Leonardo Literary and Arts Magazine 2013

Lead Editors
Makayla Armijo
Rosanna Cordova
Fran Gallegos
Shaya Rogers

Assitant Editors
Samantha Emord
Steven Veatch

Layout and Design
Jonathan Gamboa
With hundreds of submissions, this collection includes a variety of works that will speak to many different hearts and minds. Creating a diverse and impressive magazine was as much fun as it was difficult. Every piece was considered, some more than others, and there were disagreements. I hope you enjoy this collection and I hope you can find at least one piece that inspires you to tap into your creative side and make something that you can enjoy. Thank you to my fellow editors for lending their time and energy and thank you to Jonathan for making our vision come to life. Thank you to Patrick Houlihan for caring about student work and for keeping such a meaningful project going. Finally, thank you to Alexander Romero for reading my poems, taking interest in my writing, and for always believing in me in all areas of my life.

Shaya Q. Rogers, English Major
Leonardo Lead Editor

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the students who had the courage to send in their writing and works of art. Without you, there would be no magazine. Thanks to my fellow editors for their hard work and all of the effort and time that it has taken to produce the 2013 edition of Leonardo. We worked hard to be as inclusive as we could while still maintaining a high standard of excellence. Thanks go to our faculty advisor, Patrick Houlihan. His advice was invaluable. He was always willing to share his knowledge and helped us to achieve our goal of producing the best edition of Leonardo possible. Thanks to Hazel Lieg in the office at the South Valley campus. Hazel was very supportive and eagerly volunteered to help. A million thanks to the owners and staff of Los Compadres Mexican Restaurant. They made us feel welcome and they were unfazed when we stayed late, pulled out our scissors and tape, and had a table full of scrap paper. Thanks to my husband and my children for their support and encouragement. They have done everything they could to help me realize a life-long dream.

Fran Gallegos, History major
Leonardo Lead Editor

It’s been such an incredible experience to work on this literary magazine - thank you to all my fellow editors, I’ve loved every minute of voting, emailing and meeting over coffee with you to envision how we could make this publication come together. Thank you to everyone who shared of themselves and submitted; your words were brave and beautiful and matter. They matter very much. Gratitude to my dad who makes me think and laugh and never doubted for a minute that I would find the time and energy needed to devote myself to a worthy project such as this. Tender appreciation for my mother, who when I turned 12 years old handed me a book of poetry by Carl Sandburg and instructed me to read it. To Kalen who digs ditches on occasion, is obsessed with the letters between John Adams and Jefferson, challenges my grey matter, and loves me - you make me better at life. And finally, thank you to Professor Patrick Houlihan who lit a fire under me called poetry that I couldn’t put out if I tried.

Rosanna Cordova
Leonardo Lead Editor
T

hank you to my fellow editors, Jonathan and Patrick for all the wisdom, guidance and
laughs. To all those who participated and entered their work – it has been a pleasure to read
and view your entries. We appreciate your effort and interest in this magazine. “Your words and
thoughts have physical power.” – Will Smith

Makayla Armijo, Liberal Arts major
Leonardo Lead Editor

he dedicated student volunteers who produced Leonardo 2013 were a joy to advise and
watch as they worked many long hours on this labor of love, selecting from more entries than ever
before, 256 submissions by 54 different student artists, and continuing the tradition of inclusiv-
ity by publishing over 50% of students who submit. We experienced some organically evolving
changes with this year’s editorial staff: for the first time, the staff included a CNM distance learning
student, Steven Veatch, who contributed electronically as an Assistant Editor from Colorado, and
another Assistant Editor, Samantha Emord, also participated electronically. Lead Editors Makayla
Armijo, Rosanna Cordova, Fran Gallegos, and Shaya Rogers met regularly and worked very judi-
ciously to represent many of CNM’s finest writers and artists. Graphic Designer Jonathan Gamboa
has again put a professional sheen on CNM’s magazine with his signature layout and design work.
Leonardo would like to thank CNM’s Dean of Students Rudy Garcia, the Student Allocations Board,
and Student Activities Coordinator Brandon Seber for their continued support of CNM students and
the CNM community.

Patrick Houlihan, Ph.D.
Leonardo Faculty Adviser
Art

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“Said and Done”
An evening with Nils Frahm
By Erica Roybal

Cream colored
Paper umbrellas
Illuminated by
The soft light
Of candles
Creating the moon
Reaching out
She comforts
Giving space

Cream colored tulips
Leaning to one side
Individual
Glass jars
Sitting
Above the piano
Waiting
For his fingers
To sound the beginning
Forgive, A Forgetful Romantic
By Makayla Armijo

i imagined love as a childhood friend
taking leaps forth from screen doors open
leading bare-ankled patter into honesty
fingers weaved, leading through:

charmed walkways of un-whole-y
affection
leading windowed hearts through fog
insides: toying with the virtues of damnation
initiation of intention
to bring a pang back-forth and slipping
into narrowness,
a claustrophobic handshake turning
fingerprints into suffocating gestures
of romance,
brings out the color, to afford
effortless good fortune and use
words like ‘adore’,
as in to cherish to the nearing nature of
worship
when a wisdom dumbs itself to worship no one
the fool
and I am no liar but a
regretful speaker
unbound by hysteria, the pleasurable
measure of truth frees
only forget myself,
confessions of feelings
that are
no more
longer
not
Red
By Jordan Wolfe

Troops shoulder gleaming bayonets.
Boots click, crushing pebbles from another time.
Warm apples drop from leather satchels.
Soft winds caress hollow wheat reeds.
Eyes glance names carved in weeping willows.
Memory heats cold bones by the fire.
Blue sky soaks weary minds with promise.

Childhood
By Jordan Wolfe

In a breathless joy I melted,
each day swallowing the sun.
In a peaceful slumber I drifted,
every night eating the moon.
There were times when the grass became my feet.
Trees grew out of my heart!
I swung wildly on their branches.
The Pacific leaked from my eyes.
Sinking hot toes into brown sand,
my bucket was full.
Each grain held God.
Motor Bike
By Rashel N. Lytle

We all have in us
a motorbike with a full tank

so many times
I have jumped on mine
in a hurry
leaving behind
the trouble that I called family

once I drove along the shore
my white scarf trailing behind me
but, then I stopped
and let him hitch a ride

and then so many times
I jumped back on my motorbike
in a fury
leaving behind
the trouble I called husband

I stopped for a long while
raised some babies
and my bike decayed
just a bit
a lot

but times change and needs
pass
and that motorbike of mine is still running
polished
oiled, and fast

I took it across the desert
bug goggles and another white scarf
and I only stopped to sleep
under the stars and my knowledge
that we all have in us
a motorbike with a full tank
and mine waited so long for me to get back
on it
I waited too long to try

but its just like that
sometimes
and sometimes
when we have had enough
of running and chasing
we turn the key
and take off
we just go
we escape
we fly
we use that tank of gas
to create distance
and also
just to hold on
to ourselves
I am, who I am, and What I Choose to be

By Rocky Petrocelli

I am like a bird to soar like the breeze, closer to my Maker, yet diving below man.
Oh blessed be man who throws out our fodder to live, that seeds so freely.
With water close by to clean our wings. Oh, what a joy to wing so free!
Free like a lion, to be like a king, never to be bound by man or the untamed woman.
Oh what a joy to be on the hunt. So as to devour the food, a weakened caribou.
Thus is provided to feed a king and his pride and joy.
As my mind goes on, I am like a trainer of a jubilee.
Where man and woman become as one, high, oh so high, to swing on the bar.
Where the people below, laugh and chortle with open mouths in awe,
Just like the bird and lion all join in excitement and wonder,
To everyone’s extravaganza and bewilderment,
It is oh so nice, to be, as I am.
Inquisitive acquisitions of intelligence allows an invaluable aptitude, 
Aptitude to realize the sum of the line above is infinite. 
Infinity is accomplished by the everyday knowledge we acquire, 
Acquiring tidbits here and there, but we never get the answer to immortality. 
Immortal glory is only given to those great heroes like Achilles, 
Achilles, who in a rage devastated the city of Troy impudently, 
Impudence led to the end of a hero.

