apology." His voice and words were hostile in

nature, his knuckles turning white from the grip he kept on the cherry wood picture frame. His venomous hazel eyes glanced at the picture then back at her with disgust.

"I am fed up with this constant bullshit when I get home. Know what, maybe I would rather spend time with my friends. They don't bitch at me!" With one fluid motion Jacob jerked the picture frame up in the air then slammed it to the floor. She jumped and stared as the glass shattered across the floor, and her breath caught but a faint cry broke out of her thick and dry throat, her pale lips trembling. Streams of tears flooded down her cheeks. Jacob's body stood still, but tightened, staring vaguely with a callused expression that she was unable to read.

She listened to the rain beat down on the roof of the apartment, thunder rolling once more but farther off into the distance, the silence speaking volumes more than either one could formulate in any further conversation they would have. The silence of the room was deafening, causing something to break inside of Joyce. She clenched her hands, her nails biting into her palms, his hands bruising the fragments of what remained of their relationship. She recalled a time when he his hand once healed. Her voice was weak as her eyes scanned from the picture frame up to Jacob, meeting his gaze.

"Jacob, I will always want you, but I can't live this way anymore. This life we are leading, it's a lie..."

"Stop being dramatic, Joyce. I'm going to the bar." Stalking to the door, he swung it open, stepped out and then was gone from her sight. Her back slid down the cabinets as she fell onto the cold floor. She wrapped her long thin arms around her knees, pulling them to her chest. A heavy sob filled the empty kitchen as she buried her face in her knees. She gave up trying to stay strong and began to cry silently. Her body trembling as she continued to cry. Her fingernails dug into her faded jeans. She finally screamed while she tugged roughly at her hair. Anger, exasperation, and pain contorted within her, suffocating her. Whipping her head back into the cabinet doors, she looked up at the popcorn ceiling with blurred vision. She had been dead serious with Jacob.

Joyce stood up and walked across the glass cutting her feet open, smearing blood on the floor. Her steps sluggish as she climbed the squeaky stairs. She walked into their bedroom and grabbed the large brown suitcase from under their queen size bed. Unzipping it with shaking hands, Joyce frantically began to throw her clothes into the suitcase. Becoming more upset as she realized that Jacob had helped buy all of the clothes she had. She couldn't stop sobbing, her whole body shaking violently. She jerked more clothes from their hangers and

threw them into the suitcase, while her iPhone vibrated in her back pocket. She ignored it. She was clearly unable to formulate a clear sentence. She couldn't think, couldn't speak.

She grabbed the last of the jeans in the closet and hesitated before throwing them into the suitcase. In the back of the closet an ivory lace wedding gown hung. Her heart dropped to her stomach, as she stepped back staring at the gown. Lost, she quickly slammed the closet door and grabbed her suitcase. Her phone vibrated once more as she pulled the suitcase over the shattered glass and out into the pouring rain. Climbing into her car, she gripped the steering wheel with shaking hands, her tears ceasing finally for a moment. Her phone continued to vibrate as she reached around, answering it.

"Hello?"

"Miss Joyce Williams?" A young cheerful voice answered.

"Yes? Who is this?" Joyce voice shaking, as she tried to focus on the phone call.

"Miss Williams, this is the Student Health Center on campus. You had an appointment yesterday and we were just calling to give you the results."

