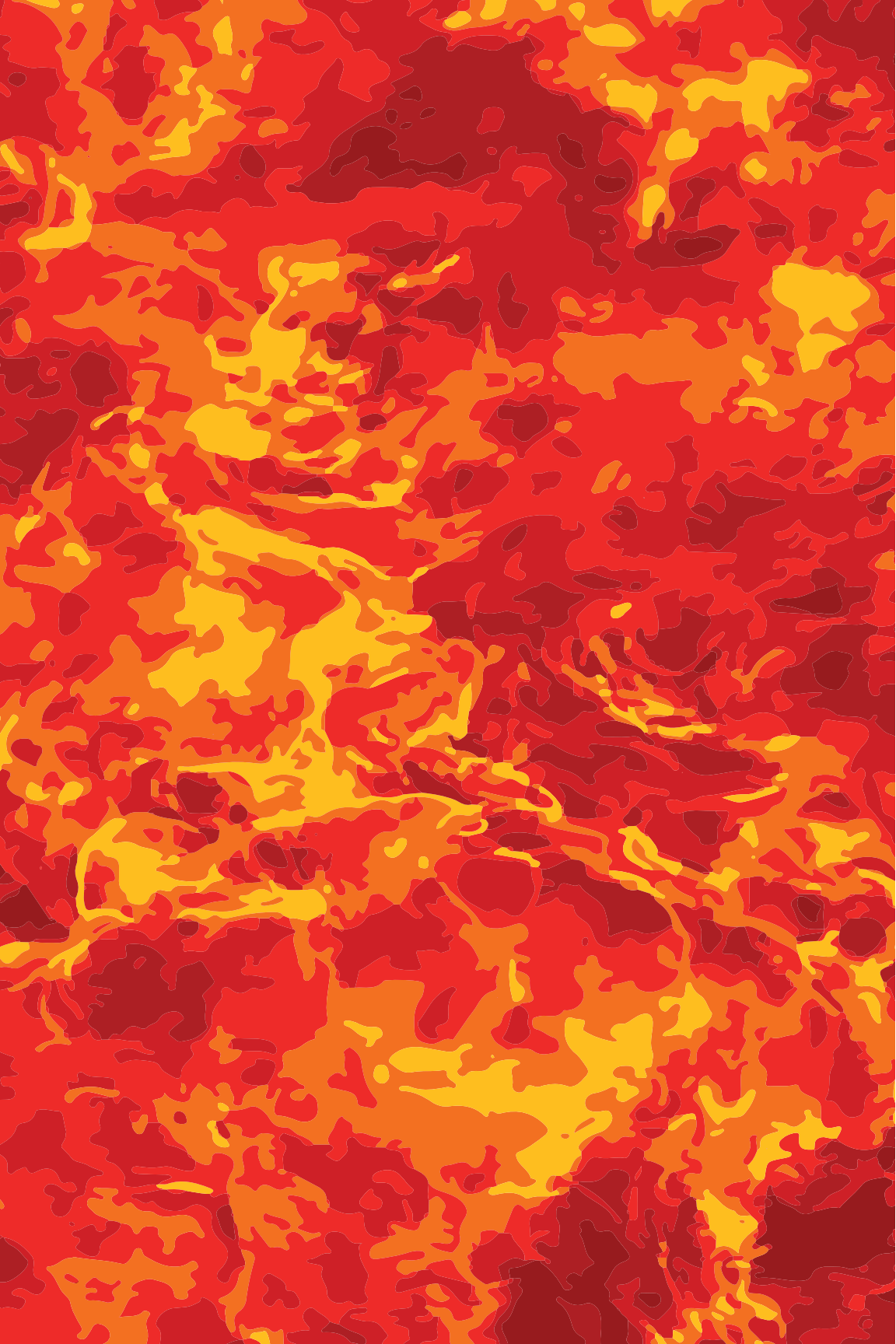


The Traveler



Volume 54



Rising from the ashes

The Traveler is a student creative arts publication produced by the Art and English Departments of Glendale Community College. The contents of this publication are uncensored. The Traveler may include adult content and not be suitable for all ages.

The theme for Volume 54 of *The Traveler* is one of resilience and renewal. We are emerging from unprecedented times like the story of the phoenix who burts into flames and then renews itself. This mythological animal returns stronger than ever before. Students at Glendale Community College will rise like the Phoenix; pursuing their dreams by overcoming adversity.



like the phoenix

Table of Contents

Literary Arts

FICTION

1st Place: <i>Half Life</i> , by Carol Powell	5
2nd Place: <i>Cuyahoga Cuspidor Company</i> , by Peter Faur	8
3rd Place: <i>I'm Afraid</i> , by Jack Nichols.	14
Honorable Mention: <i>Call Me Bathysklera</i> , by Francis Wiget	21
Honorable Mention: <i>You Get What You Pay For</i> , by Francis Wiget	24

CREATIVE NONFICTION

1st Place: <i>Paper Jungle</i> , by Angela Lilu	32
2nd Place: <i>God Loves Ugly</i> , by Chuck Wan	34
3rd Place: <i>The Lynx Lake Trail</i> , by Joselyn Maria Lopez	36

POETRY

1st Place: <i>Fury</i> , by Abbigayle McCall	39
2nd Place: <i>The Lonely Trees</i> , by Joselyn Maria Lopez	41
3rd Place: <i>To Sleep in a Sea of Stars</i> , by Abbigayle McCall	42
Honorable Mention: <i>Enochs</i> , by Payton Sparks	43
Honorable Mention: <i>A Box of Memories</i> , by Joselyn Maria Lopez	44

ONE-ACT PLAY/DRAMA

1st Place: <i>A Primer on Kimmerian Witchcraft</i> , by Francis Wiget	46
2nd Place: <i>Shadow Valley</i> , by Sterling O'Ray	57

Fine Arts

DRAWING AND LIFE DRAWING

1st Place: <i>Billie Gilish</i> by Marvin Shaoul	66
2nd Place: <i>Personal Still Life</i> by Kristin Alfonso	67
3rd Place: <i>Memory Collection</i> by Nicole O'Bannon	68
Honorable Mention: <i>Moonlight Jellies</i> by Lauren Winnie	69

PAINTING AND WATERCOLOR

1st Place: <i>Cross with Beads</i> by Debi Coons	70
2nd Place: <i>Lost Places 2</i> by Debi Coons	71
3rd Place: <i>Waiting</i> by Jazmine Liddiard	72
Honorable Mention: <i>Self-Destructive Tendencies</i> by Amy Palmer	73
Accepted: <i>A Quiet Moment</i> by Nicole O'Bannon	74
Accepted: <i>Pumpkin Patch</i> by Fiala Richard	75
Accepted: <i>Point Danliah</i> by Rylee Tinnel	76
Accepted: <i>Desert Blooms</i> by Kayla Miller	77

Fine Arts (Cont'd)

CERAMICS, SCULPTURE, ASSEMBLAGE AND RELIEF

1st Place: <i>Nerikomi Stripes: Carafe & Cups</i> by Rumi Poling	78
2nd Place: <i>Down By the Pond</i> by Sarah Starr	79
3rd Place: <i>Mugen</i> by Maria Espinoza	80
Accepted: <i>Water Etched Bowl</i> by Erin Shaeffer	81
Accepted: <i>Skating Boy</i> by Alexa Gavino	82
Accepted: <i>Cuando Se Esconde El</i> by Maria Espinoza	83

PHOTOGRAPHY

1st Place: <i>Still Life Study #13</i> by Elyzabeth Merryman	84
2nd Place: <i>Figurative Study #27</i> by Elyzabeth Merryman	85
Accepted: <i>Yellowstone</i> by Tim Gray	86
Accepted: <i>Jayla</i> by Alexia Gavino	87
Accepted: <i>Untitled</i> by Damion Caamano	88
Accepted: <i>Untitled</i> by Damion Caamano	89

GLASS AND JEWELRY

1st Place: <i>Life Underwater</i> by Emmanuel Beltran	90
1st Place: <i>The Rum Monkey</i> by George Toro	91
2nd Place: <i>Beauty and Silence</i> by Emmanuel Beltran	92
2nd Place: <i>Untitled</i> by Anjali Vijayvergia	93
Accepted: <i>Winter Ice</i> by Wendy Retzer	94
Accepted: <i>Blue Skin</i> by Mary Worel	95

GRAPHIC DESIGN

1st Place: <i>Framed Lady</i> by Madison Negrete	96
Accepted: <i>Despite Everything, It's Still Me</i> by Devon Gentile	97

2D-DESIGN, INTERMEDIA, COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART

1st Place: <i>Hummy</i> by Rylee Tinnel	98
2nd Place: <i>Chloe</i> by Debi Coons	99
Accepted: <i>Charge</i> by Erin Shaeffer	100
Accepted: <i>Mosshroom</i> by Rylee Tinnel	101

CREDITS

List of contributors.	102
-------------------------------	-----

Fiction



Fiction

FIRST PLACE

Half Life

By Carol Powell

The smudged glass door of the department store slid open as Mildred took one last bite of the half-eaten sub. She kept walking as she folded the sandwich into its paper wrapper and crammed it into her purse.

She hurried past the greeter. Her shoes click, click, clicked as she fought the urge to select a few ears of corn for tomorrow's dinner from the table on her right. She marched past the table of peaches that she could have packed in her husband David's lunch.

Mildred caught the strap of her purse that had begun to slide from her shoulder. She glanced at her watch. Half past. I've got 30 minutes. She dodged shoppers as she hurried to the women's clothing department.

She squeezed past round racks of women's clothing. The narrow path intersected with a path that ran beside the long wall at the back of the department. To the right of the intersection, yoga clothes hung from cross-bars hooked into the wall. She hesitated for a heartbeat as she saw new styles and pastel colors. But then, she felt the weight of her wristwatch and David's upcoming business dinner. She turned left instead.

She found a round rack of dressy tops and raked through them. She simultaneously scrutinized tops and fumed at her husband's half-baked observations of this morning. I have half a mind not to make his dinner tonight. But she knew she would cook dinner for him. She lifted a hanger off the rack and held it up to examine the top on it. I have half a mind to tell him how ungrateful he is. But she knew he appreciated her. The hanger for the rejected top made a satisfying clack as she slapped it onto the rack. She picked up another hanger. I have half a mind to tell him to stuff his opinions. But she knew she valued his ideas. Clack.

She found two tops that might be suitable for a spouse at a business function to wear. Draping them over her arm, she headed to the fitting room.

Mildred drummed her fingernails silently against her blue jeans as the attendant made a point of counting "one, two." Mildred took the white plastic rectangle with a two stamped on it from the attendant's hand.

Mildred followed the attendant to the fitting room. After the attendant unlocked the fitting room door, Mildred slid past her with a husky "thank you." The door locked behind Mildred as she pulled it shut.

Mildred unbuttoned and removed her blouse. She remembered David's words. "You give half of yourself to someone and think you've got

Fiction

time for yourself. But then you give half of what's left of you to someone else and you keep doing it over and over." Standing in her bra in front of the mirror, she pulled the black top over her head. "Millie, you don't seem happy."

"I'm happy."

"Why don't you do something that's just for you?"

"I'm doing important things."

The black top fell to her waist exposing her flabby abs. She snorted. I wish. She yanked the top over her head.

As Mildred tossed the black top aside, she heard rustling in the stall next door. She saw the feet under the wall exit the tiny room and then heard the hollow slam of the cheap door. "Excuse me, Miss, but could you help me find..." The stranger's conversation got quieter as she and the attendant walked away.

Mildred admired the sapphire blue color of the other top before she pulled it over her head. She continued to ruminate on what her husband had said. "Remember when we studied limits together in college calc?" She had stopped jotting down her to-do list and wondered where David was headed. He continued, "I'm afraid you'll halve yourself so many times that soon there'll be nothing left of you." She understood now. "You'll go to zero." Hmph! He hadn't needed to restate the point. She had gotten it as soon as she heard "limits" and "halving."

He had softened his voice for the next part, but the recollection still hurt. "I already feel like you're half the woman I married."

She blinked a few times, then looked sternly at herself in the mirror. You are not going to cry in the fitting room at Y-mart! Mildred reached around her side and pulled the top's zipper up her back, struggling at mid-spine. The zipper stuck half-way up. She tried reaching it from above, but her shoulder joint wouldn't bend backward like that. For the hundredth time, she wondered why she paid for yoga classes she didn't attend. She pushed on the zipper pull from below. It was called a pull and not a push for a reason. Anyway, the zipper seemed to be stuck on some inconsequential fold of fabric or thread.

"Help!" she said in an embarrassed whisper. Not surprisingly, no one came. "Help, please," she said in an even quieter voice to herself.

Mildred sat down on the triangular white corner seat that attached to the mirrored wall and the side wall. Maybe there was something in her purse that could get the zipper unstuck. She pulled her half sandwich out. The crinkling sandwich wrapper made her salivate. She considered whether to just finish her lunch and wait for the attendant to return. But she looked at her watch and rooted through her handbag instead. Nothing among her pens and credit cards and tissues that she now held in her right fist looked like the solution. A white laminated card fell onto the floor.

Fiction

Even staring at the pure white back, she knew what it was. She shoved the useless items back into her purse and set the purse aside. Bending over, she picked up the card and turned it over. It was a miniature version of her university diploma that the alumni association had given each graduate. It read “Mildred Doer,” her name before she got married, “Bachelor of Science, Mathematics.” It’s been almost 20 years! She put the card into a pocket inside her purse and made sure the Velcro closure to it was firmly sealed.

Leaving her purse on the seat, she stood and looked full on at the woman in the mirror. Her own eyes looked back at her, and she stared into their blue depths. Mildred knew the answer to her problem was in her, but she couldn’t grasp it. She was stuck. Mildred did a quarter turn away from the mirror. Over her shoulder, she could see her half-zipped reflection in the mirror. A vee of flesh from her upper back was exposed where the top gaped open.

She checked her watch. If I leave now, I can pick up the dog on time.

Mildred gave up. She swallowed hard, then snatched up her purse, and flung the door open. She dashed out in the half-zipped top. She passed the racks of clothes and was relieved to find a cashier who had no line. She reached in her purse for her wallet. The first thing she came across was the half-eaten sandwich which she threw in the trash of the opposite register. Red-faced, she kept a lowered gaze and an even lower voice as she spoke, “I’d like to wear this. Can you cut off the tag, please, and ring me up?”

Mildred swiped her credit card and tapped her foot as she waited for the payment to go through. She was near her limit. Beep. Beep. Beep. She withdrew her card and checked her watch. Thirty minutes. She sighed and headed for the exit.

Mildred’s figure got smaller and smaller as she disappeared through the door.



Fiction

SECOND PLACE

Cuyahoga Cuspidor Company

By Peter Faur

Johnny Krackenstein is drifting down the hall, ducking into one office after another. He prides himself on “management by walking around,” and he walks around way more than he should, for my taste. I often wonder whether he ever does any “management by sitting his butt in a chair and working.”