Elusive oration ensnares truths that all humans are ignoble, 
Ignoble intentions lead to overly aggressive behavior uniformly animalistic, 
Animalistic tendencies ignite, inflame, and irritate the brain to be obscene, 
Obscenities come pouring out, abjectly debasing society until there are only ubiquitous undertones, 
Undertones that embellish the need to scream because, inevitably, no one is listening to you.

On obtaining enough exuberance as to embark upon interpreting this enigma, 
Open opinions; endeavor to injure intolerance indefinitely, 
Orbiting ominously through universal ulcers of unrequited emotions, 
Opposing obstacles unbolts our admirable ability to aspire unabashed.

Understanding is everything.
Sunset
By Brianna Woods

Patches of fluff
Dolloped
Across the darkening blue sky.

Twilight voices
A sparrows’ cheery chirp
Leaves rustling
in
The approaching zephyrs of night
That race past them
Laughing.
Day is over

Not all of a sudden in quick departure
but
Slowly
With the leaves waving a heartfelt
Goodbye
and
The crickets’ summer love songs playing over the birds’ similar stories.

The sun sinks lower
In
A vibrant curtsy of color

Tossing the last flames of morning
Up
Continuous fireworks of farewell

Welcoming
and
Avoiding
A vast art

A real land
Dotted
With glittering wonders and rockets

Mysterious passages and planetary dreams

Sailing
An infinite sea

Hiding
Behind pools of clouds.
Looking out at the past I can see the future
While existing in the present
Living in a world where time holds still
Yet is constantly moving forward and backward
Am I alive or am I dead
Do I even exist or am I merely the thought of some greater being
These are the thoughts that plague me
As I continue my existence in a world where space and time collide
This is a world where light is consumed by the Darkness of black holes
Only to reappear as starlight
What does this vast universe care of my existence?
What do I matter to the sun, moon and stars?
What mark can I make, can I leave behind to show I had once existed
A painting, a poem or smiles on the face of others caused by simple kindness
I Cannot Wish For You
By Renee Tucker

I cannot wish
that your deep, dark eyes gaze
upon me with a storm of desire,
or that the feel of your touch
kindles my fire.
I will not want for the sweet
of your breath
to inspire
within my depth,
or that the rush of your air
lifts me higher
as it touches my hair.
I do not dare
to find shelter with you;
where your passion, compassion
and care
are the place where my fears,
where my sorrows or pain,
where my lonely tears
find means to retire.
I shall not hope to inspire
the want to give me these,
or the will
for you to please,
but I can pray
that God has chosen two
who belong to each, the other;
that soon the day be true
that comes the match
upon His spark
to kindle such a treasure
as this lover.
Please do not let the child within you die
With the laughter and the inquisitive mind,
For I’m afraid that life will pass you by.

One using only a critical eye,
Will miss the visions to which you are blind.
Please do not let the child within you die.

If no ships are found in the clouds in the sky,
Flow not with the tide of the daily grind,
For I’m afraid that life will pass you by.

One no longer willing to question why,
Finding contentment in the holds that bind,
Please do not let the child within you die.

Do not dismiss fantasy with a sigh
Or believe a giant can be kind,
For I’m afraid that life will pass you by.

If realizing after storm clouds dry,
No new worlds are in the puddles you find.
Please do not let the child within you die,
For I’m afraid that life will pass you by.
May
By Shaya Rogers

I will always be ten years young,
looking up toward your blonde curls,
your slender curves,
while you put on your makeup and sing.

The vines cover your hands,
I sleep, dreaming of the summer.
We grow, further away,
my desperation turns into indifference.
Would I trade soulful wisdom
for weekends, photos,
no tears at the mention of your name?
Although it leads to no reward,
I’d like to think that I would.

Wet Dreams
By Shaya Rogers

backyard
farm
white dress
love of lost
and far
gazed upon
my eyes
swollen shut
wet
all over again
dreams that will
stay dreamy
and men that will
last no longer
than the sparkler
flowing freely
in my hand
Zeus
By Makayla Armijo

out of the thinnest air
true intimacy presented through the depth of your cells.
the make-up is essential and organic life lives within the touch of our skin.
each carpal runs down the curve of our cages –
hollow slivers separated by marrow –
uncovering the genetic make-up of your strands.
and the steady swaying current of your body’s fluids pulled by the moon.
the symmetry of tear ducts speak up when ears meet stomach –
listening to your innards humming bubbling gaseous eruptions,
they weep and speak my name.
and lashes talk back with wet bats upon your back.
kisses.
the cosmic interaction like the bend of faulty fingers upon your back
and a hand to hold them in.
swan neck.
each tip composed of stale makings
preserved with fleshy little hooks for touching.
and life is only lived
when the purest oils and sweat and skin
are loved from within; unveiling the frail unity
of our limbs.
I can feel the tension and pain radiating
Wanting to devour my left side
I shake my head and close my eyes
Denying its presence
But, the beast grows louder,
Heat rises to the touch and burns my skin
Screaming for attention,
At first there is nothing to do but pay attention,
He demands every last focus.
We fight, I kick, he punches
I scream as loud as I can in his ear.
Nothing happens
I coo, I whisper, a gentle breath
I then decide
To love you

Maple leaves
By Erica Roybal

Light swimming through the trees
Creating a moment of silence
That inspires a center to draw from
Reflections of green bathing my spirits
Giving me oxygen to breathe
While joyfully accepting my waste
Moving forward
Through the passage of wild flowers and leaves
Accepting that nature
Gives
What’s needed

Devour My
By Erica Roybal
Masterpiece pumpkin, your shirt still smells like you
In the corner of memories, those Hawaiian print patterns on your
Little outfit set, purple and white and sticky
Pale as the rice in your bowl
As the chopsticks that leaned in pans
As the acid erosion eating at my early teeth
After leechee fruit cubes in tiny gelatin packages, handed to me
I can touch your doll clothes in the lost and found of my mind,
Taste the air he made salty by your tiny tears
When the boy mocked your words, name
Did he ever grow up knowing
You were the phoenix of this desert? That the sun set for you, dear girl,
And that summer you left, you took the warmth
Did he feel it? Did he know?
That we wrote letters in bubble handwriting
On milky blue lines with glittered gel colors
And that our hands met words to speak when we could not
That the moon belonged to Hawaiian purple with the slender frame
And big brawny me wrapped in black vinyl jacket year-round?
I’ll tell him, sweet haze, that we never forgot to be children,
That we grew up in the heart of eleven years
And never apart though separate,
You with your red and gold new-year packets
With your sesame fish spine snacks and canned corn,
Rising above the dry heat into a bird,
I’ll never let those tears put out
your flame before you could become, again
Seven words unspoken, I love you but I hate you.
You never say them yet I know they’re on your lips
D
R
I
P
P
I
N
G
Out of mine easily like honey from a squishable bear
You can’t bear to look at me
My eyes burn through you
Maybe I try to pull what I wanna hear from your mouth like colorful rags tied together from a magician’s act.
They are knotted to your tongue
I’m imagining these crazy illusions
I am in love with you but…
Seven words that come to me often.
Spreading over your body like butter on dark brown toast
The tease & drama is like kerosene on embers, I like to please my audience
You like to please your mama
You’re only with me for the money
A crinkled nose like I smelled the government’s perfume.
The dust of heaven splashed to the Earth,
A small explosion and the world burst to life.
Now, the Milky Way flows through my backyard on the way to eternity.
Billions of fireflies sparkle across the sky,
Lighting my way through the cosmos,
I grasp for a meaning to my being
The answer lies with the stars.

