



high grade

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creative arts journal
2009



submission guidelines

Please make all literary submissions to highgrade@mines.edu as a Microsoft Word document. One submission per document. Note any special formatting needs.

Art submissions will be handled through the High Grade office. Contact highgrade@mines.edu.

We reserve the right to format all submissions as needed.

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from the editor

It is curious how the branches of art and science are intertwined. Throughout my years here at Mines I've met some of the finest analytical brains and each spring, upon the release of the years' *High Grade*, I'm impressed with how these scientific and mathematical geniuses master the art of creation. Rooted in these pages you will find, as I have, inspiration from new unique perspectives focused through a lens, portrayed through decisively selected words, and depicted with vibrantly colored strokes.



To the talented individuals who submitted your work this year, thank you, and keep sharing. To the many devoted individuals who invested your time in the making of this journal; the editors, staff, and our own spark of enthusiasm, Toni Lefton, thank you. Thanks to all of the readers, too. Enjoy!

Christina Hadad

Editor-in-Chief

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Among Sheep

I am a sheep

Standing in a herd of my peers.
They respond with bleats of greetings and gossip,
Connected to their bluetooths and ipods,
Cyborgs in their own right.
Mind melding with electronic information.
Signals radiating from the source,
Sending up binary prayers to Satellite gods.
Each being reaching enlightenment,
The perfect state
Where the mind is wholly separated from the body,
from the soul,
from reality.



I am a magician,
Covered by a veil of thoughts and data streams
Hidden behind walls of 1s and 0s.
I move undetected.
Surrounded by oblivious meat,
Self-herding livestock,
Eager to embrace their own demise.

I am a wolf.

Nicolaus Faino





A Peaceful Night

It is a blessing
to sit
safe, secure, and soft,
to suffer no suffering,
certain that this contentment
is complete. No calamity,
capricious or controlled,
can cut the
simple simmering
of a warm body,
in a warm bed,
thinking of waning whispers
and wandering whims.
Love loses little,
to be lavished on limber lies,
or be lost in latitudes
unknown, where the mists of time
may make many mistakes manageable,
masking more and more mirage-like
possibilities, properly left unconsidered,
perhaps imprudent, perilous,
but beautifully bathed in the
simple sunset of contemplation.

Dimensions

Chlorophyl drains...
A certain brutality exists
when a brittle stem releases its leaf.

Like my mother's hand—
it has no strength to grip,
and mine still with strength cannot release her.

You cast your mind out.
You dream uncertain dreams, awake or asleep.
You suffer terrors, awake or asleep.

All the stems and branches whom
you nurtured want to hold on.
We want to shelter and protect you.
We want to keep you safe
from real or imagined enemies—
from painful dimensions.

If we accept this cycle,
giving over control to God or Nature,
will your terror subside?
Must you wait for the final sleep
to dream sweetly once more?

If so, I am ready to loosen my fingers.
If so, let hope sail softly as the breeze carries you away...

Alyda Morosco





The Garbage Pirate

Captain Plunder
Bellows barreling
down in his Frigate...
A multi-wheeled
Behemoth of the
Fathomless
cold Sea,

he Careens around corners,
Scaring

Cats,
Dogs,
Little Scallywags,
Old Farts tanning in lawn chairs.

he Screeches to a sudden halt
by selected homes,
Rusty Anchor sparking behind him.
Bent Grates,

Popped Tires,
an Off-Kilter Fire Hydrant
left in his Wake.

Out of his Frigate
he bounds, clothed from
the top of his Balding head
covered by a black Bicorné hat,
to the Toes of his shiny Leather Boots—
a fine gentleman Pirate.

he rushes Rope in Hand
to my Garbage Cans,
and binds them tight
with strong reptilian coils.

He drags them
Unwillingly,
Clenching feebly to
 mailbox poles,
 Decorative lions,
 Even to each other,
Hoping to break free.
They Screech loudly,
Begging to be spared,
Promising anything
To be released.

5

the cans surrender
their rather Rank Valuables
into the hold.
Now poor and empty,
They are hurled overboard,
crumbling upon impact
with solid ground.

Finally with a Trademark "YAARR!"
Captain Plunder weighs Anchor
And lurches forward
in search of more Booty.





As I exit my House
To rescue my Cans,
I spy Captain Plunder's
Old anchor sparking
Fiercely around a corner,
Light pole in tow.
I return to tend to my Cans,
Most hiding in the Oak
in my Front Lawn.

Warning: Don't Believe Everything You Read!