Johnny owns Get Kracken Public Relations. He’s a “hiya, hiya” PR guy, and I’m not. But to be fair, Johnny is a hell of a rainmaker, which I’m also not. As he navigates the hall, he passes posters, photos, and tchotchkes he’s collected from our clients. Here’s a photo of a Power Pop bottle, and over there’s a poster of the Bonanza Burger Twins, Billy and Betty. “Thanks to Get Kracken, every kid in America wants to be Billy Bonanza or Betty Bonanza. Some even like the burgers,” Johnny brags to anyone who’ll listen.

He’s built his firm into the nation’s fifth-largest public relations agency. No small feat, considering we’re headquartered in Cleveland, which isn’t exactly a media mecca. But as talented as he is, Johnny still needs people like me, who take satisfaction in a well-turned phrase.

Johnny sort of remembers me as the guy who led the team that made America salivate for Szechuan Soy Sauce. Remember “It’s soy. It’s saucy. It’s sexy.”? That’s my line, and we made it the talk of the nation using nothing but earned media. Our hilarious YouTube video series, 101 Bedroom Uses for Szechuan Soy Sauce and 101 More Bedroom Uses for Szechuan Soy Sauce, singlehandedly vaulted our client’s sauce into the top tier of American condiments. It didn’t hurt when YouTube banned seventeen of our videos for explicit content.

“Every home in America uses Szechuan Soy Sauce now,” Johnny brags to anyone who’ll listen. “Some even cook with it.”

Johnny knows he needs us word jockeys. His “you’re beautiful, you’re a cat, let’s do lunch” approach brings in a lot of business, but he knows he could never come up with “It’s soy. It’s saucy. It’s sexy” and the accompanying, slightly salacious videos. It’s the kind of campaign that lets Johnny send out outrageously high invoices, so he’s glad to pay us well. I appreciate the money, but I’d be happy if the only contact I had with him was his virtual signature on my virtual paycheck every couple of weeks.

Johnny continues his trek down the hallway, and the inevitable finally happens. He pokes his head into my office, where I sit in my usual business-casual getup—khakis; penny loafers; a button-down,

Fiction

ingham shirt; and a navy-blue, crew-neck sweater. I don't have a good answer for the question I know is coming. It's his general, all-purpose conversation starter with the people he calls his "creatives": "Whatcha workin' on, man?"

That question, along with "Whatcha workin' on, woman?", lets him not bother with learning most of our names. Which makes some sense, because most of us burn out and leave within a year. He knows the names of even the most junior people in our clients' offices, but us, not so much. There's only so much room on the hard drive, after all.

I just hit two years, so I'm a survivor. If I make it another year, Johnny may know my name for good. But it's been a while since my home run with soy, and accounting is letting me know my billable hours are way down, which doesn't bode well for my longevity.

"You need to 'get kracken,'" the accounting guy tells me. "I mentioned you to Johnny the other day, and he seemed kind of vague about who you were. I had to remind him you're the sultan of soy."

Johnny's a fiftyish, bantam

rooster kind of guy, well-groomed and fit, and he knows how to strut his stuff. He's a small mesomorph with a face right out of Nordic casting. I'm a head taller than he is, but I'm intimidated by him. Even so, when he walks into my office, after a day of dealing with surly reporters and know-it-all clients, I'm so tired I don't even bother to get up as a show of respect. If I upset him, he doesn't let on. I look up at Johnny, still not sure what I'm going to say when he confronts me with his inevitable "Whatcha workin' on, man?"

The truth is, I'm fighting brain

fatigue, so I've spent the past hour mindlessly surfing the TMZ website, and I'm trying to find a way to turn time wasted into time billed. I saw one of the tabloid celebs chugging down a bottle of Power Pop, our client's caffeinated, sugar-saturated elixir, so I decide to bill the hour as market research. Well, fifty minutes actually, but we tend to round up. I'd rather not spill these details to Johnny once I hear "Whatcha workin' on, man?" But to my surprise, the question doesn't come. Instead, Johnny wants to play trivia.

"Hey, Matt, do you know what Joyce James said was the most beautiful word in the English language?"

Seeing as how he blows James Joyce's name, he's obviously not the kind of guy who spends his free time reading *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He sure as hell doesn't use his Saturday nights to play literary trivia. He took a couple of seconds to get my name right by reading "Matt Henshaw" on the nameplate outside my office, so something is up.

I decide to play along.

Still seated, I offer, "Let me guess. Is it . . . Ulysses?" drawing out the word and sweeping my right hand with a motion worthy of a Price Is Right model. Johnny fails to appreciate just how game I am for taking a shot.

Fiction

“No, she said the most beautiful word in the English language is ‘cuspidor,’” he tells me. I give him a pass on his confusion about Joyce’s name and sex. “And Matt, I’m gonna offer you the chance of a lifetime. I think you’re just the guy to bring back ‘cuspidor’ in the twenty-first century. You’re the soy guy, right? Well, work your magic again, and before long we’ll be able to say every home in America owns a Cuyahoga Cuspidor.” I can picture him bragging to anyone who will listen, but I can’t quite picture how I’m going to make this happen.

Joyce may have loved the word “cuspidor,” but if he had given it more thought, he might have chosen something equally worthy but less repulsive, like “sonorous,” “serendipity,” or “solitude.” “Cuspidor,” you see, is just a pleasant-sounding word for a most unpleasant object, a spittoon.

The old-timers used cuspidors as receptacles to spit out chewing tobacco. In the late 1800s, the brass or porcelain bowls held in places of honor in hotels, stores, banks, passenger trains, railroad stations, pubs, saloons, brothels—anywhere a man of style and taste had a need to dispose of his slimy, tar-colored chaw.

In the heyday of cuspidors—1880 to 1918—they were as common as sinks and toilets. In 1880, the Boston Fire Department alone counted two hundred and sixty cuspidors in its possession. (In other inventory of note, the BFD also owned thirty manure forks in 1880.) Cuspidors were so ubiquitous that they often were a seminar topic at annual conferences of the United States Public Health Service.

Eventually, cuspidors went the way of the dinosaur. (Not a bad-sounding word as I think about it. Rhymes with cuspidor.) At the 1915 Public Health Service Conference, doctors argued that exposing the public to uncovered containers of tobacco spit helped spread tuberculosis. That concern, and the increased use of cigarettes, meant cuspidors faded faster than fax machines.

So, why is Johnny suddenly so interested in resurrecting spittoons, which had been given up for dead? Two reasons. His lust, which is being satisfied nicely by a curvaceous, red-headed spitfire named Minerva Harrington, and his love of money, which is being satisfied by Minerva’s cut of her family’s fortune.

Three years ago, Johnny’s wife said “bye-ya, bye-ya” after noticing his “hiya, hiyas” were getting lobbed toward bimbos half her age. For all I know, Johnny always has had a roving eye. If so, his wife was smart enough to wait to call him on it until his bank account could support the post-divorce lifestyle she had in mind.

Since then, Johnny’s love life has provided plenty of fodder for Get Kracken water-cooler gossip. It’s not unusual for one of us to spot him on a Friday night meandering into Marble Room Steaks with a sleek blonde on his arm and the next night floating into Fire Food and Drink with a busty brunette. Lately, though, he seems to be exclusive with Ms. Harrington.

Minerva’s family is big in the bleach business. It’s akin to the bleach

Fiction

moms use for washing diapers, but Harrington Bleach is a little stronger, and it comes in tank trucks and rail cars, not jugs. Cities and towns throughout the eastern United States use it to disinfect drinking water and wastewater. A friend who works at Cleveland Water tells me Harrington sells hundreds of millions of gallons each year at eighty cents a gallon. It's a low-margin product, but even so, the Harringtons are feeling no pain.

Minerva, it turns out, gets a healthy cut of the family's bleach profits, but she has no interest in making the world safer through disinfection. She wants to build a name for herself outside the family business. About a year ago, for an undisclosed sum, she bought the trademarks, inventory, and miscellaneous assets of Cleveland's once-glorious Cuyahoga Cuspidor Company, and she's on a mission to rekindle America's love of spittoons.

"Great-granddaddy Harrington had cuspidors all around his house, and he could fire off a mouthful of chaw from ten feet away just as accurate as LeBron James shooting free throws. Those little pots are just so cute," she said in a Cleveland Plain Dealer article when the sale closed. "I know America's going to fall in love with them all over again. And besides, there's a tie-in to the family business. There's nothing like bleach to get a well-used cuspidor spit clean. Great-granddaddy taught me that."

Johnny tells me Minerva has agreed to fork over a couple of million dollars to fuel the Get Kracken cuspidor campaign. It's up to me to figure out how to spend it wisely. Do well, and he'll brag about me to anyone who will listen, he says. Botch it, and . . . well, just don't botch it, Mark, he says. Johnny's memory for names can be so fleeting.

At Get Kracken, we kick off any new client assignment with a brainstorming session. As the newly appointed commodore of cuspidors, I get to invite anyone I think will put the best ideas on the table, so I turn to the agency's primo talent:

Harvey Winebox, the marketing brains behind the cream-freebutter alternative, No Udder Butter.

Stamatina Stanton, who elevated SatisFraction to the top of kids' educational math game charts.

Evangeline McCurry, who rescued the March of Dimes from hard times by rebranding it as the March of Quarters.

Stamatina gets the ball rolling. We need to polish the image of cuspidors, she says, make them family friendly.

"Let's do a 'Spittin' Image' contest," she suggests. Have moms and dads pose with their kids, send in the photos, and we'll pick the finalists—five lucky families whose kid or kids look just like one of the parents. We can require the families to PhotoPro Portraits to get their official photos taken. (Full disclosure: PhotoPro is a Get Kracken client.) All the families get to keep a complimentary photo, and they're entered in a drawing for a free cuspidor with a one-in-ten chance of winning.

"What do the finalists get?" I ask Stamatina.

"Easy," she says. "An all-expense-paid trip to Arizona, where they get to spit over the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. If anyone can hit a

Fiction

cuspidor placed fifty feet below on the Bright Angel Trail, the lucky spitter wins around-the-world trip. It's got YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook written all over it! We'll be all over cable news and local TV. It sounds vile, but trust me, it'll be viral."

Yeah . . . what else we got? I ask, picturing in my head some kid flipping over the side of the Grand Canyon while trying to hock a lugie.

Harvey throws out something more mundane but safer. People aren't into spitting much of anything these days, he says, unless they're in a wine-sampling club. Let's partner up with Total Inebriation to sell Cuyahoga Cuspidors to the wine aficionados in their customer base. That's a no-brainer.

Then he says we could do really well with the plant-and-flower crowd. Cuspidors are ideal for potted plants. They're portable, they don't leak, and if you keep them polished, they're kind of pretty. Let's do product placements in gardening magazines, movies, and TV shows. We could pitch some PBS kids' shows to have parents teaching kids how to put together a potted plant using a cuspidor. Good for nature, good for the environment, a good bonding activity with kids. And if the parents buy their cuspidors directly online, we can offer to engrave each kid's name on a cuspidor for a few bucks more.

Dull, but maybe effective, I think to myself. Evangeline, our nonprofit guru, has another idea.

"You ever hear of Severe Saliva Deficit Disorder? SSDD, the docs call it. 'Sa-SED' is how they say it. It's a real thing. Some people's bodies just don't make enough saliva."

"I was hoping it was a kids' problem, for the tug on the old heart-strings," she says, "but it usually happens in people over forty. Even so, nobody else has claimed to be the champion of saliva disorder patients, so the field is wide open. We could really hype the problem into a big deal, like it leads to rotten teeth and tongue cancer and lips and cracked lips, stuff like that. You know, the way they did with low testosterone and all the non-bedroom problems it causes. Then we pledge to donate a dollar to the Severe Saliva Deficit Disorder Foundation for every Cuyahoga Cuspidor sold. If there isn't such a thing, we can create one. Lots of media hits for this, I guarantee!"

I tell Evangeline her idea could get to be expensive at a buck a throw, but she has a workaround.

"In the fine print, we say we're capping donations at whatever figure Minerva is comfortable with. Five thousand, fifty thousand, whatever. We can limit our charitable impulses however she wants.

People never read the fine print. Just make sure it doesn't come out of our fees."

Stamatina has another idea. There's history museums all over the country, she says. Cities, counties, states all have them. Let's assemble a collection of old-time cuspidors from the 1800s and 1900s and take them on a tour of history museums. Load the collection with historic Cuyahoga

Fiction

Cuspidors, and we'll have lecturers talk about the role cuspidors played in public health a hundred years ago. A guaranteed factory of media clips, she says.

Really boring, I think.

I thank them all for their ideas and tell them I'll put a program together.

I like my own idea better: a "Cuspidors Make Drool Cool" campaign accompanied by a hilarious YouTube video series, *101 Bedroom Uses for Cuyahoga Cuspidors*. We upload videos like *Salacious Saliva*, *A Mouthful of Bliss*; *Cuspidor*; or *Sex Toy? It's Up to You*; and *Cuyahoga Cuspidors*, *All-In Storage for Lotions, Creams, and Lubricants*.

The videos really take off when YouTube bans twenty-four of them. We let people know we've uploaded the banned videos to CuyahogaCuspidor.com, and when they come to look, we offer a spittoon discount they can't refuse.

In a bit of product placement and subliminal advertising, we make sure every nightstand in the videos has a plant potted in a Cuyahoga Cuspidor. Riffing on Evangeline's idea, we pledge a penny for each video view to go to the Severe Saliva Deficit Disorder Foundation. Up to fifteen thousand, we bury in the fine print (and pending federal approval of the SSDDF charter). We hit the fifteen-thousand cap in two days, but of course, most of America thinks we're still throwing money into the virtual saliva pot.

A couple of months later, Johnny is walking the halls of Get Kracken arm in arm with Minerva, who's sporting a rock the size of Gibraltar on her left ring finger. I'm heading toward them. I'd just as soon disappear before our paths cross, but no such luck.

"Minerva, this is Matt Henshaw," Johnny says, now knowing my name forevermore. "I've told you about him, and I brag about him to anyone who will listen. Thanks to him, every home in America owns a Cuyahoga Cuspidor; and some people even spit in them!"

They both have a good laugh, and I shake Minerva's hand.

"Thanks, Matt!" Minerva wiggles with excitement. "I love your videos! You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to have a limited-edition line of cuspidors named after you. The Henshaw. We'll make a few dozen and engrave your name on the bottom. You can give them to your family and friends. I'll sell them to you at cost. Someday, they'll be collectors' items."

You take whatever recognition you can get, I suppose, but having my name on the bottom of a spittoon? Who could have guessed?

As Johnny and Minerva walk away, I taste a little throw-up in my mouth, wondering exactly which of the 101 bedroom uses they've found for Cuyahoga Cuspidors. I take satisfaction, though, in knowing one thing: if he were alive, James Joyce would brag about me to anyone who would listen. And who knows? I might even have given him a limited-edition, Henshaw-branded, Cuyahoga Cuspidor.

Fiction

THIRD PLACE

I'm Afraid

By Jack Nichols

Tick... *Tick... Tick...*

Her eyes snapped open, a sharp inhale filling her lungs as her body did a sort of involuntary quake with an abrupt stand that caused her to knock over a nearby chair. With her heart pounding in her throat, she steadied herself against something nearby—it felt like wood, and was enough to support the entirety of her weight until her breathing managed to calm, and she was able to take in her surroundings.