A tide tumbled over the globe,
For thousands of years there was only ocean,
Life teemed below the surface,
The cycle had begun.
Now, land has breached the surface and we stand erect and prideful of our existence.
A soft hush comes from above, but we cannot hear from so far away,
A question lies with Homo sapiens.

We spiral through the universe, spinning on our axis,
From day to day we live and die,
Like stars, we blink out of existence,
But the cycle continues without us.
Every day we are given the blessing to seek out eternal truths
I hope in all our searching
We discover rather than to ask the stars to grant wishes,
To inquire instead what we can do to make our own wishes come true.
Clovis Once Upon the Land
By Steven Wade Veatch

Day dawning
Morning welcomes
An Ice Age breeze

Glaciers retreat
Pathways open
To an Ice Free Corridor

Distant Ice
Endless views
Earth beneath their feet

Early migrants
Ancient hunters
Spread across the land

Mysterious Clovis
Journey far
Intrepid New World people

Spreading east
Some south
Prospering across the land

Mother mammoth
Baby follows
Herd upon the meadow

Mammoths graze
Others drink
Soon to drift away

Distinctive points
Superior work
Made of jasper or of flint

Quartzite cores
Chipping blanks
Make deadly edges

Quiet stalking
Lethal spear
Hunters make their play

Thrusting spear
Penetrating power
Delivers lethal blow

Scraping hides
Roasting meat
Over embers glowing

Thankful hunters
Ritual offerings
Shaman dancing, dreaming

Itinerant camps
Family clans
Explore across the land

Centuries pass
Clovis vanish
No longer across the land

Working trowel
Sifting tray
Excavate a buried site

Material remains
Revealing secrets
To learn about their ways
There were eleven of us stuffed into the suburban, all singing about that infamous Yellow Submarine in our best theatrical voices. Outside, snow fell so sparsely that my eyes strained to get a glimpse of the flakes; I shivered at the sight of rolling clouds.

Encased in plastic, a Little Debbie's perfection sat in my lap, begging to be devoured. I opened the oatmeal pie and listened to the merriment of the twenty-mile drive.

Sitting to the left, my best-friend clapped to the beat, blue eyes dancing. Spunky girl that Hayley; possessing enough charisma in the corners of her smile to befriend Mr. Hyde. My fingers brought another bite to my lips, cream touching my tongue in the same instant the vehicle jacked left, throwing my body right. My hips, shoulders, and head greeted the window.

***

The night should have started with Country-Swing lessons at the nearby Dance Hall, something that had become a weekend ritual. This particular evening, Greg ventured from the normal weekend routine and parked along the side of the road. A five-star Greek Restaurant recently opened and I mentioned more times than my fingers could count how addicted I was to Greek food. The gyro; delicately flavored lamb meat wrapped in pita bread and topped with tzatziki sauce. I wiped away the drool with my sleeve.

“You haven’t touched your plate.” I said.

“Nervous I guess.” From an early point in our relationship his deep green eyes revealed his every emotion and I enjoyed the fact that he couldn’t hide anything from me.

“Just ask me. My answer may shock you!” I tilted my head to the side and watched his hand reach into the pocket of the gray sport coat where they fiddled around for a moment. Soon enough his fingers found mine and slid a simple yet elegant diamond onto my middle finger. “I haven’t said ‘yes’ yet.”

“Then say it already.” His knuckles turned white in anticipation.

“I suppose so, I mean, we are quite good together,” my thumb played with the ring, twisting the diamond around my finger. Next to us a couple watched, the girl ‘oohing’ enviously while her date squirmed before ordering another glass of beer. Leaning in, I found Greg’s lips and whispered, “you know my answer.”

“And I want to hear it.”

“Yes. And by the way...it goes on this finger.” The jewelry found its place on my left ring-finger, the lights in the restaurant catching the shimmer of the precious-stone. Reaching for a pita chip, my hands instinctively covered my ears when a woman’s scream reverberated off the wine glasses.

No one else in the restaurant seemed affected by the howling. Conversations continued normally; even Greg started talking about the delicious half-eaten Moussaka on his plate. I whipped my head left and right until finding the source of the noise. A woman’s mouth twisted open awkwardly, then just as quickly closed and turned upwards.
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“I suppose so, I mean, we are quite good together,” my thumb played with the ring, twisting the diamond around my finger. Next to us a couple watched, the girl ‘oohing’ enviously while her date squirmed before ordering another glass of beer. Leaning in I found Greg’s lips and whispered, “you know my answer.”

“And I want to hear it.”

“Yes. And by the way...it goes on this finger.” The jewelry found its place on my left ring-finger, the lights in the restaurant catching the shimmer of the precious-stone. Reaching for a pita chip, my hands instinctively covered my ears when a woman’s scream reverberated off the wine glasses.

No one else in the restaurant seemed affected by the howling. Conversations continued normally; even Greg started talking about the delicious half-eaten Moussaka on his plate. I whipped my head left and right until finding the source of the noise. A woman’s mouth twisted open awkwardly, then just as quickly closed and turned upwards.

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In the corner of the room the large oval mirror captured a slender reflection, I stepped closer to get a better view of the makeup job that took Laura the last hour to finish. Flawless. Plain features were accentuated ever-so perfectly. Outside the double doors of the elaborate room, people swarmed the chapel in search of past acquaintances before being ushered to a seat.
“Greg isn’t going to recognize you sis! You look fabulous.”
“I’ll pretend that was a compliment.” I touched a stray hair on top of my head, gently combing it down.

“Look at me.” Laura doused my entire head with some cheap generic hairspray as if I were in a spray-tan machine. I coughed and gagged, waving away the remaining particles in the air.

“Enough, enough. No more hairspray.” I turned back to the mirror while Laura giggled. “I’m not letting one hair out of place...” She became background noise when a gaping quarter-sized gash above my left eye revealed pink tissue; a shard of glass protruding from the flesh. Panic took over my stomach, blood sliding down my cheek and dropping from my chin to the white dress.

Looking at the pool of red spreading across the silky fabric I brought my eyes up to my face once again, another gash opened on my cheek, the fibers of skin breaking while the wound doubled in size. Twigs poked every-which way from the exquisite updo, digging into my scalp. I leaned over, heaving all the contents of my stomach onto the rug.

“Holy shit!” Laura rushed to my side. “What has gotten into you? Don’t move, I don’t want you getting...” she covered her nose, “breakfast casserole – I think – all over that amazing dress. I would kill you. Mom would kill you!”

“Wait. What?” Of all the things Laura cared about it was the dress, not the open wounds that appeared magically like the bunny from a magician’s hat. I cautiously peered into the mirror afraid to see a face resembling roadkill instead of the smattering of freckles across the bridge of my nose.

Nothing out of the ordinary. Of course my face was just that – ordinary. The blood on the overly-priced wedding dress vanished before my eyes. Maybe I had gone loopy off all that hairspray, apparently the vomit on the floor had not been a part of the hallucination.

Laura swore repeatedly, insisting that cleaning up regurgitated food wasn’t a duty for the maid of honor and she expected to have her pick of the wedding gifts.

I watched while she scrubbed the floor and then shushed me when I mentioned that window cleaner might not be the best solvent to use on an imported Persian rug.