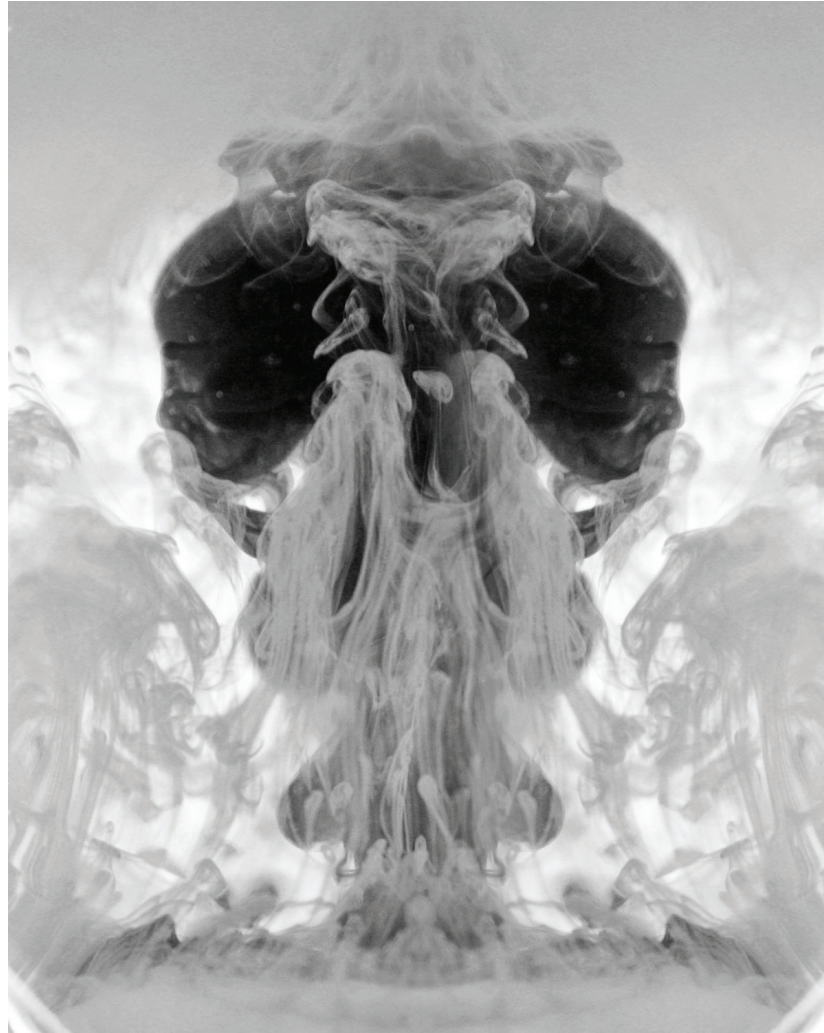
Joyce shifted in her seat. She had only gone for a monthly check up. Her voice still shaky as she stared at the rain hitting the windshield.

"Results? It was only a monthly check up."

"Miss Joyce, you are pregnant. Congratulations!" she said cheerfully. Joyce blinked in shock, that didn't make sense. She felt sick to her stomach; she couldn't handle this right now. She already had too much to deal with. Taking in a shallow breath, she hung up the phone and stared out the window. She bit her bottom lip and gripped onto the steering wheel, her knuckles turning white as she began to cry again. What the hell was she going to do now...

INK IN JARS AT TWO AM

BY MELANIE O'NEIL



Photography

Fresh off the bus with all the other children his mother babysat after school, it was straight to the bathroom Luscious went in an effort to beat the crowd. With a steady stream flowing little Luscious mindlessly looked around when on the side of the tub he saw it. It was a sign of what he'd been wanting for so long, but had been refused endlessly. 'We live in a rental, Mrs. Brenda won't let us have one,' he was told countless times. Still, it was never enough to kill his spirit to ask over and over; and now, there it was, the proof that his dream was about to come true. Finally having the last bit of pee come out, he zipped and buttoned in a hurry to reach down and pick it up. In his hands he held it in disbelief, reading: For flea and tick removal. 'It' was the green shampoo anyone knew universally to be for dogs, and it was in his hand, in his house.

"Momma, Momma!" he shouted, as he ran towards the kitchen.

"What, Son? What's wrong?!"

"Thank you! Thank you so much. I love you! Thank you, Momma."

"What's goin' on?" the crowd of kids collectively asked.

"What is it, Son?" his mother asked, her arms over his body that had abruptly clung to her.

"What is it," the children all said, mimicking Tonda Lee, who was confused, her son at her waist.

"Thank you, Momma, you know how long I've wanted one. Thank you, thank you, thank you! I love you so much. Where is it?"