It was an exceptionally well-lit room, circular in shape, with ascending walls that traveled far up; until the faintest light could not reach, and a ceiling of dark shadows remained. The most striking feature in the room was the shelves—bookshelves, to be precisely. They lined every corner, warped perfectly against the walling, and even stretched high above. The shelves were completely full of books, all had the exact same dark maroon leather binding, but lacked other distinguishing marks.

She looked down at the desk in front of her. It was littered with blank pages, all of which were of the highest quality... or at least what she could tell when she brushed her fingers across their surface. There was a lamp, it appeared to run on oil—or perhaps candlelight. Next to her dominant hand there was ink, and quail; and further off to the side, the chair she had toppled when she stood up.

The rest of the room was lackluster, ...or just completely lacking. As though the whole purpose of this room was the desk, and nothing else.

“Where th’ hell am I...” She muttered, attempting to shake the lingering confusion.

“Where is the wrong question,” A voice suddenly spoke out from behind her, and when she snapped around to see who had spoken—her eyes settled on a gentleman. “You should be asking yourself why.”

‘Gentleman’ was the first word that popped into her head. He was tall, with a frame that carried skin as if it was stretched across the skeleton—but he was devilishly handsome, clean shaven with a slightly receding line of black hair that was sprinkled with gray nearer the temples, slicked back and smooth. He dressed simple, but finer than any man she had laid eyes on. His tuxedo all black, with an obnoxiously bright golden tie. The tie matched his eyes, the only unsettling feature he possessed: golden eyes with high-luminescence.

She had a plethora of questions, but the only one she could properly

Fiction

correlate was, “Who the fuck are you?”

He chuckled, removing a palm from his pocket to wag a cautionary finger at her. “You are a feisty one, I’ll be interested to see how yours plays out.” He cleared his throat, slightly adjusting his tie. “I am the Librarian, and this—” He gestured that same hand towards the massive walls of books.

“—is my collection. No, hold on...” The Librarian seemed to be contemplating something, tapping lightly against his lower lip. “Not ‘collection’, archive? No, not archive. My garden?” He was strolling forward while he spoke with all the leisure of a man strolling through his garden, so it might have made sense, but she eyed him with scrutiny. It was something in the way he spoke. He had no trace of an accent, his voice sounded a perfect collection of every syllable, weaved in such a way that it was pleasant just to hear words spoken so perfectly.

Her confusion was palpable, and he seemed to notice this, but still waited for her to speak once more. “Why am I here?” She said finally, and the joy that etched across his fine features was unmistakable.

“Outstanding! You, are here to write a book.”

“I don’t know how to write very good.” She wasn’t sure how she knew that, but she knew it.

“That isn’t an issue here, I can assure you. I have given you all the tools you need to succeed. You need only write.”

“I want to leave.” He exhaled, burying his hands in his pockets, and looked to the marbled flooring. The Librarian had all the temperament of a man scolding a child in this moment. “You are welcome to leave.”

She eyed him suspiciously, before beginning to walk towards one side of the room—paused, turned... paused, and turned again. The realization dawned on her, and hopelessness sunk into the pit of her stomach.

“There is no door...”

“There is no door.” He repeated, nodding some. “You cannot leave until you’ve written your book and added it to the rest, I’m afraid.”

Her temper was surprisingly under control, and for some reason that was unfamiliar to her. “Does it matter how long the book is?”

“The book will be as long as it needs to be.” His response was immediate, but it refueled her resolve. She knew only that she needed to leave, and the easiest way to do that was by complying with this strange demand—picking the chair from the floor, repositioning it, and plopping herself down.

Inhaling deeply, she took quill and dipped it in the ink—her intention was to write the shortest story she could think of, but when she touched the paper... her hand had a mind of its own.

I was born January 25th, 1966 at approximately 7:57 PM. In Nashville, Tennessee at Descension Thomson General. My mother, Harper Lee Robison and my father, Dylan Howard Robison, christened me Paula Sue Robison. My earliest memory was at the age of seven, when a man named Ted McGunnery, who at that time was my pastor and swim coach, took

Fiction

me into—’

Paula forced her hand to pause, and looked up to find the Librarian glancing down at her work, a look of satisfaction on his face.

“Beautiful handwriting, Ms. Robison. What did I tell you? You are an excellent writer, here.”

“What in God’s name is this? Why do I remember this? I never knew where I was born, and I never knew my father’s name.” She said, her calm still surprising her.

The Librarian seemed to flinch at the mention of ‘God’, and performed quite the unflattering gesture of digging his pinky into his earlobe; as if the word itself had been wedged in his ear. “This, is your story Paula Sue Robison, and only you can tell it... and once you are done, you may leave.”

He paused, raising a finger, as he walked nearby. He lightly tapped across the surface of several books at his height, before exclaiming “Ah, there you are” as he pulled free a book identical to the others. Opening it, he thumbed a single passage.

“This was the fellow before you, an excellent academic student.

Alexander Luther Caldwell. He theorized his father named him this in reference to ‘Lex Luther’, do you know who that is? Apparently it is a ‘comic-book’ character, I’ve heard of them before—I thought his was an interesting story, albeit his ending was a bit tragic.”

The slam! of the book being closed was followed by him retreating another one. “Eric Arthur Blair—now this man, was exceptional. I needn’t help him with his writing, no ma’am. One of many to come, I’m sure.” Another slam! and another book, another name. He must have gone through a dozen, all in various places, before halting at an empty space; finger tapping against the shelf. “This, is where your story will go.”

Paula took a moment to consider this, and it seemed... reasonable, at the very least. She hadn’t even noticed that her hand had started writing again, and with mesmerizing strokes of perfect lettering.

She found it strange how she could remember the finest details of her life: the neighborhood dog that bit her in the summer of 1974, the smell of her childhood home in the peak summer days, and... the unfortunate circumstances of her childhood. Paula knew all that she was and was capable of articulating everything that happened, no matter how traumatic or unknown to her in the moment; she was all-knowing. Her eyes caught the paper to see that she had begun a new chapter.

I met my Husband, Daniel Jefferson Blair while we were both stationed in Okinawa, Japan. I was a 68Y, he was an 18D. I was instantly smitten with him. He was tall, handsome, and carried himself with the casual swagger of a soldier rearing for combat—but still capable of holding a conversation. There were few times in my life where everything just felt right, and with Danny, everything was always just right.’

The naïve young soldier she had been quickly unfolded, just as it had some twenty-five years ago. She wrote about their love, and the children

Fiction

they had—then she wrote about the alcohol, and how she fell into a deep-depression when Danny left for back-to-back deployments, and that only worsened when September 9th, 2009 rolled around. Their hasty marriage took a dark turn, and Paula bore third person witness to her first person recounting of the terrible person she had been becoming.

Alcohol had never agreed with her, much like a relationship with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. She was a different person on drunk. It pained her to recount the events where she drank: she drank after she gained weight from the pregnancies, she drank when the loneliness crept in and she needed to fill the void. Sometimes, she just drank.

If she had been imposing her suffering on herself, she would not have cared too much—but it was the children, two children—twins, even, that she felt for. They had endured an uncaring mother, one that blamed them for the distance and heartache that came.

This chapter of her life seemed to go by quicker than the others. Her hopeful marriage ended in a disastrous divorce, with Danny finding someone else—younger, more beautiful, and starting a new family. It was this new family he fully supported, and this new family she hated.

She kept the kids, or rather it seemed like Danny was content with leaving them with her. Paula wished this woman whose life she was detailing would take a moment, and stop... but there were horrors she imposed on her children, a bitter distaste for them that stemmed from their appearance alone. They looked just like their father.

Fresh, hot tears ran down her face and stained the satin paper beneath the stroke of her quill. “This can’t be my life...” She said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Oh, but it is.” The Librarian replied with absolute glee, idly thumbing his way through some of her completed pages; lips upturned in modest appreciation, making vague comments along the lines of “Oh, this was very sad”, and “Why would you do something like this? Outstanding!”

“I ruined my life.” Paula spoke, the quiver in her voice made her almost stutter.

“You lived your life.” The Librarian corrected.

“I did nothing... for years. I lost my husband, I tormented my children. How can you say I’ve lived my life?” It never occurred to Paula until just now that she had lost the thick southern accent she usually carried, and instead spoke eloquently.

“Some stories are shorter than others, some are more exciting than others... and some stories are tragedies.” He raised both shoulders, shrugging as though to emphasize how helpless the matter really was. “Your story happens to be both short, and tragic.”

Paula scanned the most recent pages she had produced. The children had moved out, and left her. Her son never spoke to her, and her daughter often spoke too much. She knew in her heart her son held hate in his heart for her—everything she had attempted to instill in him had the opposite effect. It was in him that she saw a perfect combination of herself and

Fiction

Danny. Head-strong, intelligence... but wasting his potential, cruel and easily prone to aggression. Her daughter was a perfect combination of everything herself and Danny were not. Resourceful, compassionate, and an inviting heart.

She had moved back to Nashville, and lived with her very first boyfriend—the first love of her life, Roger Allen Atkins. In his youth he was a wild hot-rod; fast car, bare-chested, and reckless. The years had not been kind to her, nor Roger. He lost a lot of mobility from a back injury, and had taken to methamphetamines as a source of relief.

Paula felt loved when she was with Roger, and filling that void was more important than the near constant damage she had done to herself. She knew that now. There was only a brief period in her life where she halted her constant drug and alcohol abuse, and that was when she discovered she was suffering from breast cancer—that had cost her the job she held at a local RiteAid, due to there being a conflict with using too many ‘sick days’ and... having literal cancer.

She beat it, but was still plagued by constant pains and aches—though that only served to justify her substance abuse.

Remembering the promise of leaving, Paula once more put ink to quill.

I had just gotten off the phone with my Son. He remained his usual, detached self, and spoke only vaguely about things that interested him. Still, I was happy that he had decided to answer one of my calls for once. The night was winding down, and I was finishing my third cigarette when an uncomfortable feeling crept through my head. Everything felt wrong, numb. I couldn't move my arms, a shudder traveled throughout my body. I don't remember dropping my phone, I only remember saying: "I'm Afraid."

Her quill paused, and she looked confused. “What happened?”

“What do you mean?” The Librarian questioned her, peering over a shoulder to observe her writing with a soft ‘ah’; before he snatched her various pages from the desk—what he did next, she did not fully understand. One moment he was holding the pages, and the next he was holding another maroon colored book.

He placed it directly in front of her, and opened it to the most recent page. Paula stared down at it, and only restated her question.

“What happened?” He tapped the end of the page with one finger. “This is where your story ends.”

“So now what?” Librarian arched a brow, it was his turn to appear confused. “Now nothing, your story has ended. You need only accept the ending, sign your name, and you can leave.” Paula slowly shook her head, placing down the quill. “I’m not doing anything until you tell me what happened. I don’t remember anything after this, why don’t I remember up until this point? Isn’t that how this works? I can remember the color of my backpack in fifth grade but not how I got here?”

He considered her for a moment, before once more tapping the end

Fiction

of the page. “You suffered a hemorrhagic stroke in the stem of your brain while on the phone with your son. He heard your last words, despite how morbid they were, and you were pronounced braindead upon arrival to the same Hospital you were born at—”

“Wait,” she interrupted, “I’m dead?” He continued, ignoring her. “—quite fitting by the way—your daughter was adamant on being positive you were braindead, requesting the staff perform three separate tests to confirm it. Both your son and daughter were present at your bedside. Together they made the decision to pull the plug. While going through your belongings, your son broke down into tears. Both your children remember you, though they retain their original dispositions: your son hates you, your daughter loves you.”

“I’m dead?” She repeated.

“Very.”

“Why the book, then?” She said, slowly. He tilted his head some, with almost bird-like movement.

“People often talk about their ‘lives flashing before their eyes’, don’t they? Well, this is the truth—this is the collection, the archive, of every story—man, woman, or child. Of course, I often have to help some folks with their stories.”

“Does... that make this heaven, then?”

“I certainly don’t know about all that. This is where I am, this is my hand to play in life. What happens after this... I can’t really say for certain.” He shrugged, again.

“Can I change my story?” Her request was a feeble one she already knew the answer to, but felt compelled to ask anyway.

“The life you led was the story you wrote, and as one ends... so must the other.”

“Why isn’t this... bothering me?”

He exhaled, loudly. “Dying is when moments of fear and anguish have their spotlight... but Death? Death, in and of itself, is peaceful. There is no pay, hunger, or fear here—here there is only regret.”

She felt part of that was true, since she had arrived she felt an eerie calm to this... but the tears that never seemed to stop were an awful side-effect. Paula felt as though she had lost herself along the way, even when recounting who she really was—every moment, thought, and feeling played out before her like a long, taxing screenplay; and now it was over, and she was left with the knowledge.

“This isn’t fair. I... beat cancer, I was turning things around. Things were going to get better.”

He blinked, and repeatedly without emotion. “Tragedies exist.”

There was a long pause between the two, a silence that went on for what felt like an eternity.

“I don’t want to die.” She said finally.

Fiction

“All stories need to end.”

With a deep breath, she once more picked up the quill.

“The End. *By Paula Sue Robison.* She closed the book... and was gone.

The Librarian reached out to spin the book around, gave it one final thumb through, and nodded with approval. He closed the book, carried it over to the vacant slot, and slid it home.

“An excellent story regardless, Ms. Robison.”



HONORABLE MENTION

You Get What You Pay For

By Francis Wiget

Probe 1183 deployed its reentry cushions. It released its last chute, and altered the internal ballast to best balance out the anticipated impact. The onboard central computer calculated that this would be an optimal landing. The defense computer continued its screening against optical, infrared and radio detection. The communication computer maintained radio silence.

It had been built by the lowest bidding contractor, and landed with a great deal of smoke and noise. Three of the cushions failed on impact, and only one actually survived the landing and settling. That final one gave up the ghost upon the malicious attack of a jumping cholla.

It immediately concluded that it was under attack. It deployed its defensive drones, spat out spherical explosives geared to detonate when stepped upon by anything massing more than 10 kilos, and panicked. It radioed home, ignoring the anticipated time lag of eleven years.

It was old, and had been sent to investigate alien worlds centuries ago. It suffered computer senility. Exposure to cosmic rays had done its more sensitive instruments no favors. Nonetheless, the probe continued its understanding of its mission.

It dispatched a surveillance probe via a silken balloon relying on a cunning combination of solar heating and compressed hydrogen to make it lighter than air. At least the artificial silk could be trusted. The balloon inflated and rapidly ascended beyond the ability of its camera to focus. It also spun uncontrollably in the winds above the mesa.

Probe 1183 sat in the pile of silvery artificial silks that had been its parachute and the dull gray rags that had been its impact cushions. It raised its own camera, which saw nothing except silvery silk. It deployed its five legs--it was a radial symmetry--and staggered up, and promptly overbalanced and fell on its left side. At least the silks were dislodged, and the camera was now free to scan the horizons.