Michael Feineman

I once was wandering the streets on a warm summer's day, when I happened to discover a door I had never seen before. I suppose it was easy to miss, being only a foot wide and a head tall. The door was labeled simply "3rd Person." I mused, for a moment, as to what the label could mean. Was this some trendy shop, with an equally trendy name? Perhaps it is a place for two people to go when they want to be a crowd? But these musings are unable to satisfy my curiosity. How much information can be gleaned by just looking at a door, anyway? I tried the handle, and I found the door was unlocked. With the strength of curiosity, I pushed open the door and peered inside. Through the hole where the door used to be, was a small, grey room with another door at the end. "Maybe, this is some sort of waiting room," I thought. "I'm not going to get in trouble by being in a waiting room. Let's check it out." Without much more hesitation, I stepped through the door...

Mike's whole world seemed to change. He was still himself yet, somehow disembodied. Unfazed, Mike walked to the middle of the room. The door behind him slammed shut and clicked lock. "Drat." Mike said in place of his usual curse word. He walked over to the door, and checked to see if it had really locked. It had. He decided to travel deeper into the room and inspect the other door. It, Mike found, like the one before it was smallish, and unlocked. The door was also labeled. This one read, "Universal Omniscient" and had something scratched below it. The scratching was written in a shaky hand and was difficult to read. Squinting, Mike could barely make out the words etched into the door. They read, "little did he know." "Wonder what that means." Mike mused aloud. There was no sense fussing with the locked door, and he still had the fires





of curiosity burning in him. Intently, he reached out and pushed open the door and stepped through...

In a flash, everything was revealed. Not just things related to the story either, everything. Newton was a jerk, and the answer to question fourteen of the final is "C". "What power!" Mike exclaimed. "Did that girl in sixth grade like me?" She didn't. By reaching the center of the room, Mike's foot pushed the pressure pad, which activated the locking mechanism. This caused the motor to run, which pulled the door closed. The heavy metal bar, slid into its place in the recess of the door frame. "Nuts to this" Mike said, as he turned his attention on the next door in the series. Beyond it, there was a final door labeled "Exit" with a capital E. "At last! A way out!" Mike was thankful for his new found power. He made his way to the next door, and flung it open. He didn't even bother to read the label. **Little did he know, he'd be dead by morning.** He stopped right on the threshold. "What just happened?" Mike puzzled aloud. "I'm going to die by morning?" What? I would never say that. Not to you of all people. Quickly now, come in before you let too much omniscience in. Mike carefully crossed the room. For a place devoid of feature, the walls seemed to watch him. Mike reached the final door. He was sure it read "Exit" with a capital E, but had somehow changed to "Sudden Death." Mike observed the door, and said aloud, "It doesn't say 'sudden death'." Oh Buddy, believe me, that's what it says. He tried the handle only to find it locked. "It's not locked. It really is open." Sudden desperation sank in and he started pushing and banging on the door frantically. Would he ever escape? The world may never know. "Screw this noise, I'm getting out of here."...

As I stepped out of that crazy place, I was thankful to be done with it. And yet, I was troubled by the realization I had there. As I strolled off down the street, I wondered what would happen in the morning...

Flint and Steel

In heart of passions, human blight,
is not therein boyish youth the same?
Among icy barrenness, devoid of light,

to timid wander, alone, the Devil's plight,
through virulent forest, unknown, untamed,
in deepest darkness of the night,

purest innocence to ignite
a single spark to infinite flame
burning cruel the embers white

palpable pleasure's private rite
gives glutton's gasps, lame
bursts! Agony gushes through, God-less wight!

No beast of the woods endures His sight.
Woe, woe, whom then shall sinner blame?
Now, Man, where be *thy* might,

that feverish blood may not insight
the single spark to infinite flame?
Come, be thou boy again, humble, trite,
and through grace thou shalt endure Mine sight.

Anonymous





The Drought

By day
we breath orange fire air
in front of a hot wind.

By night dive deep
through mist and rain
lush green grass and trees
- yes, there were trees! -
dripping with wet moss
clinging to mountainsides
covered in fog and toad stools
dew glittering spider webs into crystal



Once there was every manner of precipitation
snow, sleet, hail
we wore raincoats - imagine!
splashed in puddles, wore galoshes, carried umbrellas
because you never knew when it might be
wet, wet, wet!

Snow melting in the spring
streams gushing spring rain
sudden summer storms blowing over the mountains
monsoonal downpours
autumn storms from the east
water, water everywhere...
splashing, bubbling, babbling, churning, pounding
water falling on the roof,
the damp smell of pine needles
the sweet taste of rainwater
the silky moist air brushing lips...

I awake
in a dry dusty basement
wondering if the fires are still burning....



Carrie Sonneborn





Boulder Interchange

The light was so
long I died
and was born again,

but when it changed,
I wasn't quite old
enough to drive.

The road was long,
and curved
against the slope



of cougar-prowled
hills. A blizzard
rushed ahead of the cop

I dreaded, whose locks
wound high
under his cap.

His lights shone
on snow
soft and almost

sweet as cotton
that melts as it touches
your tongue.