The stench of my stomach acid sent with it another wave of nausea. At least the second time around I made it to the trash can.

***

Hayley’s sunshine hair matched the smile on her face. She stood and jumped up and down when I appeared through the door of Le Tres Bon Cafe. “Look at you. Oh my goodness!”

At least her excitement over my gigantic belly made up for the pity-party I had every morning when a new stretch-mark appeared. Sitting ourselves at a table near the windows we skimmed the menus and ordered.

Hayley noticed the hunger in my eyes and presented a granola bar from her purse. “Oh, no...I’m fine, just starving as usual. So glad Matt let you come. Flying half-way across the country just for a baby shower. That’s why you’re my best friend.” The waitress filled the glasses of water and assured us that our food would be out soon.

“Anything for you Shelly. So when are you due again...end of June?”

“Beginning of July, actually, but close enough. The baby kicks constantly and I can’t seem
to get him off my hip.”

Hayley spoke, gesturing with her hands. “When I was pregnant with Stacy I spent the last three months sleeping with a body pillow. It worked wonders, although, Matt hated the bond I shared with Steve.”

I chuckled while slurping ice water through the straw, “You named your body pillow?”

“Sheemed right. Only thing that relieved the pain in my aching back.”

I leaned to the side to allow the waitress enough room to set down the plate of Mille-Feuille. “Thank you.” Layered sheets of thin pastries filled with creamy vanilla custard, blueberries heaped atop. I took a generous bite and felt the hot juice of the berries glide down my throat. I set down the fork and wiped at my lips with the linen napkin, “How is your family...”

my voice trailed off.

The chair where Hayley sat was empty. I waited. Five minutes passed, then ten. The waitress approached the table, wiping it down as if no one occupied the seats. I went to the bathroom, calling her name repeatedly.

Long lines formed at the bakery counter and I pushed past the customers, none interested in moving aside for a pregnant woman. A couple opened the cafe door, a bell announced their arrival and my departure.

Standing on the sidewalk I squinted my eyes in the sunlight, shouting Hayley’s name. Why would she leave so suddenly, not even tell me she was going?

There was little sense to be made from it all. The blue and white striped awning shaded the outside tables and I stepped around them to get a better view of up and down the sidewalk. Nowhere. My friend was nowhere to be seen.

A small snowflake fell on my arm, melting immediately from the heat of my skin. I wiped at the liquid and looked heavenward. Directly above me gray clouds produced a light flurry of snow, though the rest of the blue sky invited afternoon picnics and pool parties, asphalt hot enough to evaporate water.

A few feet away a teenage girl crawled across the sidewalk. With frustration she screeched, “Where is my tooth? Where is it? I’m a toothless whore. A toothless whore!” Was I losing my mind?

Shaken and upset, I followed a group of boys and girls into the cafe and turned left, running into a man. “Scuze me.” He noticed the confusion in my eyes. “Ma’am, you all right?”

“My friend, um, she was here a moment ago and now...” I stopped when the man’s eyes narrowed in concern. “Everything’s fine. Promise. No worries.” Politely he smiled, touched my shoulder and walked away, leaving me standing in the cafe friendless and suddenly worried about the stability of my mental health.

***

Stepping stones led to the door of the white house with white shutters and white curtains covering the inside of the private windows. The well-manicured lawn lived up to every Home Owner Association’s unrealistic expectations; no animal droppings on the sidewalk, a white mailbox near the road and planter boxes filled with various white flowers. I gripped the steering wheel, rested my forehead against it then gathered my wits.

The doorbell glowed, inviting even a burglar to press a finger against it. The French-doors swung open, a man dressed in a white suit and tie greeted me. There is still time to
run, I thought when my feet entered the impeccable foyer. No one else sat on the couches and chairs, no one waited but me.

No more than five minutes passed when the suited man showed me to a door. I knocked lightly and opened it when a soft voice called to me. “So glad you finally decided to come see me. It’s a big step Shelly.”

“I got your name from...well I can’t really remember how I got your information. Regardless, I’m not that excited to be here, if I am being honest.”

The woman, possibly in her early forties, nodded and swallowed visibly, “I can understand the hesitation. Most that come to me are just like you. And honestly,” she winked, “I’m excited you are here. Before you can move forward it’s necessary to see me.”

I had been standing during our awkward conversation and so I quickly went to the chair against the wall of the small room and sat with my feet together, arms folded against my chest. Something felt off, yet I couldn’t pinpoint exactly what, not yet anyways. Sweat dripped from my armpits down the back of my arm and when it got to my forearm I wiped the droplets away with the opposite hand.

“Nervous? Perfectly normal.” The woman’s short blond hair hit her at chin-level, the spunky ‘do’ complimenting her green eyes and plump lips. I wondered why she spent all day cooped up in a room talking to people with ‘issues’; certainly she had a family.

“Let’s just get this over with.”

“Tell me the last experience you had.” I corrected her, “Hallucination.”

“No, Shelly. Event, experience...what do you remember?” A pad of paper rested on her lap, pen gripped between fingers waiting to scribble furiously with each word I provided.

“You can call them whatever you like, but to me they are hallucinations.” This didn’t feel right. Why was I here? I shouldn’t be here...I should be...and then for some reason I didn’t know anything at all. My hands grabbed my head, covered my mouth in an attempt to suffocate the breath that struggled to escape.

“Shelly, look at me. Focus.”

Her steady words calmed me, if only for a second, and I peered into her eyes. There I saw tragedy, pain, understanding. “Where am I?”

“My name is Charlotte. I am the therapist between...” the exhaling of her breath turned the room cold and I shivered in response, “...how ‘bout I show you something. I don’t do this for anyone, but you...you’re special. Different than most of my clients.” She set the notepad on the floor, pen resting on top and brought both hands to the right side of her face. The calm exterior began to crumble, her hands shaking violently as she fought to gain control. “I apologize. I’m still new at all this. Fresh.”

Tugging at the short hair, she pulled it away from her face, the entire side of her scalp going with it. I began to hyperventilate, the room spun faster with each glance in the direction of the mutilated scalp.

A single tear rolled down her cheek. “I’m not like you Shelly. My wounds were too great.” She replaced the side of her scalp, patting the hair in place and returned to her usual composed-self. “Do you remember yet? It’s important that you do...or...well...” her fingers brushed away the stray tear, “please try.”

Every nervous tick in my body presented itself; my legs shook, teeth gnawed at fingernails, shoulders twitched, and then somehow it abruptly stopped. I closed my eyes, felt the
emptiness in my stomach when I looked directly at Charlotte, “I remember, but I don’t want to.” “Tell me everything.”

I couldn’t form words on my tongue, my mouth closed tightly in protest, and so I willed my mind to recall the event.

We all met at the local Farmer’s Market, jammed eleven of us into a nine person vehicle, ignored the safety restraints. Randomly my lips would part and I listened to a voice repeat my thoughts. “Opening night of Fiddler on the Roof, I was so excited...been preparing for months on end, practicing late into the evenings.” No one noticed the ominous gray clouds while heading down the two-way highway, no one but the driver saw the oncoming car as we tried to pass a slow-moving vehicle, but everyone felt the brutal force of the over-correction, heard the crunching of metal and screams accompanying the shattering of windows, experienced gravity as their bodies flew out the narrow openings and onto the field. We all felt it.

“I looked out the windshield as it happened...in slow-motion...like I was out-of-body. I hit the side of the window, smashing the entire right side of my body. Darkness.” Charlotte left her notepad lying on the floor, closed her eyes while I recounted the traumatic event.

“When I awoke I immediately saw the clouds overhead, flurries of snow falling on my face, the pain of the impact still present, still throbbing. Dirt. I laid on dirt. A field somewhere. Then screaming.”