The local star was white. The landscape was mostly bare earth interrupted by patches of plant life and aggressive plant life such as the spiny cactus attached to the last cushion. The probe's main computer dithered over whether this was an emergency or just some sort of misunderstanding. The defense computer took over the sample-taking arm and dispatched it to the popped air-bag, and aggressively collected samples. The sample arm, which had been neat and silvery eleven light years ago,

Fiction

now had some scratches in its finish.

The samples analysis computer promptly quit in a snit. The main computer checked the signals and network connections internally, and restarted the analytics hardware. It rerouted the defense computer through the drones to keep it busy and out of the way. The analytics computer promptly stated it was going on strike and refused to work in these unnaturally dry conditions.

The defense computer rerouted subroutines, seized control of the samples arm, and squished the sample into cactus juice, which it then dumped over the hump that was the analysis computer's housing.

The samples analysis computer, being the most limited of the five inside the probe's housing, did not fight back. It did burn some of the cholla's mass for chemical analysis, and ran a microscoped camera over the sample.

The sample arm, trying to do analysis while also trying to defend against errant cacti, waved at the sky and tangled itself in the parachute. The camera arm watched. The main computer tried to take control of the self-repair soldering arm, to cut off the defense computer. The maintenance and repairs computer fought back, deploying malware it was supposed to prevent. The defense and main computers were both distracted by trojans.

The repairs computer, in control of the repair arm, deployed it to cut the probe clear of cholla and parachute. It dodged the waving samples arm, and hit the camera arm with a solid thump. The camera arm shook, then hit back.

The defense computer promptly deployed one of the defensive spheres, blowing the repair arm clean off in the detonation. The samples analysis computer quit again, and went into hibernation. The camera arm deployed a miniature arm to wipe the soot and debris off the camera lens.

The main computer and communications computer raced to get a distress call out and a request for directions. The Defense computer succumbed to the maintenance computer's trojans, and went into hibernation. The maintenance and repair computer seized control of the sample and camera arms, but could not use them to actually reattach the maintenance and repair arm.

The repair computer kept trying to use the camera arm's miniature arm and the sample collection arm to pick up the repair arm: two arms, neither of which actually reached the fallen arm, kept trying to stretch and reach it across the humps of the computer housings. At best, they knocked it further out of reach. For an hour they were playing soccer, knocking the broken arm back and forth to each other. The camera arm won the game, knocking the repair arm off the probe and to the dirt below.

The repair computer, focussed on regaining and reattaching the repair arm, ignored the dust and damage to the solar collectors. As the other computers failed, the repair computer played its soccer solitaire until the gears seized up. The repair computer radioed for instructions, as a matter

Fiction

of last resort.

A pair of javelinas saw the movement of the probe's arms. They did not approach the probe, but watched from a safe distance. As the probe did not smell like food, they did not disturb it. Once the arms ceased moving, they nosed up to it and sniffed closer, then wandered off.

Coyotes investigated the probe, claimed it as their territory. Bats flew over it. Dust and dirt collected on it, got blown off, then re-deposited during the haboobs of the monsoon. A peregrine saw a flash of sun off the camera, dove, and came out of the dive when no rabbit was visible.

The repair computer reached for contact with the balloon probe, but nothing came of it.

A pair of horsemen, having heard of some mechanical contraption outside the ranch disturbing the wildlife, dismounted and approached a pile of dust and dirt and metal struts. They wore spurs, dusters against the wind, and Colt 'Frontier' revolvers.

The camera arm rotated, still able to do that much, and focused on them. The repair computer tried to wake the central and defense computers from hibernation. The central computer played a succession of random noises in the one centimeter band. The defense computer warned that a fatal exception had occurred and that payment to an electronic address back on homeworld was necessary to reboot.

The repair computer went through what files it could access in the rest of the probe, and spat out five spherical explosives. The camera watched as the explosives rolled out rather than jumped out.

The men, seeing silvery balls rolling toward them, argued about what to do. The younger man reached to pick one up as it detonated, and he lost two fingers from his right hand. The other had mounted and ridden off before the first could finish wrapping a bandana around that hand. Once he could concentrate enough, he rode off to warn the boss that Old Scratch was a mechanical man off the farm.

No more humans bothered the probe. Animals came and went, a saguaro took root to compete with the cholla. Rains came and went.

Three years on, the repair computer went into permanent hibernation.

Twenty-two years later, the rusty remains of the probe received the news that mission control had been destroyed shortly after launch. A repeating recording played to the probe.

"You are our last hope, Probe 1183!"

You get what you pay for.



HONORABLE MENTION

Call Me Bathysklera

By Jack Nichols

A great knocking on the main door reverberated through the dormitory, a red brick building with paneling and slate tile floors. Two doors opened in the hallway, across from each other.

A tall, dark blonde-haired elf woman came out of the left, dressed only in her night dress, bare feet thudding against the tiles. "Who would that be at this hour?"

A shorter, red-haired woman came out of the right, also clad only in a night dress. "Are we under attack?" she asked.

The first woman, Proctor Episophia, smoothed her skirts and walked to the double doors, under assault again. The second woman, a priestess named Sophoclea, followed.

Someone outside spoke a spell, and the doors burst open, allowing snowy air to enter and overcome the women.

"Who dares assault a Temple dorm?" yelled Episophia. *I hope I don't get shot for this.*

"Identify yourselves! You profane holy ground with each and every step." She walked to face her invading force.

Sophoclea followed, hugging herself against the cold.

Their eyes clearing, the women saw a pair of files of men with flintlock muskets standing just inside the doors. A chestnut haired man in a sable coat stood at the head of one of the files, and a mouse-grey haired man stood at the head of the other. Chestnut wore a diadem in his hair, with an emerald shining in the dawn's early light.

"Your majesty!" said Episophia. "We were not warned to expect you."

"My liege," said Sophoclea, "welcome to our Temple."

Episophia performed a courtesy, and upon standing shocked herself by confronting the king. "Your majesty, it ill behooves thee to barge into a woman's dormitory in a temple to goddess Elaphebolo when you know her penalties for seeing maidens." *I hope he doesn't go berserk on me. I've heard stories.*

"I think the goddess can indulge a father's concern for his daughter." Chestnut walked, nay, paced from one side of the doorway to the other.

"My liege, had we been warned we would have prepared--" said Episophia.

"Then the king must needs be obeyed upon arriving. No warning means she can't flee her responsibilities." The king's eyes flashed violet in the dim hall, catching a lantern's light and reflecting much like a cat's.

Fiction

“Your highness, we ask that you wait while we awaken her. It is not meet that a man walk these halls. This is a woman’s dormitory!” The taller woman spoke, looking down.

“Very well. Guards, we will await my daughter outside. Mustn’t have the king appear to be whoring around the heralds.” He turned his back on the women and strode the way he had come.

The women both sighed in relief. Then they walked down the hall to seek their princess. They tried a door at the far end of that weakly lit hall, and found it locked against them. Sophoclea produced a key, only for the lock to refuse it.

Ten minutes later, and an elven guard appeared at their elbow. “The king grows impatient, and would know where his daughter is.”

“Locked in and sulking, at a guess,” said Sophoclea. Episophia shushed her. “Asleep, perchance, and not answering the door,” she said.

The guard looked at the lock, and drew a pistol. “The king demands his daughter’s attention.” The guard then shot the doorlock, which fell to the floor. It clattered even as the echoes of the shot bounced down the hall. Gunpowder smoke drifted, and doors up and down the hall opened.

Sophoclea berated the guard for awakening all their charges, but walked into the *princess’s room*. The bed had not been slept in. No signs of a struggle marred the room’s pristine condition; the desk and bookshelves were all neat and clear. The wardrobe, too, was intact as far as the women could tell.

The priestess and the proctor accompanied the guard to the other end of the dorm, where the king stood impatiently.

“I can tell by your faces that she is not here. What means this?” The king, Skyles, looked from one face to the other.

Episophia swallowed. “Your majesty, she is gone without permission. There is no sign of a struggle, and everything is well kept.” *Do not profane this holy place with violence now, please!* Skyles, King of Astropylaea, looked down upon the women. “I have the brother of Queen Perikleia in my castle, expecting to meet his bride this day, and you have lost her? How do you lose a princess?”

“We did not lose her, your majesty. She is not where she is supposed to be, granted, but ‘lose’ is a strong word. She is out without permission--” Episophia tried to explain.

“She is gone from here. I will have my daughter, today.” The king turned from the women to his men. “Summon a company--there’s a telegraph here somewhere--to search the entire facility. My own daughter does not get to disobey me.” He turned to Episophia. “Where is your telegraph room?”

Episophia swallowed, and swallowed again. Kings are dangerous, and prone to outbursts. “My liege, let me at least get decently dresses, that I may lead you there.”

“What, modesty? You’re a priestess, I know how you get new acolytes when no one volunteers. No, lead me now!” Skyles pointed to the carriage

Fiction

he had arrived in.

"At least a coat, your majesty?"

Episophia was feeling the cold, even if the king was not. Sophoclea had already retreated to her own chambers, Episophia noted. *Abandoned in the face of the enemy--I'll remember that.* Skyles relented. "Fine, but be quick. I have a princeling awaiting his princess." He looked into Episophia's green eyes. "You would think she'd appreciate relocating to warm Diogenera."

Meanwhile, a man in tights and doublet strode up the stairs to the entry to the temple's post and *kerygian* office. As a place of public activity, it was removed from the main Temple by a cobblestone side street and a macadam frontage road from the highway. As a Temple building nonetheless, a colonnade surrounded it. The man peeked around corners and behind columns, calling.

"Oy, I'm lookin' for an apprentice Keryx!" He stooped down to peek at ground level, and straightened up when he saw a herald on a stone bench. "You the one as wanted a coach to the train?"

A dark-haired and round-faced woman in the undyed cloth of an apprentice herald looked up. She shook her head 'yes,' and stood up from the marble seat.

"Got your ride right here. Any baggage?" He looked at the bags on the bench and sighed heavily.

She pointed with her chin at a daybag and duffel. The man who had called her scowled.

"Got a weight limit--"

She pulled her moneychain out of her bodice, plucked a drachm off it.

"On how much baggage--"

She pulled a tetradrachm off it.

Right, I'll just load up the coach, then. Hop on up, you're paying enough to get it to yourself."

She smiled, did him a courtesey. She followed him as he grunted and groaned under her load, mumbling the whole brief walk to his coach. She opened the coach door, and stepped up and in. She heard him grunting as he loaded the duffel underneath, and hoped that the coach's undercarriage was strong enough for it.

The herald looked out the window, saw no one following, and slid the shutters back in place. She sighed, and sat back against the hard wood of the coach's seat.

She shuffled through her daybag again, grabbed some deer jerky and began chewing. She checked her jewelry case, and set it back within the dress she used as padding around it. She looked at the inscription on her daybag, and took her belt knife to mutilate the Epsilon-epsilon-epsilon, trying to change it to a Beta-beta-beta. She doubted it would fool a determined pursuer, but every effort was worth the attempt.

She listened to the coachman climb up and refuse an offer, and the

Fiction

horses took to the road. She breathed a deep sigh of relief, and her shoulders unclenched a little. She felt rather than heard the wheels rolling on the cobblestones, then the changeover to the asphalt of the Gikarta Highway, that led to the train station. She opened the shutters on her left to watch the road pass by, and watched as the student dormitories and class rooms of the Temple changed to the cheap apartment complexes and cookshops of the student rookery, then the stables for the caravans from Gik-Arta and Khrysoptolis and the outside world. She breathed another sigh of relief when they were outside the City walls, and idly scratched the point of her right ear.

She smelled the coal smoke of the trains before the coachman pulled off the highway to the station road. Cold air is not improved by coal smoke.

The coach rolled to a stop outside the station, a city in itself, or at least a large walled town. She carefully stepped out of the coach, and awaited the coachman's wrestling with her duffel.

"Damn, lady, you have a side of venison in here or something?"

She smiled at him, reached into her bodice and pulled another drachm off her moneychain. He grunted and accepted it. She did him another courtesy, and waved for a porter.

A large man, possibly part troll since he was at least dimpled at him.

He looked at it, looked at her, and shrugged. He bent, grabbed it, and tossed the strap over his shoulder.

"Which track?" He paused to light a cigar.

"Which one departs for the Panopolis?" She watched his eyes.

"Direct, or through Nikopolis along the river?"

"Oh, dear me, let me check my ticket." She pulled out a sheet of card-stock, with the typed information. "I guess I'm following the river."

"Right, track three. Keep up."

He grunted and set a harsh pace. She grimaced but pulled up her skirts to keep up. She smelled incense, and noticed the troll-man was exuding smoke from his tricorn and his beard, not just his cigar.

"Wait, are you on fire?"

He grunted, looked over his shoulder, and she saw his braided beard had incense sticks. She accelerated to catch up.

"Why the rush?"

"Train's leaving in a quarter hourglass." The half-troll stopped to answer.

"Don't stand there gossiping, hurry up."

"Heh. Told ya so."

They didn't quite sprint, but they were doing their best to invent speed walking as they reached the platform for Track Three. She gave him a tip of a drachm, and he grunted and bowed after he loaded the duffel in the train's undercarriage. She looked for the door onto the train, and walked quickly to catch it. A conductor was walking along the platform, calling for any last passengers for Nikopolis,

Fiction

Pterolithos, Panopolis and local stops along the way. She climbed on, and looked back.

She looked over the crowds, saw no one she recognized, and relaxed. No soldiers troubled the crowd. No watchmen or bounty hunters disturbed the scene. She was safe, for the moment.

The train stopped at the little towns between Polastera and Nikopolis, and people boarded and departed. She stood at a door, careful not to block it but watching every face in the crowds, or on the platforms whether crowded or not. Thus she spent her journey, watching, avoiding the men who would flirt and the women who would gossip. She also avoided the men who would gossip and the women who would flirt; she was very careful. She smelled the rot of hay, of the chill in the air, of pigs and cattle in the rural towns, of smoke and industry in the larger towns. She enjoyed the novelty of it all.

A Kindly Kimmerian man watched her from the cabin adjacent to the door. While his ears and eyebrows were pointed, he needed a shave, so she knew he was no full-blooded Kindness himself.

At Nikopolis, the suspicious-looking man left the train. She noted him out of then corner of her eye, as she had noticed him watching but not talking. Once he was out of sight in the throngs of the platform, she shifted her daybag to her shoulders, then rushed to the third car behind, and again placed herself at the door. Some men in uniform had come to the platform, and were watching the passengers. The suspicious-looking man talked to an officer, and the soldiers spread out. She ducked inside a compartment on the far side of the car, and pulled the shades.

Inside, she pulled out a hand mirror and unbraided her hair. She brushed it quickly, and twisted it into a much rougher braid. She checked her makeup, touched it up a bit. She emphasized her cheeks even more than they were naturally, and sighed at her reflection. She traded out her worsted *kerygian* dress for a simple woolen one, and then fitted a woolen bodice over it where she had had her silken one.

She left the compartment, and walked back to the door to the platform. The uniformed men were gone.