"Where is what at, Honey, I don't know what you're talking about," she said, looking down into her son's joyous eyes that peered up at her, his hands still wrapped around her sides.

"The dog, Momma, the dog; where is it at?"

"A dog!?! Where!?!!" the children cried out in sheer excitement.

"No, we didn't get a dog. Now go play, kids. Go on, go play."

"But, Momma, I seen the..."

"Luscious! Shish! Listen, calm down. Kids, go in the living room."

"But we wanna see the dog," one of the bravest children exclaimed in a rebellious, pooched lip pout.

"But I saw it in the bathroom, Momma. I saw the sham..."

THE GREEN SHAMPOO
THAT MAKES DREAMS
COME TRUE
BY JONATHAN LUCAS FRENCH



“SHHHHISH,” Luscious’ mother said harshly with a finger to her lips, cutting him off before he could say another word. “Be quiet, Son. Kids, everybody go in there. I have to talk to Luscious about something.”

In due time, with the scary look of a mother’s seriousness upon them, the children reluctantly went away, dejected there wasn’t a dog.

Then, with a firm hand on the shoulder of her prepubescent son, Tonda Lee looked sternly into Luscious’ troubled eyes, and said quietly, “Listen, Son. The school called; you have lice again, and I can’t keep buying that expensive stuff. So please, be quiet about it. Right now just stay away from everybody so you don’t give that shit to everyone! You hear me? Now go on.”

Through the group of kids Luscious headed towards the front door, tears welling up in his eyes, the children parting as if he were Moses and they the Red Sea.

“Eww, he’s got lice?”

Luscious could hear the children all talking about him before the screen door ever shut.

Beware the hound which Silence feeds,
For he alone can’t quench its need.
It began as a creeping thought,
Born of the land where shadows fought.
Handed down from shadows dark,
It gained a dank and hollow bark.
From the shadows’ dreaded blight,
It brought forth fangs and learned to bite.
When Silence could afford no more,
The hound was loosed to roam in lore.
Since made loose of the shadows’ war,
It lives only to slash and score.
In fields of gray with eyes of green,
It skulks about as sight unseen.
A starving beast of feral make,
With naught to gain and naught at stake.
It prowls our realm, malice entail,
Our civility as its veil.
It preys upon us, few by few,
Seeking circles where secrets grew.
Soon sun swept realms shall turn to black,
For few withstand the hounds attack.
Beware the hound which Silence feeds,
For he alone can’t quench its need.

THE HOUND WHICH
SILENCE FEEDS
BY ELI ANDERSON



STILL DEATH

BY AARON BURKS



24" x 36"

Acrylic Paint

The purpose of this piece was to explore the technique of Grisaille painting, and to do something other than flowers and vases.

There comes a time in every boy's life when he has to lose his innocence; a time when one must put away childish dreams and grow to an acceptance of the realities of life. I would come to an acceptance of this truth in an abrupt and sudden way. Ironically, my dad had told me for the first time that he was proud of me that night. It was over the phone and I was telling him about some fancy party I had been invited to, although that wasn't the entire truth. I was only invited to work as a journalist. After a year of making coffee and picking up other people's lunches and dinners I had finally gotten a real assignment. My job was to go to a fundraiser for the Republican candidate for president and report on his speech. It's probably safe to say that the only reason I was lucky enough to get this assignment though was because of another story that had been unfolding in the past few weeks. It caused other seasoned journalists to shy away frightened at the prospect of covering such an important story. There had been three high profile murders within the last three weeks. The first was the actor. He was making a speech in Los Angeles about his desire to end human trafficking when he was shot in the neck. Of course, this caused a media frenzy. Other celebrities began to pour out their sympathies. Everyone spoke about his charity work and all of the good things he did. They talked about his initial struggles to make it as an actor having come from a small town and a single parent household. Everyone thought he was a saint. Second was the businessman. He too was giving a speech announcing the launch of a new program aimed at providing schools all over the world with better technology. He walked up to the podium, graciously accepted applause, and just as he was about to begin speaking he also was shot in the neck. Again there was a media and public outcry. The world mourned for him just as they had done for the actor praising his commitment to helping others become just as successful as he had become. They spoke about his family. He had a wife and two kids, son and daughter. His grief-stricken wife along with other relatives spoke on every news station possible about their late loved one's commitment to being a good father and husband. One would have thought he was a wonderful human being. The third was the musician. He just like the other two was murdered while giving a speech for a charity organization and the same sequence of events began over again. The musician just like the actor and the businessman was both mourned and praised. The connection