A woman screaming. Stop screaming, I thought to myself, just stop...stop...please stop. Even though I perceived my condition to be okay, the woman’s wailing sent my nerves into shock. Maybe no one was okay, maybe I wasn’t okay, maybe we were all dead. Could this be the after-life? I knew there to be one, it had been the only thing in life I was certain of. If anything, death wasn’t the end.

Slowly I looked right and left; looked as far as my head would rotate while lying on the ground and I couldn’t see her. But we had been sitting right next to one another, talking, singing, eating...she had been there once.

“What about the blood? Shelly?” Charlotte’s voice prodded the memories.

“Before I got up to look for her...a white pillow under my head. Someone put a pillow under my head, probably while I was still unconscious.” Rotating my head I saw spotting of red on the pillow. I touched my forehead and felt the sticky pouring of blood from the gash. Twigs in my hair. It hurt. It all hurt.

“Where did she go?”

Hayley. Where did Hayley go? I didn’t know, there were no memories of her after the...after I blacked out there were no memories. My feet found the ground, I stood, though I’m not sure with what strength, and I called her name over and over. The ground was uneven, a potato field. I walked a few steps calling her name, grabbing my abdomen in the process, off in the distance the blue suburban laid to rest on its side looking more like it belonged in a scrap yard.

A stranger touched my arm, “Who are you looking for sweetie?”

“My friend. Hayley, my friend was sitting by me and she’s gone. Have you seen her? A short girl with blond hair? She was right by me. She’s gone. Please look for her. She’s my friend.”

“I will find her. But you need to lay back down.” The kind stranger led me slowly to the spot in which I first landed, helped me to the frozen ground. With the help of another stranger they found a blanket, draped it across me like the coroner does to the bodies on his table. I didn’t mind though, the warmth of the blanket was the only feeling I recognized.

Surrounding me were others from the vehicle, people that I knew well. Lilly crawled across
the damp earth, fingers digging, flinging dirt, searching. 'I'm a toothless whore.' The words struck a humorous chord yet I found no reason to laugh. Why would I? Bodies had been thrown from a rolling vehicle and I was among them.

As I recounted, Charlotte covered her eyes. “Are you all right?” I asked with sincerity. “I'm not suppose to tell you this, I really shouldn’t, but your story sounds so familiar.”

Her voice went to a whisper and I strained to hear, “my husband, two sons and I were in a van. That's all I remember.”

“What does that mean, that you are here, that you can't remember?” Inside, my heart ached for this stranger, this woman that had experienced a trauma as I had.

“I'm not going back. Rather than move on to the after-life I chose to stay here, the in-between, to help those like you remember. To return.” “And will I return?”

“I can't tell you that.”

“But everything is coming back. Everything that happened that night.” I found strength in my legs and stood before her in defiance. “Let me leave. Let me return, please.”

Charlotte reached for my hands and held them, “I am just the therapist. Someone to talk to. Someone that helps you to realize all the things you once had.” She smiled, offering a little comfort, “your skin is still warm. Pink.” She felt clammy, cold, and now that I really looked, her cheeks were an eerie shade of blue. A knock at the door interrupted us. It swung open and the suited man appeared once again. “It's time.” Charlotte dropped my hands and whispered, “Please wake up. Please come back.”

As I left the room I watched her lips move, repeating those last words. When I turned around to face the path before me an overwhelming warmth spread throughout my body; the light of the room blinding me. I closed my eyes, squeezing them shut, still able to hear Charlotte’s final plea.

When brightness turned to dark my lashes fluttered open. Clasped tightly, my hands held onto someone, their voice begging me to ‘please wake up, please come back.’ The sterility of the room burned my nostrils. Lying on the hospital bed, my mother and father wept openly, caressing my legs and arms to stimulate a response.

I've heard that when near death, people see their lives flash before their eyes. I always imagined the flashes to be all the things past that I had experienced, not of the bright future that lies ahead. Father pressed his lips against my cheek and I fell into a deep, relaxing sleep. I willed my body to heal from the trauma, and in time, I hoped my mind would as well.
Anguish
By Photoparensynthesist

Charcoal
Protest of Jose Arguellas

By Photoparensynthesis

Graphite
Mi Padre
By Makayla Armijo

Oil on Wood
Sentinel
By Paul Gambino

Ballpoint Pen
Colorado Aspen Copse
By Steven Wade Veatch

Watercolor, Pen, and Ink
Autumn Ducks
By Steven Wade Veatch

Watercolor
Helpless
By Makayla Armijo

Watercolor and Ink
The Beginning

By Makayla Armijo

Oil on Canvas
LOST
By Joseph R. Brasher

The desert heat
Builds up hot
Hot as the Sun
Cold as Fire
Dry as Dirt
Looking for shade
Life everywhere
The Sun setting
The land growing darker
Noises in the shadows
Glowing eyes staring
White teeth Gleaming
Where am I?
Close Self-Portrait
By Lori Hirsch

Acrylic on Canvas-Board
Mood of the Mountain
By Steven Wade Veatch

Hollow
By Sonia Moring

Rusty heart cast in iron
boldly left holding the note
heavy is the irony
that fits in my hand
as I see the words that she,
not he,
wrote
on paper from your pad
we took on our walk
random words
you'll find
a year from now.

Poem Walk

My hair is damp
and the air brisk from
this morning's unexpected snow.

My nose is cold
and his arm is strong
on this unexpected stroll.
These cactus splinters ache me
Creating pain in open palms
Split before the savior
Dancing on the skyline like euphoric dolphins
Acting out, giving in
Eager for
Some kind of something
Laughing hysterically in moments of joy
Sobbing viscera
Left behind the whole spectrum of human emotion

Good god what words?
Questioning bliss, sanctioning
Blessed evil thoughts though,
Benevolent actions, this endless tide of life
So give me good grace, now or never
And patience is a virtue but
Our kind flunked that test
We are left with the remains
Cold clasp, last gasp—a finite
The ride began to spin
With hands clasped, tight as a lug nut
But soft as a silk covered pillow,
She screamed in joy

The ride began to spin
The love as strong as an Olympian
But as simple as an atom
I stared into her eyes

The ride began to stop
Hands loosening like an over worn shirt
Unraveling like an old knit sweater
She let go

The ride began to stop
Feelings slip like a tire on ice
Reality hits like car accident
I have to let go
A Crack in the Sidewalk
By Kristie Hollowell

Hitting my head against the blue tiled wall, praying for insight, “Please help!” I look around and realize my emotions have no witnesses. Suck it up, put on that smile, I hide it from the world, depressed, looking at the floor, paying attention to the break in the sidewalk, “I can’t step on the crack, might break my mother’s back.” What is that, nestled perfectly on his posterior? Yellow eyes that peer directly into my soul, a smile lights my face, my spirit guide is looking at me. I pick it up; it is small, light and plastic, missing from a backpack. Colors that remind me of the forest, mutable, and conceals the shape. What am I concealing? “Who, Whoo are you?” Shrewd decisions will be made, aggression that I manifest, released as wisdom when thought is not spoken. Clever, old Owl.
Mommy, Why...
-do we have to use candles to see at night sometimes?
-do we have to take cold showers sometimes?
-doesn’t our phone work sometimes?
-doesn’t anyone visit us at our house?
-is our house so messy?

Mommy, Why...
-does Daddy say mean things to you?
-does Daddy say mean things to us?
-do you say mean things to us?
-don’t you and Daddy love us?