From the platform, anyway. One stood beside her. He scratched his pointed right ear and then pulled out a poster of a dark-haired woman with an elaborate hairstyle piled on top of her head. She wore a gold-threaded dress with brass or gold pins.

"Excuse me, miss, have you seen this woman?"

The keryx jumped a little, then made a show of looking it over, then decisively shook her head 'yes.'

"She had been on this train, but she got off here. Maybe you missed her in the crowd?"

"Did you talk to her, miss?" He rolled up the poster and pulled out a little book and pen.

She nodded 'no,' and made a face. "She seemed so standoffish, and I won't dare talk to a Lady without she speaks first, sir."

Fiction

He shook his head 'yes.' "For our records, your name, miss?"
"Bathysklera, an' it please you, sir." She watched his hands, not his face.

"Patronymic or matronymic?" The soldier took notes.

"Bathydameis, sir. Am I in trouble? Is she? Oo, was I on the same train as a highwaywoman?" She looked at his face, then away again.

"No need to get excited, miss. Just taking down witness statements."
He put the notebook in a coat pocket. "Excuse me, I have to clear this car."

She courtesied, and went back to watching people on the platform, her heart racing.

He opened every compartment, looked in, and talked to any people he found. He roughed up a Kimmerian couple, and pulled them both off the train, the woman protesting and the man nursing a swelling eye.

She turned away, closed her eyes. She waited until she could hear the commotion no longer, then looked out again. A conductor was calling for passengers, striding along. The Kimmerian couple was arguing with the uniformed men in their dark green tailcoats with brass buttons and tricorns. One of the men slapped the woman, and the Kimmerian drew back his fist to punch the slapper. One of the uniforms held him back, and the couple missed the train as it pulled out.

Bathysklera checked her makeup again, and went to the empty compartment she had changed in. She kept the shutters pulled, and lay down to try to rest.

She awoke to darkness, and banging on the door.

"Oy, everyone out, with your papers please!"

Bathysklera sat up, stretched, and ruffled through her day pack to find her papers. "Bathysklera Bathydameis, Apprentice Keryx, Writer and Printer" they proclaimed. She smoothed them out, and opened her compartment's pocket door.

A blue-uniformed man stood there, mostly hidden by a bright lantern that must have been a salamander fire spirit rather than a mere oil lamp. She squinted into the light while he examined her papers. He then took out a sheet of paper, and held her chin while comparing them.

"What's your name!"

"Bathysklera!"

"Where are you from?"

"Temple of Atana, in Polastera, under Master Katadikos." She sweated in the light.

"Very well. You look familiar, but not like the missing princess. You may continue."

The soldier let go of her face, and accepted the dekadrachm she had slipped him. He left, and she closed the compartment door behind him.

He'd left the poster, the one with her face on it. "Basilissa Eunike Eudikeis, Suspected Kidnap

Victim--Reward for Safe

Fiction

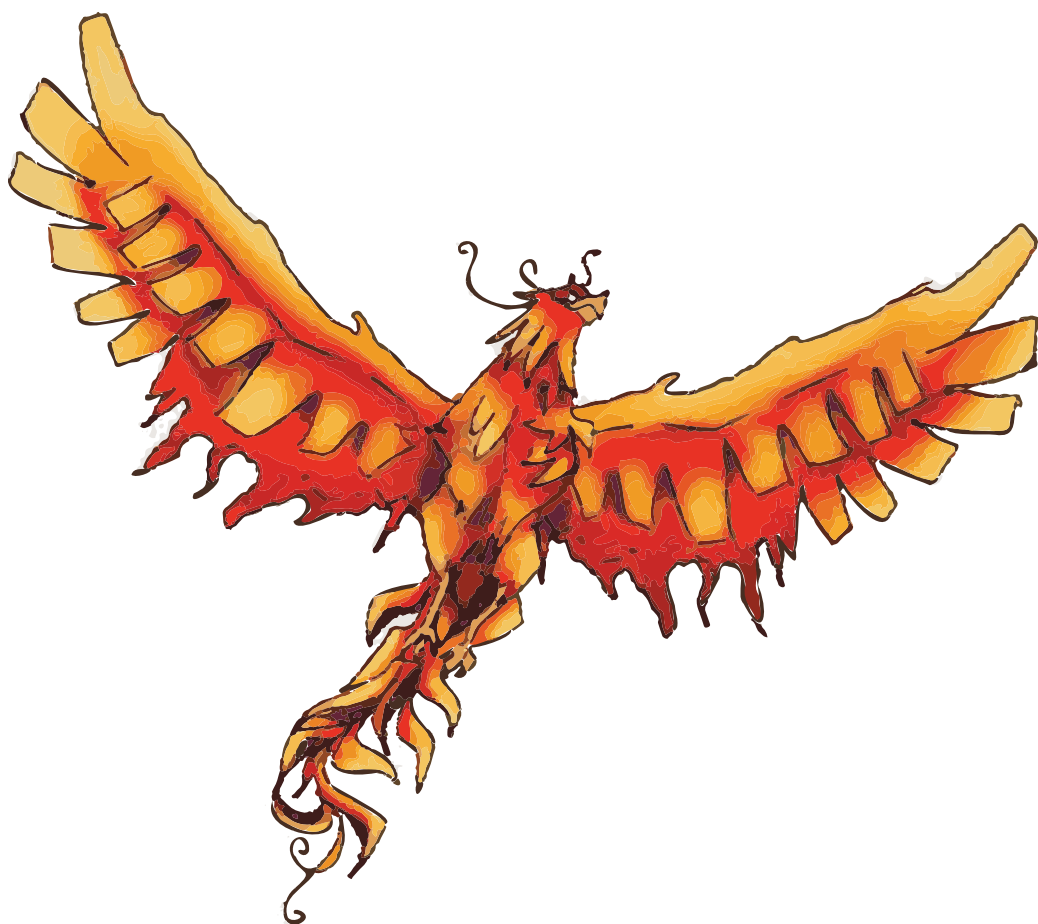
Return--Report to nearest Skopos if sighted--Reward One Mina.”

Bathysklera shivered in the night. She prayed the soldier was kind. She did not really sleep until well into the countryside again.

She reached the border without incident, and slept well again.



Creative Nonfiction



Creative Nonfiction

FIRST PLACE

Paper Jungle

By Angela Lili

I find myself in a place where even the most subtle whispers can echo, like the winds in a canyon. Not a sound is made, but there is an abundance of volumes. The walls are blank, the ceilings are blank, the tables are blank, but the pages are filled. I find myself in a place where there are aisles on aisles of limitless knowledge. The contexts are created from mindful thoughts, but only my mind is present. With so many chapters to explore, how am I the only one here?

The shelves are tall like a New York skyscraper. The wear and tear mimics the aroma of Seattle coffee. The fluorescent bulbs are bright like a scholar. The seats are clouds of cushioned comfort. The walls, ceilings, and tables remain bare, but they've housed students of plenty. The air is crisp like an October morning, but the ambiance is settling like a November evening. The rectangular papers are crammed into one, spiraled like the stairs nearby. Stacked on these skyscrapers are exhibits of art, with Victorian details engraved onto American gothic covers. Some are thrilling like the full moon on a starry night. Some are so horrific even with no show of teeth. It's the constant mystery that leaves me wanting more.

Even with an abundance of prints, their priceless value forever remains. They are cold to the touch but share warmth when they're held. These hardcovered luxuries provide the wealth some may never afford. They are rich with places to see, opinions to hear, foods to taste, and stories to tell. I can transit to London and be noble like the knights and kings. I can escape to Paris and fall in love with the beauty of romance. I can dive into the depths of the icy Arctic. I can even launch to the heights of an endless outer space, all without ever leaving this place. There are mountains to be climbed, woods to be trailed, rivers to be swam, and tropics of possibility. In this paper jungle, I can fly through the loose leaf like an early bird, or dig down deeper like a worm.

Opportunity fills these long aisles of emptiness. The outdated carpeting offers nostalgia, sending readers to a safe and familiar place. The musky scent is no different than that of a forest, bringing the beautiful outdoors inside. A vending machine filled with a nourishing buffet of sugar and salt is offered not too far away. The sounds of pages turning continue the echoes, as if a lonely hiker carried paper on his back through the canyon. The air unit ventilates a breeze that is far more refreshing than rainfall in the desert. Time here is limited, but the hours come full

Creative Nonfiction

circle when the next day begins. The clock stays ticking like a full-time job, offering a distant white noise. My foot taps along, creating waves of vibration. The cold breeze contributes to the this faint sound. Slight buzzing from the gray computers fills the rest. Whether it be research or leisure, these robots of information do not discriminate, for all that are curious are welcome here.

I come here to escape loud surroundings and bring myself peace. Although most of the books have collected layers of dust, it serves as a reminder that they will always be there. The skyscrapers are stable and the furniture has mounted its place in the floor. The clouds of cushion have sunken in low, like they have been left roadside on a rainy spring day. The tables may shake and the doors might creak, but know that this empire will never collapse. All points in time remain present here, providing any reader a valuable gift.

History or science, English or foreign language, there are no boundaries when it comes to this establishment. The average round trip flight will cost a pretty penny, but a library card is always free. If there is ever a desire to venture out and travel, all destinations are obtainable here. But like all things that are well and alive, it's time to give these passages a rest. The screens turn black and the lights dim low. The air cuts off and it's time to go. This is where the chapter ends, so I'll drag my feet out and close the doors. When the Earth makes its turn and the sun arrives for its morning shift, I'll be back once again. I'll be greeted with the same walls, ceilings, and tables, but this place is not bare. There are still empty pockets in my mind that are needing to be filled. The aisles of limitless knowledge created from mindful thoughts is the only thought on my mind.



Creative Nonfiction

SECOND PLACE

God Loves Ugly

By Chuck Wan

God I am ugly. I wear my scars like the rings on a pimp. I once stuck a fork in an electrical socket, and still remember the sudden shock to my body; obviously I tried it again.

Occasionally my legs twitch, I'm not sure if there are any connections to the fork incident as a child. The hot stove called my name and tempted me to touch it, inevitably I learned to cook at a young age. A patch of melted skin from when I burned my left hand by reaching up and grabbing a hot light bulb still remains. My skin bubbled up like blowing a bubble with Bubblicious bubble gum and I popped it with my index finger as soon as it inflated. They immediately rushed me into the doctor's office aka my grandma's room, everyone hovered around in concern for my wellbeing. Below my left eye is a scar caused from walking into a tree branch at the Grand Canyon, there was blood and panic everywhere, but luckily, I did not damage my actual eye. I cried during all those moments.

I'm an ugly crier. My face mushes up and then water starts falling uncontrollably down my face. I must have been quite the asshole of a kid, because I remember crying louder and stomping my feet on purpose when being ignored, doubling down on the ugliness. The worst is when I want to speak but the crying takes over so much, I end up saying only one word at a time while trying to catch my breath. Crying makes the cheeks on my face hurt and I always feel so tired afterwards. I wipe my eyes profusely to get the tears out until they turn bloodshot red, leaving me with a burning sensation, and making me want to keep rubbing them just like scratching an itch. My nose drips with snot, and when I'm really in the feels, it falls to my mouth, giving my tongue a mixture of salty tears and slime for taste.

By the time I became a teenager, acne turned into an unwanted brother for me. Everywhere I went, acne followed along, trying to hang out with my friends and ruining any chances I would have with a girl. I never wanted to have a younger sibling, he just showed up in my life one day, crying and looking for attention; my parents are the ones to blame. I tried countless creams and treatments to get rid of it, but it always gets angry and comes back stronger. They say what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger, and my acne looked like the Incredible Hulk, destroying the city in order to save the world, but the city was my face. The worst is when a pimple appears under my nostril or eyelid, not only is it noticeable, but I am also reminded of its presence with pain and discomfort until it pops.

Creative Nonfiction

The acne stayed well into adulthood, and even now, I sometimes wake up to find it watching me sleep. We did eventually grow apart, but the years we spent together left scars on my face like what meth does to an addict.

Out of a desperation to make new friends, I smoked and drank for a period of my life. Cigarettes burned my lungs, they made me want to vomit, but I did get lightheaded. The only thing I chased while smoking cigarettes was the light headedness, it helped me get rid of stress. For me, this only created an endless loop of smoking for every little moment, every excuse I can find, because addiction needs every excuse to multiply. Once I quit, so did the bad breath and the added social pressures of taking smoke breaks. I'm not a fan of drinking alcohol neither, my face turns into a tomato as soon as I take one sip. I have an alcohol allergy and instead of getting "happy" drunk, I skip the drunk phase and immediately get a throbbing headache, feel like shit, and want to go to sleep. This is the one aspect where I see my alcohol allergy as being beautiful, because with my tendencies I would probably be madly in love with alcohol, but my ugliness helped me avoid a toxic relationship.

All that is gold does not glitter, and this ugly is the gold that doesn't glitter at all. However, gold is gold, and my ugliness has taught me lessons of selfishness, made me hate the reflection in the mirror, and helped reshape my perception of beauty. No matter how hard you scrub, you can't wash the ugliness out of that face of yours. You learn to love the things that people picked on you for at in school. You learn to love those ugly moments you've had, because you learn to hold onto those pictures that brought on the rain. Live with the scars, accept the pain, and embrace how you live; cause god loves ugly.



Creative Nonfiction

THIRD PLACE

The Lynx Lake Trail

By Joselyn Maria Lopez

If I could live deep in a forest surrounded by critter creatures, I would without a doubt. There's something magical about being surrounded by greenery. It takes me to enchanted kingdoms and transports me through worldly dimensions. It pulls me into folklore legends with mythical creatures, being beckoned by talking baby animals or lead by glowing petals. There're endless ways that my mind tends to drift far and wide to such earthy spaces in time.

My favorite place to go, to be away from the city, is Lynx Lake. It's within the Prescott National Forest; there's a trail that goes along the lake. All around it. A half-dirt and half-paved trail. To go around the lake, depending on the pace, takes approximately forty minutes. I take roughly that time; I enjoy walking at a leisurely pace to be able to relish the scenery and tranquil atmosphere.

The trail is a loop around the lake. On the uneven side of the dirt-trail is a dam that had been build in 1962. And on its side is what I like to call a giant ruler; it's painted in white and marked in black ink are the measurements in feet. There are many rocks, wood, and bark of various sizes and lengths sprawled near the dam. And depending on the season there's lots of running water that sometimes it's not safe to cross. The waters can rise so high that crossing isn't an option, as one misstep can sweep you underwater and the force of the current would carry you to the lake. Other times, parts of the lake dry up and passing the dam is effortless.

Every time I set foot in Lynx Lake and every time the sun hits the trees and the lake at the right moment, I stay in awe. It's unexplainable magical. I tend to go here mostly during the weekends and I never want to head home afterward. My favorite time of day to go is when the sun begins to set, when the skies turn from a bright azure to a mix of baby sky-blue and golden as the sun begins to hide away to sleep among the stars. And the trees appear a little darker, the shadows moving, waiting to prance on unsuspecting visitors. The lake goes quiet and still, the people start to leave, and tranquil silence settles over the forest.