BEHIND THE MASK

BY JOSHUA COVINGTON



was easy enough to make. All three men died in some sort of public event with the purpose of raising money. Naturally everyone assumed and speculated that the next assassination would be at this week's next major fundraiser which happened to be the fundraiser for the Republican ticket. The most peculiar thing about these stories was the rumor. At every single shooting someone had claimed to see the murderer. Always with the gun pointed in the direction the victim had been standing with smoke coming from the end in a tuxedo and always holding a mask over his face with his other hand. It was a very odd proposition, so odd that no one, me included, took it seriously.

So, I went to the fundraiser. I was going to take my chance no matter how it came. No murderer was going to stop me. I arrived and waited for the candidate to finally make his speech. When he showed up, he walked through the crowd shaking hands and smiling. I even got to shake his hand myself. I was very happy to be where I was. He walked up onto the stage and the lights hit him and the crowd cheered louder than ever before. They continued to cheer for a few more minutes before settling down allowing the politician to say a few words.

"Thank-you," he said, "and good evening." Then there was a pause. The politician stopped and darted his eyes back and forth every so often moving his head slightly to see a little more. Then he chuckled and said, "I guess I'm safe." He smiled widely with a perfect, beautiful smile and the crowd laughed and applauded the sentiment.

"Now," – BANG! He fell backwards to the ground his neck pouring out blood. The crowd which only a few moments ago had been cheering, applauding, and laughing was now crying, screaming, and running frantically for the nearest exit. For a moment I stood frozen processing what I had just seen. When I did turn to leave I saw something above me in the balcony. It was the rumor. A man dressed in a tuxedo holding a smoking gun and a mask over his face. Again I was frozen. I couldn't believe I had seen what I had just seen. The rumor was true. There was a serial assassin going around killing famous people at charity events of all things. All I could ask myself was why and why at these types of events. It boggled my mind.

After a long night I returned home to my tiny apartment still in shock. I didn't have much of a place. I had only been out of college for a year. The weather of the night matched the mood. It was fiercely pouring down rain. It seemed like I could see lightning and hear thunder every few seconds. I hopped out of my car, slammed the door shut and then raced to the door so I could get out of the rain as quickly as possible. I unlocked the door to my apartment and as I entered was startled by the sound of someone greeting me.

"Hello," said a strange voice. I jumped and grabbed my chest. Then I saw in the darkness a figure sitting on my couch outlined only by the light coming through the window. I heard nothing but the sound of playing cards being thumbed around. There was a table in front of him.

"Well, come sit down."

I deliberately and gently shut the door behind me without taking my eyes off the intruder for even a millisecond. I stood still for a moment as if fixed in time staring blankly into space without a single communicable thought in my head. I just watched this man. I somehow saw a smile come across his face in the darkness. Then he turned on the lamp. He was young, very young and handsome to boot. His dark blond hair was slicked back, his face seemed to be without blemish and perfectly structured, but the most startling feature were his eyes. He had the brightest blue eyes. They were so inviting and warm. They pierced right through my defenses and incredibly enough I was no longer afraid of him. In fact, in that moment I calmly walked over to him without hesitation, as if sitting down for coffee with an old friend.

After I pulled up my chair and sat across from him on the other side of the table, it was still silent. I didn't know what to say. Then suddenly it hit me.

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"Tommy," he replied.

"Well, my name is ..."

"I know your name, John," he interrupted.

"Oh, okay," I responded a little bewildered. It was quiet again and I thought for a moment before asking, "How do you know my name?"