Mommy, Why...
-can’t I wear a dress to school today?
-does Daddy always hit us with his belt?
-does Daddy pull your hair and slap you?
-do you use…
-a wooden spoon
-wire hangers
-the vacuum cleaner cord
-a plastic bat
-a hairbrush…
-to hit us?

Mommy, Why...
-does Uncle “———” like to play with us so much?
-does he like for me to sit on his lap?
-does he use his…

Mommy, Why?
-fingers
-hands
-“———”…
-to touch me?
Drinking the Hell
By Paul Merritt

On a splendid night where my gal did go.
Gliding her fine path, she is feather free,
Drinking the hell that my whiskey does flow.

Too fast and it will be the throne I owe.
Liking the time, she’s one to disagree,
On a splendid night where my gal did go.

She is looking good, glad to be her beau.
Slipping and falling she will leave me be.
Drinking the hell that my whiskey does flow.

Can’t slip too fast, I have a line to toe.
With eyes like that, she’s deeper than the sea.
On a splendid night where my gal did go.

Feeling right, and letting her tell me so.
Having her time, taking a spell to see.
Drinking the hell that my whiskey does flow.

Talk right, or it’s to the curb you will go.
Happy as I am, I do not need to be;
On a splendid night, where my gal did go,
Drinking the hell that my whiskey does flow.
Daddy is taking me to the pet store today. We ride through the rainy streets of town in his truck. It is our family’s only way to get around and Daddy uses it for work, too. Outside it is splattered with plaster inside it smells of cigarettes, sweat, and spilled beer. *It stinks in here,* I think to myself. I hate the rain because I can’t open the window for some fresh air.

The trees flash by and I get kind of sick when I watch them through my window. And combined with the smell, I am scared that I might throw up. That would be a bad idea. A very bad idea. Daddy has been drinking already today. His eyes are watery and all red; his speech is slurred. He is being nice to me right now, but I know that can change very quickly.

When I woke up this morning, I didn’t know I would be going to the pet store today. I have been praying that Daddy and I wouldn’t be going to Paws ‘n’ Claws ever again. Daddy brings me here only when he has “apologized” for whipping me so badly that I can’t sit down. Just a few licks with his belt don’t qualify. I have to be bruised and with welts before he will so much as admit that anything at all has happened.

An apology from Daddy consists of him telling me to go get cleaned up and to get into the truck for a trip to town. He says it just like that “go get cleaned up for a trip to town.” That is the only way that I know that we will be going to the pet store.

I go to the bathroom to get cleaned up. After I wash the tears off my face and blow my nose, I look to see how badly I have been hurt. The bruises are turning purple and blue already and some of the welts are bleeding this time. I try to find some gauze to put over the bleeding areas. Of course, there isn’t any gauze. I use toilet paper inside my underwear instead. I know that the toilet paper will dry on the blood and it will hurt a lot more when I have to scrape it off my wounds later.

I can barely walk. Every movement is excruciating. The denim of my jeans rubbing against my bruised, raw skin brings fresh waves of pain and I strain to keep the tears and sobs inside. If I start to cry again, Daddy will yell and smack me. That must not happen. I can hide the welts and bruises on my butt and thighs, but I don’t want to get hit or yelled at again.

We finally arrive at Paws ‘n’ Claws, and Daddy says to me, “Find a fish that you like and we’ll get it and a tank.” I am stunned that he is actually going to buy me my own tank. *He might really be sorry this time,* I think wonderingly. Daddy, my mind says *I don’t want a fish as some kind of booby prize; I would rather not get beaten.* *I wish you could love me.* Of course I will never say that out loud to him.

Daddy buys me a fish and a tank. We go home.

I start to wait for the next trip to the pet store.
“Open the door Jess!” I jiggle the locked handle out of desperation. “If you do it, I swear, I’m leaving you!” She does not bother to respond, high or not; Jessica still knows a lie when she hears one. “Please…” I say softly. “Please don’t do this again.” She does not have to speak; I knew what her answer was: “Why not? What’s left to lose?” I slide downward, crouching with my forehead against the bathroom door. I can hear the crinkling of the package. Was she just opening it or tossing it because she was finished?

She wasn’t always like this. Jessica used to sparkle with brilliance and colors so bright you’d at first be too blinded to see how wonderful she was. Her smile was jewel-toned rose petals – once she finished in the bathroom though, it would become an untended garden; cracked and withering.

Jess swears she was using before we met. This is a gentle lie. I am acutely aware of the truth: when we met, she was athletic in build with hair that shimmered without sunlight.

She was a graduate student with a part time job and three small children. The father of Brianna, Luke, and Daphne had died in a war the country shouldn’t have been fighting in the first place. Jessica’s mother was alive but useless – she said she’d help her daughter only if she’d drop out of school and grow up.

Jessica was going places. She was smart and vivacious. She refused to give up on school because she wanted her babies to know that you could accomplish anything if your heart was in it. Then she met me.

I tell myself it wasn’t my fault. I tell myself daily that it wasn’t me. It’s a lie. I was the final straw. I was the precariously balanced fruit on top of an over-filled plate. She should’ve let me fall, if I could’ve seen the future, I would’ve jumped.

“Jessica, please open the door.” I say. “It’ll be ok, we can…” We can what? Start over? Make new babies? Run away? She had already run – into the bathroom. I have no answers, not even clichéd lines of comfort.

Trade your dignity for energy – reach your dreams and still have time to make dinner. Make your house sparkle and get that promotion at work! I’ve spent many nights in the last three years making up slogans in my head. Every need and desire achievable with just one needle – all it costs is everything.

It was a stupid naïve idea she cooked up out of desperation when Daphne had the stomach flu, midterms were upon her, and I was coming to dinner almost every night. She just needed a little more of herself to give. I should’ve invited them over for dinner. I should’ve
offered to sit up while Daphne puked her guts out so Jessica could get the sleep she so obvi-
ously needed.

“I’m sorry.” I don’t even realize I’m speaking out loud. “I’m sorry. I should’ve stayed up with her.”

It was about eight months after we met that Jessica got pulled over. One jerk cop and an illegal
search later, Jessica was arrested for carrying Meth. The case was dismissed, but Child Protective
Services involved themselves just the same. Suddenly the three reasons Jessica had for every-
ing she did were whisked away to a foster home with a new mommy and daddy who always looked
disapprovingly at Jess. A judge ordered rehab, parenting classes, weekly random drug testing
and one hour visitations three times a week. Jess decided to take the semester off. She dutifully
enrolled in the programs prescribed by the people in control of her future.

Jessica was desperate for money. She needed a real lawyer. The public defender was a nice
guy, but overworked and under involved. Jess called her mom. “No child of mine’s a junkie!”
That vile harridan said just before she hung up. It was the last time she answered a phone call
from Jessica.

What Jessica wanted was in-patient treatment. She needed to hit a reset button and pull
out of the world for a little while. While she was filling out the paperwork for just such a place,
her social worker called to inform her that an in-patient program would mean that she couldn’t
see her kids and that would mean she was not complying with the judge’s orders. The message
was clear: get clean our way, or not at all.

“Please baby, open the door.” I cry. “I don’t have answers, but we’ll figure it out together.
Please, love!”

Group therapy, individual therapy, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, doctor’s appointments,
drug testing – Jessica went everywhere dutifully and followed the instructions to the letter.
She relished in her three hours a week with her munchkins. She fielded the tough questions
with gentle, mommy-style non-answers and hugged them tight when their time was up. She’d
stall for as long as she could – straightening ponytails, re-tying shoelaces and tucking in shirts.
Then the Interim mom and dad would arrive with their judgmental eyes, not speaking to Jess
and ushering the kids out as quickly as possible.