The trail also has bridges and benches to be able to rest and savor the views. There's one that I enjoyed very much, one that lets me sit and view the whole lake without trees in the way or without people crossing by. I stayed there to immerse myself in the simple act of breathing in the calmness that it delivered. I lingered more than usual and watched as one

Creative Nonfiction

lonely duck swam by and paddled its way to shore. Its yellow feet waddled as it walked in the grainy sand, staying close to the water. It never once quacked and once it heard my voice it flew away just as a seagull glided ahead, the tips of its feathers brushed the water with so much precision and grace. It flew low, watchful, and gawking to catch the numerous jumping fish. The fish leaped in the air one after another then dived back in, leaving amidst a trail of bubbles in their wake.

I stayed facing the lake as I drank huge lungfuls of air into my system. Absorbing all the raw essence of nature into my lungs, letting it sink through. The water reflected the cloudless skies and the endlessly eternal tones of the trees as if the branches of the trees couldn't decide on one season alone. The contrasting hues of green, lime-green, yellow slowly faded into orange, a deep red, and back to green all over again. The patterns repeated seamlessly together.

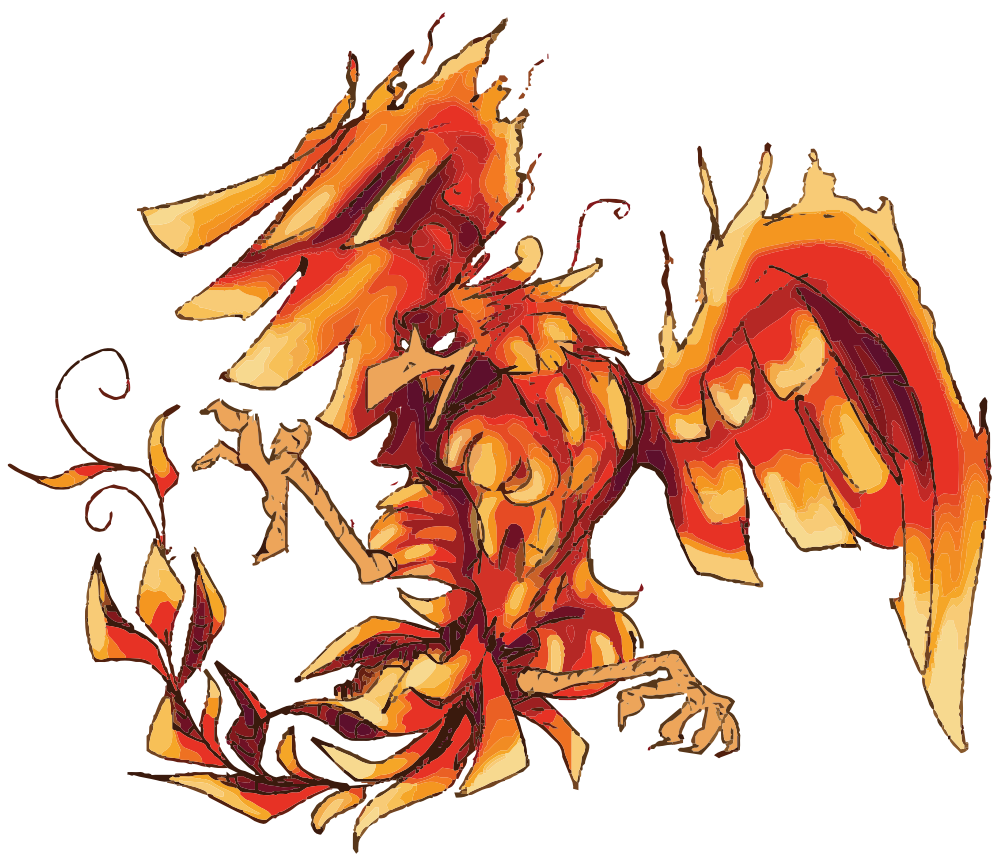
Lynx Lake never ceases to astound me. It's even more magical during the winter seasons when the lake freezes to complete ice and hoarfrost clings to the leaves and rocks like feathery needles. And the snow blankets the entire forest. The air colder than usual with a sharp cutting taste to it, slicing with each breath of intake. Everything a little darker as if one walked into an entirely different page in a book. Each season a chapter waiting to be read, to be explored and immersed in its magic.

When I want to savor the last rays of the sun before heading home, I go for a run around the lake, allowing the air to brush against my face. Cold and sharp. And I imagine being chased by fierce kings or running away from broken down kingdoms aspiring to swallow me whole into their world forever. I run until all my worries evaporate into nothing, and my thoughts get consumed in daydreams.

Home is where the heart is. A simple phrase that can be understood when calmness lies within ourselves and no matter the circumstances or what the world throws at us, we'll be fine because we'll always be at home no matter how far we go. I know this because every time I get to be surrounded by fields of green and pure air, I allow myself to relax and let everything go and only focus on the present, on what matters the most—living my life in the moment. And as I look at nature and the beauty of it all, I know I'm home and I allow myself to live.



Poetry



Poetry

FIRST PLACE

Fury

By Abbigayle McCall

Like the Earth, we're all just rocky terrain
starting out pure through and through
ubiquitous universes unraveling in our brain
but time inevitably builds, and we build too.

Collecting and cementing shiny layers of things anew
ideas, experience, interests, attractions
like sticky magnets, they saw us and flew.
Encapsulating and puzzle-piecing those fractions,
sticking together with glue

into our world like sedimentary,
the layers pile on endlessly.
It's easy to get lost in the multitudes,
to feel like a fraud standing in your own shoes.

The mathematical world likes neat little boxes,
package it up and stick a nice label on it.
So, we seek a magical hat of sorting
to assign us our signs, types, and houses; hope they're not boring.

But you can't stick a label on something ever-changing,
you'll run out of tape and words and time spent adhering.
Our layers will forever keep growing and growing,
so, grab all your label makers and get started on throwing.

There's a battlefield in our hearts
of the interests and voices begging to be heard.
It constantly sways so we play different parts
until a reigning victor demands recognition and explore.

Poetry

But to declare one is to annihilate another,
when that other is a fraction of ourselves.
It's getting pushed to the back burner,
and we scream "Don't leave me behind!
Don't forget me on a dusty old shelf!"

Originally, we're one,
but we collect and cement
'till we weigh many tons.
We weather and fray and ferment
under pressure that builds and builds
'till we inevitably buckle under.

The oldest, the lowest, the layers we once knew
all crush together in an unrecognizable stew.
And we ask ourselves "How did I get here?
What happened to the person I used to be?"
Untouchable, pure, whole, and—oh so, shiny.

I'm angry, I miss her:
unapologetically me.
Now I'm wallpaper hiding
and afraid of what I see.

The world throws around diagnoses
to explain the weathering of our parts,
but it happens to the best of us,
and the best of us are filled with fury at heart.



Poetry

SECOND PLACE

“The Lonely Trees”

By Joselyn Maria Lopez

Don't you think the trees get lonely,
As the sun slowly falls to sleep?
Or is it only me that sees the shadow
That crawls into the night?
Don't you think the trees tell a story,
With each rustle of their leaves?
Or is it only me that listens to their glory,
Filled with fables and lore?
Don't you think their bark groans in their sleep,
As each leaf gets plucked away by the wind?
Or is it only me that hears their weep,
As they remain naked in the cold?
Don't you think the trees get lonely,
Or is it only me that can't bear the thoughts
Of leaving them to the crawling shadows,
Or to the wind that mocks them as night falls?
Do you know why the trees cry?
Do you know why they curse at the sky?
It is because they outlive everything that passes
With not a soul to see them other than a tree.
Do you see now why the trees grow lonely?

Poetry

THIRD PLACE

“To Sleep in a Sea of Stars”

By Abbigayle McCall

Beginnings always twinkle...

little strands of glitter floating on time wrinkles,
waves that wade & wake the generations,
the nebulas, the new world formations.

Recycle the rendezvous conclusions,
orphaned deathly passing of deceitful collusions.
A spectacular show, a supernova finale
lights a golden runway for life to go dancing.

The first cry of life, has stardust in its eyes
they twinkle so bright, wade like the tides.
Stardust founds our very existence,
so just take a moment to whisper, and it'll carefully listen.

How poetic that it all lies in the sky,
our stories, our fates, our wishes that fly...
Yet, following suit: if you shine brighter than the rest,
your time on Earth will be made less and less.

Stars that are bigger, that are brighter than the Sun
burn out so much quicker than even the blaze of a gun.
And those who are loving, vibrant, and sweet,
who trail blaze mountains and sweep you off your feet,
will be swept away in a most terribly ironic and tragic way.

To live your life with a heart so large, swell with love,
To be fatally diagnosed with a heart enlarged, swell with muck.
To live your life as Marilyn, a burning, bright star,
To be burned unfairly, burnt out, left as smoldering tar...
As the Fates show their treacherous, tumultuous tarot cards.

Time treks on, trailing the tides,
and everything and one will eventually die,
return to its core, to its form, to its root,
the blueprint of death is our starlight debut.

The root of everything can be mapped above and afar,
where we float and we sleep in a sea full of stars.

Poetry

HONORABLE MENTION

“A Box of Memories”

By Joselyn Maria Lopez

Time has aged it.
Before, the edges were perfect;
Aligned to all four corners.
But now, it cracks like my sanity.

Once it was pure,
Purer than the first rays of the sun,
Purer yet than the first drop of snow,
Before pollution tainted its core.

And now, as I lift it tentatively,
Awaiting for the surge
Of memories to resurface,
They don't come.

Not yet, not until I'm engulfed
By emotions so strong, vI tremble,
As they claw their way into my insides,
Seeping through minuscule cracks.

And I fear it will tear me apart,
With each image and punctured thought at a time,
As they emerge, one after another,
Without warning,
Faster than lightning.

For the box might be worn and dull,
But inside, inside
It's as if time stood still.
As if all the raw emotions stayed rooted in place,
And there's no uprooting them.

Poetry

HONORABLE MENTION

Enochs

By Payton Sparks

I order a whiskey sour.
Red wine sits on rye.

Across the bar, a man stands,
With a beer in hand,
Cuddling up on another that's dressed as a woman
In a skirt and long
Fishnet stockings.

I am not sure he knows,
But I can tell
He is happy.
His every move is soft.
His arms wrap around her
His head buries itself into her neck
And the world around them slows down
To the tune of drunks singing karaoke and the smell
Of cheap tequila shots.

I stir my drink
And, without taking a sip,
Wished them a good night.



One Act Play Drama



Drama

FIRST PLACE

A Primer on Kimmerian Witchcraft

By Francis Wiget

EXT. Train station - DAY

Establishing shot of a 19th century-style train station. Two sets of tracks lead off into the snow in both directions. On the platform sits a ticket counter, where an elf-man with a shaved head sells tickets to a line of elves, half-elves and humans. The elves are in silks and fine wool, 18th century-style skirted coats and tricorn hats. The humans are in shapeless cloaks over draped clothing, ancient Greek style.

KLEO (24), a red-haired elf-woman in a scarlet great coat-and-half-cloak stands in line, saddlebags over her shoulder, with a half-elf woman Halirrhothe HALI (22), in a skirted coat and breeks, beside her. Hali speaks with a Germanic accent, rolling her "r"s and putting words in strange order.

HALI

You are sure of this?

KLEO

That witch was a fake!

HALI

I do not think so.

Her crystal ball showed us a vision of the night of the home invasion.

KLEO

I don't know how she faked that, but she did.

(beat)

So I'm going to try my luck at the Kimmerian Embassy.

HALI

You would more certain sound, if you did not repeat yourself so much.

KLEO

You don't have to come with me through the line.

HALI

I worry about you.

Kleo hugs Hali. Hali stands stiffly, then relaxes and hugs Kleo back.

KLEO

I worry about you too! Now let me get on my way.

Hali turns and leaves.

Kleo watches Hali leave. The person behind her nudges her when the line in front of Kleo advances.

Kleo steps up to the counter.

Drama

EXT. Train station - DAY

Kleo steps off her train, from a first class compartment. Glazed windows rather than mere shutters.

She walks to the platform and follows the crowd. A half-dozen people mill toward the sign that says "STABLES" and Kleo follows.

EXT. Stables, DAY

Kleo finds the stables outside the station proper.

She walks up to a STABLEMASTER, a half-elf smoking a cigar in a warm cabin with a window to the outside.

Kleo knocks on the window.

The Stablemaster opens it and leans out, cigar first.

KLEO

How much to rent a horse overnight?

STABLEMASTER

What kind of collateral ya got?

Kleo rolls her eyes. She looks through her saddlebags.

She pulls out a cabochon cut cat's eye agate.

KLEO

How about this?

STABLEMASTER

B'ain't worth a horse. Got more?

Kleo frowns, and goes through her pockets.

KLEO

And this?

She proffers a moonstone pendant in a silver necklace.

The Stablemaster takes it in hand, looks at it through a jeweler's loupe, and nods.

KLEO

I want a receipt for both of those.

(beat)

How much is the actual rent?

The Stablemaster scratches his head.

STABLEMASTER

You said overnight?

(beat)

That'll be two drakhmae.

Kleo frowns at him, but pulls out a bracelet with coins attached, pulls off two silver drakhmae, and hands them over.

Drama

STABLEMASTER

Right! Hold on while I show you your horse.

The Stablemaster closes the window.

Kleo stands waiting, snow collecting on her hood and melting away.

She pulls out a pocket watch from her girdle. She looks at it, sighs, and puts it away.

The Stablemaster appears, bundled up in multiple shirts with their cuffs sticking out from under his coat, which is too big for him.

He waves at Kleo to follow him.

They walk to a stall, and Kleo saddles up the mare.

The Stablemaster writes out a receipt, checks off some markings on his own paperwork, and gives Kleo her receipt.

Kleo leads the horse out of the stall, mounts up, and rides out into the snow.

Ext. Castle - Night

Kleo rides in through a gate.

Two human guards rush to meet her, wearing mail and white surcotes over their armor; they point muskets at the woman.

Kleo dismounts.

The guards pantomime opening a coat and searching pockets. She opens her coat, turns out her pockets.

The guards look at each other and nod.

Kleo turns to the horse and takes a saddlebag off, throwing it over her shoulder.

They point their muskets at her again; she opens the saddlebag to show clothes inside.

They look at each other, and shake their heads. They lead her to the gate of the castle proper.

One hangs back to follow her.

KLEO

You boys get many elves out here? Or is there another reason for the paranoia?

One soldier grunts, the other pokes her in the back with his bayonet. She walks in through the gate.

INT: Castle Hall, Night

Kleo walks, upright and tall, to meet the man waiting for her just inside the hall, ANALYKOS. He wears a tunic and hose and a frown under a chin-beard and a mustache.

Drama

ANALYKOS

We received your telegram. We have yet to receive any official recognition from your Queen, though.

(beat)

As it is late and the rules of hospitality demand we show you some courtesy, we will house you for the night.

KLEO

Thank you so much. Are you always so welcoming?

ANALYKOS

You are clearly special, so we have set a side special accommodations for you.

KLEO

Such as. . .?