He grinned and said, "I know everything about you, John." He started to stand up.

"Do you?" I asked incredulously.

He grinned that grin again slowly pacing around the right side of the table, "I know you're from Mississippi. I know your parents' names are Tish and Jeff. I know you have three sisters and no brothers. I know you were in the honors society in high school despite being terrible at math. I know your graduating GPA was a 3.3. I know you majored in English and minored in journalism. I know you're a 23-year-old virgin who has never had a date - much less a girlfriend - and I also know your secrets."

It thundered when he smiled a very wide and creepy grin. He was now sitting on the table just inches away from me. As suddenly as I had taken a liking to him, I began to regret it. I didn't trust him anymore. I was afraid again.

"What secrets?" I whispered.

"The deepest kind," he answered. Tommy then walked back around the other side of the table and flopped lazily into the sofa. Then he pulled out a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. It wasn't until then that I realized he was wearing a tuxedo.

"Do you mind?" Tommy asked with the cigarette dangling from his mouth.

Usually I didn't allow people to light a cigarette in my apartment partly due to the landlord's policy and partly due to the fact that I hated the smell of smoke. However, since I was induced to a paralysis of the mind by fear I simply said, "No."

"Want one?"

"No."

"Suit yourself," Tommy said before lighting his cigarette.

"Why are you here?" I asked abruptly for a brief moment filled with a small amount of courage.

Tommy answered back casually, "Because I wanted to talk, that's all."

"About what?" I asked in the same abrupt tone.

He pointed at me and said, "You, and what you're going to write tomorrow."

"Unfortunately, I'm going to have to write that someone died tonight."

"Is it that unfortunate?" he responded maintaining his casual tone.

"What?" I whispered astounded.

This time there was a slight degree of angry impatience in his question, "Is it really that unfortunate?"

I sat there outraged with my palms raised in front of me. "Of course it's terrible! How could you say such a thing?"

"Don't get all uprighteous with me, Pal," he said waving his arms in defense. "I'm not the bad guy here. I'm not the one standing in your way."

"Really, then who is? Those three, no excuse me, four people who have been killed? Now is that what you're trying to tell me? They're the bad guys?"

He pointed his finger at me again and said, "Bingo."

I sat there for what felt like a few minutes completely still. I sat there with my mouth open, as still as a statue, entirely befuddled. I couldn't believe what I had heard. As a young man who had been raised in a Christian household protected from all of the bad things in the world I had never nor could I have ever anticipated such a blatantly immoral argument. I really was befuddled. There was no counter argument for me to go to. Tommy must have taken notice of my astonishment.

"You alright?" he asked with what sounded like genuine concern.

"I-I - I- ugh." I couldn't find the words.

"Allow me to explain." He sat up and leaned forward picking up the playing cards again shuffling them once more. "See, the reason you couldn't respond to that answer regarding those dead men is that you have been brainwashed."

I looked at him with confusion.

Tommy just lifted a hand up again in self-defense. "I know. I know, but it's true. You've been brainwashed your whole life. You've been brainwashed from the crib by your parents, teachers, television, radio, books, advertisements and anything else you can think of has been working on you from the day you were born. You never had a chance."

He continued to shuffle those cards while I sat there listening hanging on every word. Tommy had something about him that made you want to listen.

"See, all of these so-called victims, the actor, the businessman, the musician, the politician," he mocked them with his tone, "did you ever figure out, did you ever wonder what they all had in common?"

Tommy looked at me waiting for a response so I was compelled to give him one. "They were famous," I answered unconfidently.

"Yes, that's true but what else? Did you figure anything else out?" He leaned forward with his elbow on the table holding his face up.

"Well, they were all at some kind of charity event," I said.

"Only technically true," he said slapping the table. "C'mon, I'm looking for something else."

"I don't know," I whispered.

Tommy sat still for a moment and then abruptly said, "Okay, that's fine. Here's the thing. All of these famous, successful, beautiful people I killed they all had one teeny tiny thing in common. They were all liars. Hypocrites if you will."

"How?" I breathed.