At the first “check-in” with the judge, protective services raised concerns about Jessica
taking the semester off. They said she was now only working part time and was technically
non-compliant; the paperwork had said she should continue fulltime with school. Jessica’s free
attorney simply nodded to what the other lawyer said and told the judge that Jessica would get
right on that.

So close to the enrollment date, the only available classes were at 9 p.m. Monday – Thursday.
Jessica’s boss was nice enough to let her switch to weekend shifts only, a time once designated
for her children. Week days began at 6 a.m. to ensure time for all of the various hoops and went
straight on until 8. She had one hour to eat and „relax“ before her class. Our investment in
caffeine was monumental; cases of energy drinks, a restaurant-grade coffee pot, and enough soda to rot the teeth of an entire third-world country.

At the next check-in, Jessica was found out of compliance again for missing two therapy sessions — she’d slept through her alarm. She never missed a visitation and had consistently tested negative for drugs.

“I’m coming in, you can’t stop me!” I yell. I have a screwdriver, a butter knife, a bobby pin, and a hammer. The hammer is my last resort.

I asked her to marry me two nights after the judge ruled her non-compliant. Don’t mistake my intentions; I loved her — love her, but the primary reason for asking her was to help. The strain on her was visibly significant. She was losing weight fast, her hair had become limp, and depression had wrapped its tendrils tight around this wonderful woman. Every time I looked at her, I was afraid she’d been using Meth again.

I took her out to an expensive restaurant and gave a quiet speech about being in this together, no matter what. She burst into tears and said yes. For one week, the woman I first met was back. She had renewed motivation and worked tirelessly toward the return of her kids.

Then the social worker called again. Since we were intending to marry, I would now be added to the case. I would need to complete parenting classes and weekly drug tests. I would also need to begin therapy. I wasn’t deterred by this newest edict, but Jessica deflated in seconds. I spent that night convincing her that I still wanted to get married. Just before 6 a.m. she believed me and rushed off to her first appointment.

We married three months later. Our only real victory was getting protective services to allow the children at the wedding. We had dreamed of a big fancy occasion. We settled for a small civil service in a courtroom and promised we’d have a big vow renewal at the five year mark. It didn’t matter though. Brianna was the Maid of Honor, Luke the Best Man and Daphne pulled double-duty as flower girl and ring-bearer. It would have been a perfect ceremony were it not for the one hour time limit.

“Honey, please, let’s just talk about this!” I can hear a lighter flick and almost immediately smell acrid fumes. I discard the bobby pin and decide it’s time for the last resort.

We worked hard together for a year. We did everything that was asked, but it was never enough. There was always something missing, always something that left us just short of compliance. Then, one month before the two-year anniversary of our living nightmare, the social worker called and dropped a nuke. “At this time, it is the opinion of the department that you have not complied with the terms for reunification with your children. We are going to request at the hearing tomorrow that the judge terminate your parental rights and begin the adoption process.” The demon went on and on, explaining that Jessica and I would be allowed a final hour-long good-bye visit and then the kids would become the children of Mr. and Mrs. Judgmental- Bastards.
The goodbye visit was three days ago.

It takes me only five whacks with the hammer and I have a hole large enough to slide my hand through. I turn the lock and burst through the door. The bathroom looks suspiciously empty. I pull back the shower curtain and see Jessica curled up on the floor of the tub, sobbing silently; the source of the acrid smell is in her hand.

It’s a cigarette. I’ll take Cancer risks over Meth any day.

I crouch beside her and stroke her hair. “Jess honey...” I don’t know what else to say. After a few minutes her sobs peter out and she looks up at me. Her eyes are on fire. “I’ve dragged you down with me,” I open my mouth to deny it, but she raises her voice. “No, don’t say a word, just listen. I’ve dragged you down. You’ve spent the last two years putting your life on hold to help me.”

She adjusts herself so that she’s sitting in the empty tub.

“I’ve thought about just leaving you, not even giving you the choice.” She says. “How far will you follow me? Will you abandon everything for us?” I don’t respond. I wait patiently for her to explain this madness.

She produces five passports; they are impressive fakes. Beneath them is a map with a highlighted route out of the country.

“The kids start at their new school tomorrow. I have a plan.” She fires each word carefully. “How far are you willing to go?”

I ignore the passports and stare at Jessica. She looks truly alive for the first time in two years. I stand so fast my knees pop. “I’ll pack what we need. Tell me the plan.”
In the summer, Daddy works a lot. He always has beer and cigarettes. In the winter, there is less work, less money. Less food. When there is less money for food, the family eats beans, potatoes, chile, and homemade tortillas for most of their meals.

The family qualifies for the food stamp program. The stamps are mailed to the family every month. Depending on the mail service, the food stamps arrive within two or three days early or as much as five days late.

When stamp day is nearing, the young girl waits for the mailman at the street every day. Of course, the mailman knows what the girl is waiting for. He is very nice. He says hi to her and sometimes he tells her a joke. He never mentions that he knows why she is waiting at the mailbox. He never makes her feel embarrassed about it at all. He is maybe the only person who doesn’t make fun of her for using food stamps. The checkers at the stores and the classmates who see her using food stamps all make comments that embarrass her.

Hurrah! The stamps have come. The girl is very, very happy that they finally came. She is tired of eating beans and potatoes every day. She will also get a break from the burns that she keeps getting while she is learning how to make the fresh tortillas that Daddy has to have with almost every meal, but especially with beans and chile.

Every month, two of the children get to choose their favorite sugared cereal to take home. The children wait anxiously for their turn to choose. Except for those two special cereal choices, the children have to eat the cheap unsweetened cereal—puffed rice, puffed wheat. The unsweetened cereal stays unsweetened when the children eat it. Unfortunately, the “good” cereal only lasts a couple of days; then it is back to the awful, boring cereal.

The family goes shopping. Mother takes the older children with her to the Bag ‘n’ Save in the next town over. The food stamps will stretch further if they shop at the warehouse store. The store has lower prices because they sell everything in bulk sizes, and they make you bag your own groceries. The family always uses at least two baskets. At the store, the two baskets fill up quickly. Bread, eggs, milk. And beans and potatoes, of course. The family goes through 10-14 gallons of milk every week. People at the store stare at the little girl and her family as they push the overfilled baskets through the aisles. The children of other families whisper to each other when they recognize the girl or her brothers or sisters. The adults whisper to each other when they recognize Mother. The girl pretends that she is ignoring the whispers, but each one is a sharp slash on her spirit.

The girl doesn’t wonder why the other children stare at her and laugh at her and her family anymore. She knows why. What she doesn’t know is how they could be so mean to her for something that is not her fault. Don’t they know that being poor, dirt poor, isn’t her choice? Don’t they know that they could be in her shoes some day? It’s as if the children in other families have selective perception. They look down on the girl and tease her. Her classmates think it is the only thing about her that matters; that being poor is her whole identity and her entire contribution is to be the butt of every joke.

The food will run out in three weeks and the family will again eat beans and potatoes every day.
In my fourteenth year you got sick. Which meant not much because you were still Uncle Chuck who loved football and Aunt Mary Clare and you could grill. Better with a grill than God, we’d say. And so years passed, half a decade and you’re running your firm and still kind and funny and sick is a television word and really, how could you be sick? Not you. A Kennedy in my adolescent mind, golden and glamorous and graceful and a good guy, the best. Decent stock. That’s what’s grown in Iowa.

Your fanatic love of sweet corn, remember?

The indignities of your disease snuck in with the cold one winter, the first Christmas I see you with a cane it doesn’t jar me, it’s so subtle – the stripping of personhood. It’s the same sickness the Pope had, the one who shook a lot and trembled and couldn’t get his holy words out right anymore. You close the firm and the cane becomes a walker with funny little tennis balls on it. Bright yellow, I remember. They were like the color of your corn.