ANALYKOS

Isolated so you cannot bewitch anyone. Above ground so you are cut off from anything from the underworld.

Analykos makes a gesture, his thumb between his middle and ring fingers.

KLEO

You know that's just superstition, right? I don't have the evil eye.

ANALYKOS

But you do not deny you are a witch--you made sure to mention it in your telegram!

KLEO

Well, yes. That's my job--as a firewitch I keep buildings from burning down.

She pauses to look around.

KLEO

You should be mostly safe, but you might want more exits should anything burn in the main hall here.

(beat)

You'd otherwise have crowds stomping on people trying to get out.

ANALYKOS

Are you threatening us?

He puffs up, standing on tiptoes to match her height (she is wearing heels), and sets his hands on his hips.

KLEO

Hardly. Just trying to help.

(beat)

You are defensive, aren't you.

She pulls a cigarillo out of her coat sleeve and casually lights it with a matchstick. She inhales, then exhales a smoke ring.

Analykos waves the smoke away.

Drama

ANALYKOS

Your petty tricks do not intimidate us! Guard, escort her to her room.
(beat)

You know, the Crow Tower

A guard steps forward and nods. He leaves his musket in a rack inside the gate, then draws a broadsword and prods Kleo with it.

KLEO

I bet you do that to all the girls.

They exit through a door to a spiral staircase.

INT: Conical Room - Night

Kleo walks around the room,

crouching. She grumbles to herself.

She bars the door behind her, and finds water and a bathtub waiting.

She pours water into the tub, pulls a privacy screen between herself and the door, and takes a bath.

She squeals at how cold the water is. Minutes later, she emerges from behind the screen with a towel wrapped around her.

KLEO

I think I've been in icewater warmer than that!

She looks around the room, then opens her saddlebag. She pulls out a change of clothes, a blanket, and clean underclothes.

(OUTSIDE) GUARD

10 of the clock, and the Crow Tower is clear!

Kleo drops her clothing as she jumps. She shakes herself, and dresses off-camera.

KLEO

No bed, no blanket, only a pad. Some hospitality.

She uses her saddlebag as a pillow and curls up with her blanket.

She tries to sleep, gives up, and braids her hair.

She tries to sleep again.

INT: Conical Tower Room - Day

(OUTSIDE) GUARD

6 of the clock and the Crow Tower's clear!

Kleo grumbles and rolls over. She looks up at the ceiling.

KLEO

O Anodomenyi, what did I do to deserve this?

She gets up stiffly, moving slowly and grimacing.

Drama

She puts clean clothes on over her underclothes.

She stretches, and lifts the bar on her door.

She tries to open it, to find it locked.

She goes through her saddlebag and pulls out a book with a title in ancient Greek, subtitle on screen reads "101 Uses for Fire Elementals in Crime Prevention and Solutions".

INT. Cramped Tower Room, Morning

A knocking on the door awakens Kleo, asleep with her head in her book. She jumps. Analykos unlocks the door and enters.

ANALYKOS

Well, if you have slept long enough, we can meet the ambassador after breakfast. They're still serving, so if we hurry. . .

Kleo pulls herself to her feet. She glowers at him, and he makes the sign against the evil eye.

KLEO

Food would be good, thank you. Let's go.

She follows Analykos out of the room.

INT. Great Hall, Morning

Two men sit at a table, signing at each other. A man sits across from them, more BOY (15) than man as he has no beard yet. Analykos leads Kleo to the table and seats her next to the boy. He then leaves the room.

KLEO

Well, gentlemen, what's on the menu this morning?

BOY

Uh, miss, um, porridge.

KLEO

Well, that what I usually have for breakfast--so that's something we have in common. What's your name?

BOY

Damoskleros, an' it please thee.

KLEO

I'm Kleometis--just call me Kleo. How do you fare today?

Damoskleros jerks back suddenly, reaches down to rub his leg. Kleo turns to the men across the table, both of whom are making the sign against the evil eye. Kleo rolls her eyes.

KLEO

I'm just talking to him. Are you boys feeling left out?

The two men sign fiercely at each other, and at Damoskleros. Damoskleros hems and haws and blushes.

Drama

KLEO

Boys, it's all right. I'm not bewitching him. I can sign, too!

The two men make the sign against the evil eye again, and stop signing to glare at Kleo. Analykos returns, two bowls of porridge in hand.

KLEO

Relax, all of you! I'm not bewitching anyone.

ANALYKOS

Of course you haven't. These two are deaf to your blandishments.

KLEO

And I have yet to meet a witch who can use signs to bewitch anyone.

Analykos jerks his head back, looks to the two men. They shake their heads. Analykos looks at the boy. Damoskleros shrugs, finishes his porridge and retreats from the table.

ANALYKOS

Have you already tried to seduce the boy? Have you no shame?

KLEO

I haven't tried to seduce anyone, thank you so much. Aren't there any women here in your embassy?

Kleo looks around, sees only men in armor or in tunics and hose.

ANALYKOS

We are not so decadent as to allow women to distract our brave men from their jobs.

Analykos nods to his deaf soldiers, in mail and surcotes. They stand up and walk behind Kleo.

KLEO

Wait, don't you try that--I haven't finished eating! Where is your famous hospitality?

One of the deaf men grabs Kleo by the shoulders and the other twists rope around her wrists behind her. She squeaks in surprise and frustration. She wears a garnet and a ruby ring on each hand.

Blink and you'll miss seeing each one glow a moment.

The two men roughly lift Kleo to her feet and hold an arm on each side. She doesn't resist.

ANALYKOS

There, we've pulled your fangs, witch. The ambassador will see you now. Analykos signs at the two men.

ANALYKOS

You can't sign, you are gagged before them--they are safe from your blandishments.

Drama

KLEO

Of course they are. Your hospitality and courtesy leave a lot to be desired, Annie.

Analykos stops walking, and turns toward her, and gets up in her face.

ANALYKOS

You are in no position to judge! You come here asking openly about magic, knowing we punish witches and sorceresses! What did you expect?

KLEO

I expected an audience wherein the

Ambassador would tell me what witches do, exactly, to deserve such punishment.

Kleo squirms, tries to get comfortable.

ANALYKOS

You come openly and seductively, first wearing men's clothes yesterday and now in a dress that's indecently short!

Kleo flips her braid as best she can, unable to reach it.

KLEO

My hair is up, I'm wearing boots so you can't see my ankles, what am I showing off to entice anyone?

Kleo flips her braid around, side to side.

ANALYKOS

If you say anything else I'll gag you. Hold your tongue until spoken too!

Kleo opens her mouth only to close it before Analykos can stuff a scarf he had ready to hand into her mouth.

ANALYKOS

Good, we can teach you to be a proper woman after all.

Exit all through a door to stairs.

INT. Castle office, Noon

Kleo stands between the two deaf men, each holding one of her arms.

She scowls at the AMBASSADOR, a heavily bearded man in a velvet tunic and heavy hose, sitting at a desk.

Kleo performs a curtsy despite being bound, and glares at the Ambassador.

KLEO

Is this how you greet all Elven guests, or am I special?

Analykos, between her and the desk, moves to slap her but the ambassador nods a 'no.' Analykos frowns and opens his mouth to protest, but the ambassador nods again and Analykos closes his mouth. The ambassador looks at Kleo in her scarlet dress, black corset, and knee-high boots.

Drama

AMBASSADOR

You telegraphed that you were coming to ask about witchcraft. You have admitted to being a witch yourself.

KLEO

Hardly. I know superstition when I see it--that doesn't make me a witch. Do you have a name, or do I just address you as Ambassador?
The ambassador stands up, shoving his chair back.

AMBASSADOR

You are insolent, woman! I will not share my name with a witch--you are an elf, of course you are a witch and an offense against Potideous!
(beat)
You will not ensnare me with your ways.

Kleo shrugs, squirms slightly. The ambassador nods to Analykos, who pulls a chair over to the desk. The two deaf men force Kleo into it, and wrap rope around her waist to secure her to the chair. The Ambassador nods to the two soldiers, who salute and leave. Analykos opens his mouth to protest, but the

Ambassador nods and Analykos shuts up, brow furrowed.

AMBASSADOR

I'm sure I can handle one bound woman, witch or otherwise. Do you want to stay to be sure she doesn't bewitch me?
Kleo squirms, and Analykos sighs. Analykos turns to leave.

ANALYKOS

The men will be jealous, your honor, you being alone with a woman.

AMBASSADOR

Let them be jealous. They will get to watch her burn in time.
Analykos leaves as Kleo goes pale and struggles in earnest.
The door closes behind Analykos.

KLEO

You promised free passage, you rat bastard!

AMBASSADOR

Louder, I don't think they heard you.
Kleo sputters as the Ambassador gets up. She kicks out at him as he approaches his chair. He has tears rolling down his face, and instead of attacking her hugs her. She freezes in his embrace.

KLEO

Uh, I'm really not into bondage. So what are you doing?

AMBASSADOR

You remind me so of my mother.
The ambassador sniffles for a moment.

Drama

AMBASSADOR

She was but a half-elf, and taught me my witchcraft.

(beat)

We don't have much time. Kimmerians don't write down their witchcraft, but a bastard tried to write down all our secrets--if he lives, he is to be found in Polastera.

(beat)

Lukophorus, Wolf-bearer, is his name.

Kleo lights her ruby, and slowly toasts the ropes around her.

KLEO

Is that why you did the show?

AMBASSADOR

Mother was abused by Father, but she loved me--Father just saw me as an heir to his estates to be married into into another family to better grow the estates.

We were knights, now we are barons. Mother loved me for myself--and so what if she was a witch?

The ambassador stare off into space, then comes back to reality. Kleo's ropes have burned through, and she tosses them off. Smoke swirls around the room.

KLEO

Thank you for telling me. I, I am sorry about your mother. She must have loved you deeply to admit to that.

The ambassador stamps out the embers of the ropes. He takes Kleo's hand and kisses it.

AMBASSADOR

I apologize for the welcome. We wouldn't want anyone suspecting. Tell me, how do you plan to escape?

Kleo looks around the room, looks at the charred rope, and frowns. She looks at the window--essentially a slit with a cone at the bottom. She frames the slit with her hands, squints, and opens a gate. Her face frowns, and she sweats.

KLEO

Want me to slap you or anything? Torch your finery? Something to make it clear I cheated and used magic to escape after all?

The ambassador knocks over a candle on his desk. He piles the telegrams he had sitting on his desk into the spilled wax and flame. He blows on them to excite smoke, if not quite a fire. He puts his collar into the flames.

Drama

AMBASSADOR

I'll think of something. Do be quick and quiet--they will try to kill you.

He pauses, a tear rolling down his cheek.

AMBASSADOR

You could be my mother's baby sister, with that hair.

He grabs her and kisses her forehead, then kicks her chair over.

AMBASSADOR

HELP! Betrayal, witchcraft!

Kleo takes the hint and flees through her gate, which opens in the stable.

EXT. Stables, Day

Kleo saddles her horse and mounts it, muttering to herself.

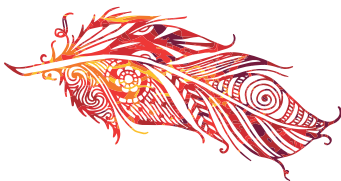
KLEO

I'll just have to let them have my only pair of breeks. Sidesaddle today, dammit.

Kleo rides for the gate, gathering momentum, and her opal pendant glows.

Her horse jumps over the gate, clearly impossible, but an airy, ethereal figure is just visible holding the horse high enough and then cushioning the horse's landing.

Kleo rides off screen as we hear a hue and a cry from the castle.



Drama

SECOND PLACE “Shadow Valley” By Sterling O’Ray

Fade In

EXT. Ghost Town - Day

The burning sun shines down upon a small ghost town that stretches along the scorching dirt horizon line. Reliving fond memories of the past when new rail and mining techniques invigorated the possibilities of making a fortune in this rugged country. It’s structures are rustic, vacant, and glisten with every angle found in the heart of the Adobe desert.

Faint WHISTLING fills the air. The ambience of desert and minimal WESTERN SONG hides in the

background. A tall, shadowy figure enters the foreground, whose shadow turns profile.

V.O. NARRATION (WITH WESTERN ACCENT)

It wasn’t always this way. Out here in the west, (pause) I’m the only one who’d know.

CUT TO:

MAIN TITLE: “SHADOW VALLEY” APPEARS ON SCREEN.
MUSIC CONTINUES TO PLAY IN THE BACKGROUND

FADE TO:

EXT. Saloon Porch - Day

The town is lively with townsfolk passing by. As the camera zooms in, a pair of polished boots walk in front of the screen coming into view. At a nearby saloon, TERRENCE TANTRASHER (dark hair, matching western attire, local cowpoke) is elaborately chatting and laughing amongst a series of flirty saloon girls, LADY ROSE (bright red lip, half up-down style), MISS KITT (flashy jewelry, styled curls), and BONNIE BELLE (colorfuleyeshadow, loose waves). The camera follows as the “stranger” in the boots walks up to the porch, the sound of footsteps in the dirt echoing.

TERRENCE TANTRASHER

And just like that- bang! I knocked them all out. Ever single one of them!

LADY ROSE

How many of ‘em’ did you say there were?

TERRENCE TANTRASHER

About as many of these fine jewels we have here!

Drama

Terrence Tantrasher playfully leans in and reaches towards Miss Kitt's jewels wrapped around her neck.

MISS KITT

Hands off the merchandise!

BONNIE BELLE

You ain't get nothing here for free today cowpoke.

LADY ROSE

Well, if it isn't the town hero.

Ladies, behave yourself.

The saloon girls undergo a quick attitude adjustment while Terrence Tantrasher pulls himself together. MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE (very well put-together in black sheriff gear) steps out as the main focus. He tips his hat at the sight to greet them.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

'Evening ladies....(pause) Terrence. Not causing any trouble are you?

TERRENCE TANTRASHER

'Course not sheriff. I would never.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

I can set with that. Your hat's on backwards.

All of the sudden the sheriff's assistant DELILAH (young lady, early teens, properly dressed) rushes across the patio to the scene. This sparks Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale's attention.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Delilah?

DELILAH

Excuse me, Marshall do you have a moment? We've got trouble.

The two exit the across the patio while the rest make eye contact with each other.

CUT TO:

EXT. Sheriffs Porch -DAY

In the distance, another dark figure, LEROY KINCAID (outlaw, mysterious) is seen from a mile away. OMINOUS

MUSIC plays in the background.

DELILAH

He's new to town. Ain't never seen him before. Looks like a stranger to the first water.

Leroy Kincaid and Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale make confident eye contact. Several shots of glance exchanges between the two picked up on camera. Leroy Kincaid exits the scene.

Drama

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

I know trouble like the back of my hand.

DELILAH (CONT'D)

Oh! And every paper's been filed. Every townsfolk, like you asked.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

In apple pie order? Down to the last letter?

EXT. Saloon Porch - Day

The townsfolk talk amongst one another of Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale's accomplishments in a series of montage voiceover and inserts of proof shown on flyers.

V.O. NARRATION

One time, I heard he stopped a runaway train.

V.O. NARRATION

Don't forget that deadly stagecoach chase!