"Good question and I'll answer it with another question. Do you really think that they were what everyone said they were?"

There was an edge to his voice when he asked. I could see something in his eyes. It was in that moment that I realized - Tommy could murder.

"I guess they were all successful," I whispered.

"There's the brainwashing."

Tommy had been leaning forward all this time. When he finally leaned back into an

upright position he started shuffling his cards again.

“What’s with the cards?” I asked.

“You see, you’re right to say they were all successful in one way or another, but why? Out of all the people in this world why did they or how did they get so lucky?”

He waited for me to answer. I just shook my head letting him know I didn’t have an answer.

“Okay,” he said leaning forward again placing the cards on the couch arm. “I can tell this gonna take a while so I’ll just cut to the chase. America and the world are like this deck of cards it’s a game, but unlike this deck of cards it’s stacked.”

“How so?” I asked.

“Listen, for anyone to have success in a civilized society whether it is in movies, music, business, or politics they all had help. Haven’t you ever heard that old sermon?” He didn’t wait for me to answer. “The truth is they just had more help than others - much more help than others. So, as you can now see I’m not the bad guy. They are.”

He seemed to honestly believe what he said. I was astounded. “You murdered, no assassinated these people and you think somehow you’re the good guy?” I asked as my voice rose with righteous condemnation. My face displayed anger and shock.

“You see, there it is that’s the brainwashing,” he declared with a smile.

“What?” I yelled back.

Once again Tommy through his hands up in self-defense, “John, Johnny boy, c’mon, deep down you know it’s true.”

“It isn’t true,” I retorted through gritted teeth. “Those people did NOT deserve to die. You are a MURDERER,” I yelled, “an assassin. You belong in prison.”

Tommy gave me a look I did not expect. He looked at me like one does a child who is misguided and confused. It was almost as if he pitied me. “John,” he replied, “you’re not one of them.”

“What are you talking about?” I yelled at him again. I started to say something else but he interrupted me.

“I know people don’t like to have their certainties disturbed but Johnny you really need to hear this.”

“Hear what?” I asked crisply.

“I know your story, John. I know every last bit of it. I know you didn’t make the best grades in school. I know you were poor and didn’t come from a well-to-do family. I know

life hasn’t been easy for you because you didn’t have any privileges and no one cared enough to help you. Trust me, Johnny; you’re not one of them no matter how much you want to be.” He paused for a moment I guess to let the weight of what he said sink in. “You and I though, Johnny, we’re a lot alike. We haven’t followed the exact same path but we followed those paths for the exact same reason which is that we thought they were the right things to do. At least, that’s what everyone told us.” Tommy paused again and began to slip deep into thought. “You have all these rules and you think they’ll save you. But that’s the problem: the rules.”

“How on earth could rules be a problem?”

“The rules are the problem because those rules only apply to people like us,” Tommy said pointing at me.

“I’m not like you,” I retorted.

“Yes you are,” he responded quickly. “It’s like I said - this world is like a deck of playing cards and the deck is stacked. Why do you think they call me a serial assassin rather than just a serial killer?”

“Because that’s what you are,” I said.

Tommy raised his fist up and gritted his teeth but ultimately constrained himself. “No, see you’re not getting it,” he scolded with a slight chuckle. “Think about the zodiac killer and Jack the ripper; they were deemed serial killers, not assassins, because they killed commoners not monarchies.”

“So what?” I yelled.

At first he whispered gritting his teeth but towards the end he started to yell, “Stop talking like you’re one of them when you’re NOT!” He slammed his fist on the table as he spoke the last word. Then he stared at me with those eyes and I thought he was going to shoot me. He pulled out his gun and placed it on the table. “Get this through your head,” he said still gritting his teeth pointing at me to emphasize every word. Tommy pointed at the gun, “I did this for people like us. I did this for fairness. Those people I killed were only interested in power; they just weren’t honest about it. They did those charity events and all of those other things they did that you and the rest of the drones seem to think is so great for themselves.”