When did you know you wouldn’t get better?

Amantadine and Levodopa and bold sounding drugs begin to litter your home and your mind. The actor, the one with the same disease, had surgery – they cut open his brain and jostled it, stimulated it in some radically deep fashion and after they did that to him, he didn’t jerk and could swallow his food and the tremors stopped, but this scared you. Or maybe it bored you. I think you knew something none of us did, so you refused. I never asked about it. My Father, was unable to understand your choice. Please forgive him, he just wanted you back.

How did you keep your grace, Chuck?

You left in June. Everyone was so sad and I was too and am still and will be until my light, like yours, dims. But I saw the mercy of it, and I know a little something myself now about how the body can betray and erode the self, strip you in the way fall takes leaves from trees, and you were in your sixteenth year of struggling. A man who played football and loved his family and ran for Congress should not have to fight to brush his teeth, eat, walk, live. The indignity of it.

Do you know how much you are missed?

Aunt Mary Clare went to Iowa after, then to Colorado. I know she thought of you the whole trip, and felt you there with her. Dad let out a sob when he saw you in the casket. Mom says he’s never cried before, the sound of his cry cracked something in me I cannot fix. Did you hear his words to you at the service? He told us that when he’d come to visit you a few days before you left, he gave you his ice cream so you got two bowls that day (no greater love, do you remember how Dad loves ice cream?) and that you were his best friend.

_In memory of a hero, with humble thanks and love_
Prayer, Fragmented
By R. Cordova

The day you get the news (or the part of it they’ll give) your first call is to Dad and he’s so
cold-sane-wise that he knows how to proceed, he is the only one that ever knows. And he’s
decided you can’t tell Mom over the phone, and you gratefully follow orders because you’re
Crazy and someone should be in charge of something and the world’s going too fast. He’s
right and you know this as you drive the long road Home, the infinity of miles. Some things
best done within arm’s reach (ashes, ashes, we all fall down). The road looks different this
time, dark and angular. The world’s fucked up, you’re cranked out though you were a good
girl (always) and didn’t ever put a thing up that nose and you’re surprised the car is sticking
to the road, that it isn’t flying up somewhere just like you are, flying and untethered from the
ground. Dad doesn’t tell her you’re coming because she’ll panic; it’s all got to be done so
gently, gently, gently so of not disrupt her sensitivities. This would be easier if she drank but
there’s no alcohol in their house, never has been and you resent the irony of being born to the
two Catholics in the world who don’t drink when that would make this easier, easier, easier on
us all. The key is under the mat, you half pray to God, thankful for this reminder that some
things don’t change. And then you’re inside and there’s a love-look on her face but some
shock too and maybe she sees your face and that you’re Crazy now with something and they
say that Mom’s always know. She’s heading to the back of the house where you grew up and
you’re following her, stalking her with the words she isn’t ready for. In the bedroom where
she used to rock you in a chair at night so you’d sleep she is silent and picks up a blue laundry
basket and begins to fold, fold, fold. Crazy is talking and the words are saying that they called
today and want her to come first thing in the morning, they found changes on her brain scans
and they know what’s wrong now, why she can’t walk right and why she fell and why she can’t
feel, feel, feel her legs, but they won’t tell Crazy more until she goes in and she’s very sorry,
so sorry about it all Mom. And then life goes silent, and the woman who carried you inside
her womb, who has never been poor in words, is still. She looks at Crazy; she finally looks at
her and a little air escapes her mouth, startled. There’s just this. And the moments are long
and the quiet is getting noisy. It’s rowdy now and dangerous and if this moment doesn’t end
soon you will need to smash something just to hear that you exist and maybe, that you matter.
And then she speaks, softly. It’s not her voice though and it’s not her eyes you’re meeting and
maybe this is when you start to get scared because this is happening, it is. Her tiny whisper,
“I don’t understand. When you were born they told me you were perfect. They told me you
were a 10.” Crazy sits on the bed, begins the descent into frantic prayer: Hail Mary, full of.
Careless
By Renee Tucker

I remember how she died that day, that pity of the flower gone to seed. The frost dulling the vibrant splendor’s bloom in murderous submission, how it forcefully discarded all misconception of eternal summer. My refusal to feel the morbidity of that molested innocence. I can walk away without remorse; careless.

I left her wrapped in that blanket of an eternal freeze, so much like the agonal dog I found starving on the patio so many seasons before, in the same spot, at the same chilling instant. There, the snow shivering on her skin reminded me of how merciless it was; killing the autumn grasses without care of the repercussion. There’s a corpse frozen in the field; robbed, tainted.

I think about her weakness, and how unceremoniously I buried that as quickly as possible; washing my hands, scrubbing them clean, meticulously removing all the dirt beneath my nails. That pretty soil – just wanting it washed away, wanting that resounding silent finality expired in no more than a sigh.

Remnant is that chill that reaches its fingers into my veins and turns my blood to ice.
My last stand
By Laura Cooper

Struck from the blow of your fist, paralyzed by fear and pain.
No where to run, no where to hide, you are always there.

No matter if I’m at work, trying to making up excuses,
Making sure I say the right thing, you are always there.

Struck by the lamp you threw, deprived of movement,
A bloody mess, thoughts jumbled, you are always there.

All the makeup applied so thick, to cover the bruises
Caused by you, yet you don’t care, you are always there.

Broken ribs from when you threw me through the wall,
I know I should leave, but I can’t, you are always there.

My mind is shattered, from the words you sling,
Can’t escape or shut it out, you are always there.

Til one night, I sought revenge while you were sleeping,
Now you’re dead in the ground, and you are always there.

I am the laurel of the valley, in which your soul now dwells,
This is your hell, karma’s surprise, now you are always there.

Today’s sweet smell of the air, as the rain drops pour,
you can’t hurt me no more, for you are always there.

Look now the sun is shining, a beautiful day without you indeed,
You’re buried under the laurel tree, now and forever, you are always there.
How the legs went numb one Tuesday morning.
How it was a pinched nerve, she needed to run and it would end soon.
How the Doctor in the ER asked if she’d been drinking as he stitched up her face.
How she explained she was walking the dog and the leg failed.
How she joked as he sealed her face that she’d never be a model now.
How six weeks after the diagnosis the Buddhist left her.
How the steroids brought sudden madness and the daily shots began.
How she met a man who liked guns and other things she did not, but who healed something.
How she decided that maybe she’d let this one stay awhile.
How you can learn to laugh at anything, really. And especially the things that aren’t funny.
Sisters
By Fran Gallegos
(For Virginia, gone too soon)

We fought and loved
We comforted each other after they beat us
We held each other in the dark when there was no light
We kept each other warm when there was no heat
We learned to cook together, tortillas, tamales, beans
We were hungry together when there was no food
We listened to that song he sang to us when he was drunk
   “Fatty and Skinny, sleeping in the bed
   Fatty rolled over and Skinny was dead”
We taught our brothers and sisters how to act when he was drunk
We kept the secret of what happened when we were
alone with Uncle We experimented together, smoking, drinking, weed
We survived, damaged, depressed, devastated.
Fiery Atom
By Jamison Wagner

Angry politicians expostulate, pander
to faceless masses in Neolithic manner
Minutemen ignite take lethal flight
towards other people they do not like
hydrogen to helium the nuclei fuse
matter to light in actinic blooms
gamma rays staccato all flesh they raven
helpless innocents no safe haven
radiation darkens consuming in flame
cities now skeletal a sad refrain
all life ends without compassion
wrapped up in a fiery atom
Thank you to Los Compadres Restaurant

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