Proof of the act is shown in various sequences, Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale rides past a crowd cheerfully on horseback.

V.O. NARRATION

A week ago, he caught those ruthless crooks robbing the bank.

V.O. NARRATION

What about that time he rescued those trapped miners? That was a good one.

V.O. NARRATION

I'd invite that Marshall for a drink celebratory drink anytime of the week!

INT. Bar - Day

The sound of Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale's drink hits against the countertop. The BARTENDER steps in polishing glassware.

BARTENDER

Big day today huh? Care for another?

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

The usual.

From a distance, Leroy Kincaid is spying on the sheriff. He takes a long drink from a glass, smashes it, and approaches.

LEROY KINCAID

Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale. I've heard a lot about you. If I didn't know any better you'd been out in the desert so long, you know all the lizards by their first name.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

You're as drunk as a fiddlers clerk. Don't believe we've met. Not from around here...(pause) What do they call you.

Drama

LEROY KINCAID

That's for me to know and you to find out Marshall. Leroy Kincaid.
Heard Shadow Valley's boomin'. Leroy Kincaid grins like a weasel in a hen house. He continues to taunt the sheriff. Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale automatically senses he is up to no good. He chuckles out of anxiousness.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Off to strike it rich then? That's how most of em' are these days.

LEROY KINCAID

Devil take the hindmost. The bartender returns with Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale's drink. He takes a small sip and finishes his thought.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE (CONT'D)

Haha, very well... Since you'll be new in town, I hope you know the law-
He suddenly realizes that he is all alone. Leroy Kincaid had disappeared.
The sheriff looks around a few times, checking over his shoulder, only to find nothing.

EXT. Bar - Day

The sheriff steps outside and looks around for the stranger. He mutters under his breath.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Leroy Kincaid....

INT. Sheriff's Office - Day

Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale sits at his work desk processing his thoughts. He begins to perfect his work space rearranging a series of writing utensils from smallest to largest in perfect order muttering under his breath again just as before.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Leroy Kincaid....

His assistant, Delilah, barges in.

DELILAH

Marshall, are you alright?

Marshall?

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Hm? Yes, Delilah, I'm alright. What's the news for today?

DELILAH

Well there's been a shortage of water from the well. And, um... not a single gunfight.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Not a single one? There's always been one.

Delilah shakes her head in discouragement. The sheriff still rearranges his desk area.

Drama

DELILAH

And one of the showgirl's gone missing.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Gone missing?

DELILAH

I know, the place's gonna turn into a ghost town.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Oh, don't say that. I'll get to the bottom of it.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. Sheriff's Office - Day

Leroy Kincaid eaves drops by hiding around the corner to watch both Delilah and Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale part ways. He slips in, and finally breaks into the Sheriff's office. He examines the papers and desk items, discovers the sheriff's badge and puts it on, ruffles a few items around.

CUT TO:

EXT. Saloon Porch - Day

On his way to the saloon to investigate, Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale runs into Terrence Tantrasher with a bag in hand getting ready to leave town.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Terrence, you got a moment?

TERRENCE TANTRASHER

Can't say that I do, I'm on my way out west.

EXT. Sheriff's Office - Day

Meanwhile, Leroy Kincaid is still inside. He begins to cough into a handkerchief, it is covered in blood. He tosses it somewhere in the office.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. Saloon Porch - Day

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Don't believe I saw you last night when the rest were starting to go.

You know, it's not everyday your favorite saloon girl goes missing.

TERRENCE TANTRASHER

Last night? Sheriff, I was packin'.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Last night. I may have a couple questions for yah...

CUT BACK:

INT. Sheriff's Office- DAY

Drama

Leroy Kincaid senses Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale and Terrence Tantrasher are on their way back to the office. In an attempt to make an escape, he grabs as many valuables as he can, shoots his way out through the back, and escapes.

INT. Sheriff's Office- DAY

In an attempt to solve the mystery, Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale sits at his desk ready to interview whomever may be left in Shadow Valley. There are three interviews (1, 2, and 3).

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Have you seen this woman?

INTERVIEW 1:

She's a GREAT dancer, I've been to all her shows. Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale sits unimpressed.

INTERVIEW 2:

Nope! Never seen her before.

INTERVIEW 3:

Hmmm... waaaaaiit.... no, no I've got nothing.

Interviewer no. 3 returns the flyer to Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale then proceed to touch something on his desk which irritates him.

FADE TO:

After some time to himself, Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale has his head rested in his palms. Delilah knocks against the wall to alert him of her presence.

DELILAH

No luck huh? Yellow bellies...

EXT. Sherif's Office - Day

As Delilah is leaving, Leroy Kincaid whistles, stops her in his tracks. He gets close, and traps her.

LEROY KINCAID

Hey pretty lady, How about I take you out some time?

DELILAH

You better pull in your horns stranger.

Leroy Kincaid takes out his flask, taps a special powder, lizard poison, into it behind her back, and approaches Delilah again.

LEROY KINCAID

Delilah, maybe one of these would cheer you up.

DELILAH

Alright flannel mouth I hear yah.

Drama

Delilah takes a quick drink from the flask and tosses it back at Leroy Kincaid. He watches he walk away. Delilah stops walking. The camera focuses on Leroy Kincaid's expression in a close up. A loud thud is heard.

CUT TO:

INT. Sheriff's Office- Day

Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale had fallen asleep, he is waking up. He notices the bloody handkerchief. Rubs his eyes and it's gone.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Delilah?

He get's up from his office and leaves.

EXT. Ghost Town - Day

Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale is in a state of confusion. He notices the flask on the ground. He picks it up, smells it, and looks onward.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Lizard poison.

From afar, Leroy Kincaid is standing, staring. The two glare at one another. He coughs, holds his finger to his mouth to hush the sheriff from speaking, then disappears to dust.

V.O. NARRATION

At that moment, I realized I knew what I had to do.

Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale steps backwards in a panic. He begins looking around. Voices of his past begin to speak to him. His thoughts are racing at the same time. Flashbacks to Delilah knocking. To the saloon girls and Terrence Tantrasher laughing. To Leroy Kincaid's lizard comment. The lizard poison. People cheering and then leaving the town. As well as his cluttered desk area.

V.O. NARRATION

Boothill.

CUT TO: BLACK

EXT. Gravyard - Day

An innocent GIRL (modest, braided hair)is praying at a gravesite. The church bell is ringing. Marshall Oscar Cayne

Dale steps into view, his hand to his gun sling. As he gets closer, his shadow expands. It covers the young girl. She is resting a flower on the site.

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

Excuse me m'am.

The young girl turns around, in fear at what she is about to face. His weapon is drawn, and he is shaking.

Drama

MARSHALL OSCAR CAYNE DALE

I hope you know the law.

CUT TO:

The sound of crows fills the air after a shot rings out.

Marshall Oscar Cayne Dale is walking away, hat in hand, he places it on his head. Looks back at the gravesite, and trots off into the sunset. The ending music plays and credits are rolled.



Art



Drawing and Life Drawing

FIRST PLACE

Billie Gilish

By Marvin Shaoul



Drawing and Life Drawing

SECOND PLACE

Personal still life

By Kristin Alfonso



Drawing and Life Drawing

THIRD PLACE

Memory Collection

By Nicole O'Bannon



Drawing and Life Drawing

HONORABLE MENTION

Moonlight Jellies

By Lauren Winnie



Painting and Watercolor

FIRST PLACE

Cross With Beads

By Debi Coons



Painting and Watercolor

SECOND PLACE

Lost Places 2

By Debi Coons



Painting and Watercolor

THIRD PLACE

Waiting

By Jazmine Liddiard



Painting and Watercolor

HONORABLE MENTION

Self-Destruction Tendencies

By Amy Palmer



Painting and Watercolor

ACCEPTED

A Quiet Moment

By Nicole O'Bannon



Painting and Watercolor

ACCEPTED

Pumpkin Patch

By Fiala Richard



ACCEPTED

Point Danliah

By Rylee Tinnel



ACCEPTED

Desert Blooms

By Kayla Miller



FIRST PLACE

Nerikomi Stripes: Carafe & Cups

By Rumi Poling



SECOND PLACE

Down By the Pond

By Sarah Starr



THIRD PLACE

Mugen

By Maria Espinoza



ACCEPTED

Water Etched Bowl

By Erin Shaeffer



ACCEPTED

Skating Boy

By Alexa Gavino



ACCEPTED

Quando Se Esconde El Sol

By Maria Espinoza

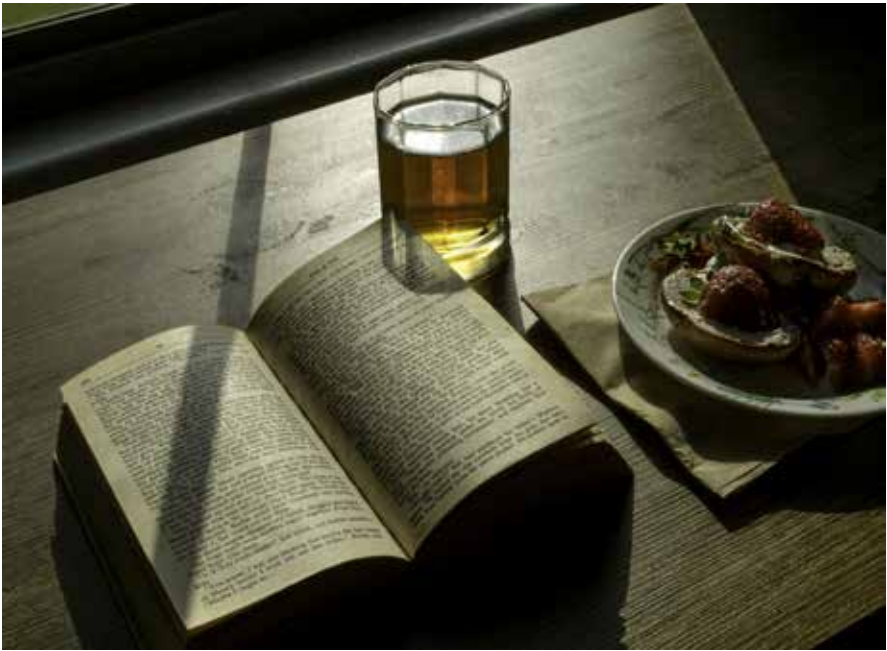


Photography

FIRST PLACE

Still Life Study #13

By Elyzabeth Merryman



Photography

SECOND PLACE

Figurative Study #27

By Elyzabeth Merryman



Photography

ACCEPTED

Yellowstone

By Tim Gray



Photography

ACCEPTED

Jayla

By Alexia Gavino

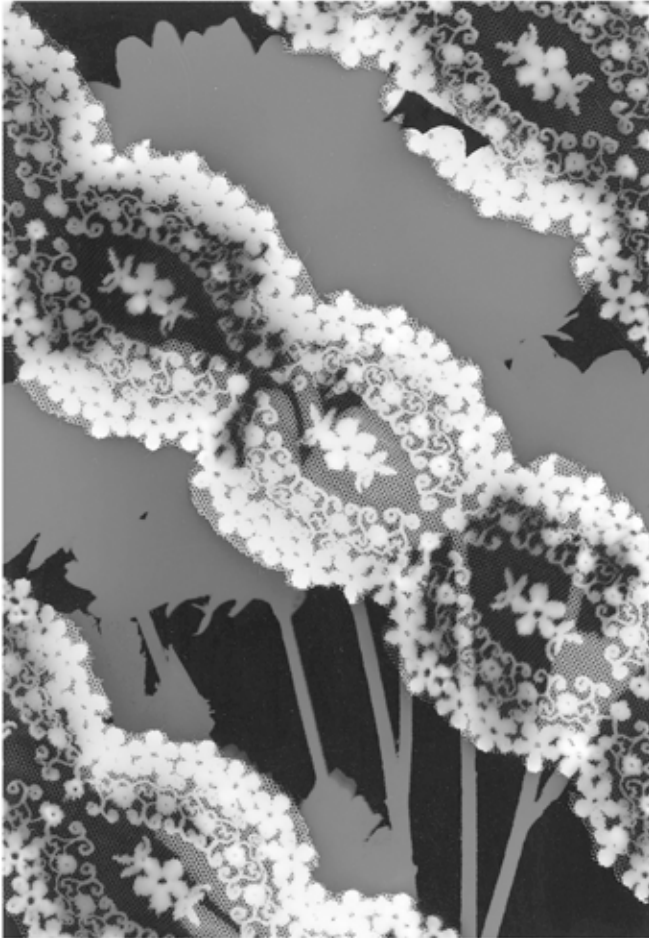


Photography

ACCEPTED

Untitled

By Damion Caamano



Photography

ACCEPTED

Untitled

By Damion Caamano



Glass and Jewelry

FIRST PLACE (TIE)

Life Underwater

By Emmanuel Beltran



Glass and Jewelry

FIRST PLACE (TIE)

The Rum Monkey

By George Toro



Glass and Jewelry

SECOND PLACE (TIE)

Beauty and Silence

By Emmanuel Beltran



Glass and Jewelry

SECOND PLACE (TIE)

Untitled

By Anjali Vijayvergia



ACCEPTED

Winter Ice

By Wendy Retzer



ACCEPTED

Blue Skin

By Mary Worel



Graphic Design

FIRST PLACE

Framed Lady

By Madison Negrete



Graphic Design

ACCEPTED

Despite Everything, It's Still Me

By Devon Gentile



FIRST PLACE

Hummy

By Rylee Tinnel



SECOND PLACE

Chloe

By Debi Coons



ACCEPTED

Charge

By Erin Shaeffer



ACCEPTED

Mossroom
By Rylee Tinnel



Credits

BOOK DESIGN

Michelle Blomberg, Faculty Advisor/Art Director
Jessica Ruvalcava, Art Director
Anna Campbell, Phoenix Illustrator
Alikì Tsianos, Designer
Nohely Hernandez, Designer
Monet Almarez, Designer
Katrina Martoran, Concept Development
Leslie Ibarra, Concept Development
Emily Ramirez, Concept Development

FINE ARTS FACULTY ADVISORS

Gaylen Stewart Stephanie Burchett

FINE ARTS STUDENT JURORS

Erin Shaeffer	Jaira Muñoz
Iran Nolasco	Taya Thomas
Jacey Coca	Christa Pavlovsky
Ana Rodriguez	Jennifer Scali

LITERARY FACULTY ADVISOR

Jeff Baker

LITERARY STUDENT READERS

Dawn Gibbs	Francis Wiget
Sholama Kawry	Ryan Thornburg
Joselyn Maria Lopez	

LITERARY FACULTY JUDGES

Justin Burns	Chad Merrell
Jayne Cook	Lisa Moore
Roxana Dewey	David Nelson
Jenna Duncan	Phillip Roderick
Ray Lira	Jeff Sanger
Eric Luthi	Lori Walk

COMMUNITY READER

Ashley Scheideman

SPECIAL THANKS

Ryan Kennedy	Terry Leyba-Ruiz
Sherri McClendon	Susan Campbell
Brendan Regan	Casey Farina
Scott Schultz	