His nostrils were flaring and his face was red. I was scared again because I didn’t know what was about to happen. I was worried he had snapped.

“You know they all had it easy; someone cared about them. Someone cared about their success and their happiness, but not us. You believe in law and order because they, the elites,

taught you since you were a baby that that's what we need for everything to be okay, but what they don't tell you is that while it's just okay for you, it's freaking wonderful for them. While you're overseas getting shot at and watching people get blown up, they're enjoying their cocktail parties and picking up other people's wives." He stopped and stared at me, his eyes burning with intensity. "You see, John the rules don't apply to them." He picked up his gun, "So, that's what this is about. It's about fairness and in order to have fairness we need just a little anarchy. I'm an agent of anarchy and you know what the great thing about anarchy is?"

He stopped to let me answer but I couldn't move a muscle. I felt so sorry for him.

"It's fair."

He stood up and I followed suit. Tommy walked right past with me without as much as a glance my way. When he reached the door, he stopped, placed his hand on the knob, then turned to look at me. The most defeated look was spread across his face. It broke my heart.

"You have an article to write for tomorrow," he said softly.

"Yes," I whispered.

"Don't stack the deck." He then turned the knob, opened the door and left with a quick thud. The sound of that door closing brought me both relief and anxiety. I knew I still had something to do. I had a decision to make. I stood still looking at that stack of cards, thinking.

MIST, REELFOOT LAKE

BY DAVID HAROLD SHERIDAN



Photography

I wanted to capture the soul of the lake. Something different of the area.

BLANKNESS
BY JENNIFER PARRISH



Empty spaces
blank faces
where all of the words should be.
I search deeper and deeper,
pictures forming as blips on the screen of my mind,
then
quickly
dissipate
leaving me searching once again.

Empty spaces
with no traces
of conscious, creative thought.
No stringing words of cohesiveness,
giving me a starting point to my endeavors. I
struggle
on
trying
once again.

Empty spaces
oh! the places!
full of stories I wish to tell.
My psyche stretching with indignation,
as I reach out to grasp at what could be – if I could
catch
it
firmly
keeping hold.

If only I could form the words to tell the stories buried deep within my soul.
I would pass on love and tenderness, and perhaps wisdom too.
But I must accept that –
just for now –
I see only
empty spaces and
blank pages.

“Why the hell are there dishes in the sink?!”

Jessica sat on the couch staring at the television. She kept her eyes on the screen as the older woman stomped out from the kitchen. Jessica was used to the angry tirades of her sister, so she continued to stare at the flashing images. Of course, the respite did not last long as Chelsea placed herself in front of Jessica. It was impossible to see her face in the darkness of the room, her back to the glowing television. Jessica didn’t really need to see her face though.

“Jess, I told you to clean up.”

Chelsea flipped the light switch, taking away Jessica’s last defense against the coming confrontation. One look at Chelsea told Jessica everything she needed to know. Her sister’s normally immaculate bun had blonde hairs sticking out in every direction. Her eyeliner was smeared as a result of her nervous tendency to rub her eyes. Most telling was that the bright white tag that read “cashier” was still pinned to her worn red polo.

Chelsea made a sharp, waving gesture as she stood in the middle of the cluttered room. Jessica rolled her eyes and hid her smirk at the clicking of Chelsea’s jaw in response. Jessica tried not to act too immature, but sometimes the fourteen-year-old teen could not help but annoy her sister.

“I’ll do it in a minute,” Jessica replied, taking her time to announce her decision.

“No, you will do it now.”

“Why do you care when it gets done?”

“If we don’t keep it clean, then we might as well just go and live in the streets!”

“God, you’re always so dramatic!” Jessica said as she stood.

“Well maybe I should just stop caring. Is that what you want? For us to just live in a disgusting, dirty hut?”

“Why should you? You never cared before!”

Jessica’s mouth clamped shut so fast that she almost bit her tongue. Really, she wished she had bit the damn thing off as she saw the wide, watery eyes of her sister. She had not meant to say that, but really why was the housework so important to Chelsea? But the words were impossible to take back, and they hung in the air like a dead weight. Despite the urge to flinch, each sister kept her eyes on the other. Jessica always hated the staring contest that occurred after every argument for the last year. The meeting of dead, cold eyes was almost unbearable. Still, anything was better than allowing herself to look over in the corner.

CORNER OF
DISCONTENT
BY JANNIE REED



A pair of boots sat haphazardly against the foot of the chair as if any moment the wearer would come in to slide them on. An antique gold pocket watch sat on the table on top along with some keys and other knick-knacks. All of it sat still, placed carefully so that the morning ritual would be quick and efficient.

That corner was the only organized space in the room, though it was not clean. If one looked closely, they would see a thick coat of dust covered all of the items, shattering the illusion that the owner would come in at any moment to collect his possessions. Of course, Jessica and Chelsea had not looked at the corner since they had returned from the hospital almost a year ago.

They never talked about it, about him. They never really talked about anything anymore, other than these shouting matches over the dishes. These happened almost every day, but they never lasted long. The rest of the time, the house was filled with the sounds of Jessica's shows, and if the teen listened carefully, she could hear the low thrum of music from Chelsea's room. They were on their own now, and really, each girl was isolated in their once welcoming home. They never discussed it, though. There was nothing to talk about really, because they were both fine.

Chelsea finally broke their stalemate and glanced at the kitchen. Without another word, she disappeared into her bedroom leaving Jessica in the dark room with the ghostly light of the tv shining on the silent recliner in the corner of the room.

The children grew up in the shadow of his eye,
As he held his plow and looked upon them.
They played and they read; they watched the old cartoons;
And he taught them in the way that they should go.

Life passed on and he grew weak, but he kept that garden tilled and sown,
As he sat upon that tractor that his father had owned.
The children grew up and they grew strong,
As they remembered those days of long ago.

Now those children are in college and he has passed on,
But he looks down at them from Jesus' side.
The boy an Eagle Scout, his sister an A student,
Each striving to walk that way.

So trusting in Jesus' love, I'll seek that home above,
And see again my grandfather some sweet day.

THE HAND
TO THE PLOW
BY MICHAEL KELLEY





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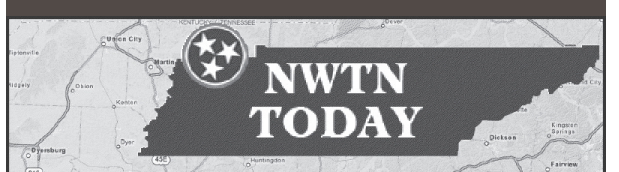


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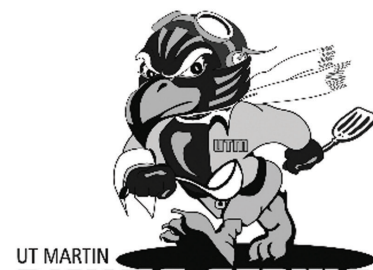
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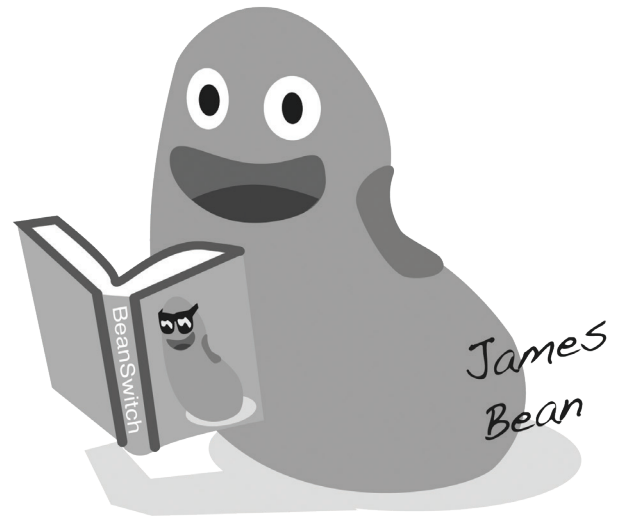
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