Shira Richman

Divining

Stepping through puddles, the twigs
and fragments of leaf stick
to my toes. Sopping
and splayed like tea leaves,
laying the future at my feet.
If I only knew how to read
the navy light of thunderclouds
or the gauze of fog
draped soft
on the cityscape.
The roads gleam halos
into each reflection, except mine.
I shadow,
and nothing
passes through me.
Even storms allow the glow,
illuminating clouds
into more colors of ice,
marigold, rose, verbenas.
My hair hangs cold and wet,
water snaking through each curl
as steam froths from the ground
shaping fish and butterfly and oak
if only I knew how to listen.

Hilary Brown





Watching Mercury Fall

This is the eulogy
of a suspended snow
fall, a sentence
of seasonal bondage. Tied
scarves, chained tires. The sun
is such
a tease, blinking sporadically from behind
estranged

clouds. The snow
coming to
rest in the basin
like cheap white
wine settles

in a cup. A
dull halo
crowning the rim of the unkempt
park, the rusted swings
creaking their disdain
at nature's new

fit of imperfection.

Eat the Rich

Khristian Clymer

Eat the Rich. Those faded, white letters grabbed his attention even before the sound of the wearer's voice had settled. The t-shirt was black, but would have been more than easy to spot in the dark. The skull and crossbones did remind him of Captain Silver's flag, until his eyes simply met the commanding slogan beneath, which dismissed any lighthearted literary allusions.

"Hey," said the approaching visitor. After Erik finished a lengthy processing of the shirt and a quick notice of the loose, faded navy-blue jeans, he became aware of the deadpan, but almost embarrassingly loud voice. The greeting caused the cashier and barista, in the midst of their cleaning duties, to look up. The couple in the corner of the shop were too distracted by each other's rambling faces to notice.

"Hey," responded Erik with the hint that he wished to match his visitor's forcefulness. "Have a seat."

Ben Rydeman did not look good, thought Erik. But he never did. In the past, Ben would make jokes about not showering. Back then, those jokes were laughable, but now, if one were told, Erik would need to force a smile just to hide a frowning look of disgust. Ben's red hair could touch his eyes but was curved to the side of his head. Being this unkempt may have been fashionable amongst teenagers during his "heyday," but the thin and greasy strands conveyed more than just angst against the ideals of other 28-year-olds around him: it showed his lack of angst, his lack of ideals, and his lack of understanding his own age.

"How are ya?" Ben asked in the same monotone and clearly audible voice. He quickly seated across the arms-





length coffee table from Erik. Ben's eyes did not leave Erik's since walking in. But not until Ben sat down did Erik notice those enervate things. He thought those pale eyes contained more sadness than usual, but they still held onto the skepticism which kept Erik attracted to their friendship since they met two years before. The blue of Ben's irises matched the light bags beneath them; those bags were not heavy due only to lack of sleep, since his body was getting used to staying up all night.

These features and emotions were expected, thought Erik. But something unapparent hid in Ben. Finding it was easy, but what bothered him was why. The one emotion Erik expected to take in from Ben's eyes, but could not see, or expected to understand from his movements, but could not hold, was a certain fear.

"I'm good. How's life?" responded Erik, his usual response to these types of greetings.

"Eh, you know." This was also, of course, Ben's usual response. However, both Erik's and Ben's typical greetings lost all superficiality when spoken only to each other.

"Why? What's wrong?"

Ben was always quick to give a generic response to this question. But if probed just one more question deeper, he became stubbornly reluctant.

"Girls, man. I hate 'em." Ben looked away to face the window slightly to his left behind Erik's head.

"Yeah, I know. What happened with Jen now?"

"Nothin', man. She's just killing me right now. It's tearing me up."

Ben crossed his legs and continued: "I don't know what I'm gonna do. Sometimes she just acts so young."

Sometimes Ben knew the response he would get out of Erik. In the past, if Ben couldn't sleep at night due to some heart-wrenching circumstance, he would often call Erik at night

and get him to say the things that he needed to hear. Erik's words were often preceded in Ben's head, but Ben lacked the courage to say them aloud. Ben was now in one of those circumstances, and Erik would now speak Ben's mind.

"She *is* young."

Ben looked down for a second and bounced a few quick glances around the coffee shop and responded despondently.

"I know. But it's still bullshit."

"I know, it sucks for you guys. But you guys are at such different times in life. She's still in high school."

"Yeah. It's just this whole Christianity thing. She goes to church and feels guilty, puts me on the fucking backburner, then she wants me to secretly come over. I can't deal with this. I love this girl. I have never loved anyone like this before, not even Jodi."

"Yeah, I don't know, man," said Erik in his forgiving voice.

"The Church just pisses me off sometimes. I admire Jesus Christ, he's one of my heroes, like Buddha, and Thomas Jefferson, and Chomsky, and Marx. But these fucking Neo-Cons drive me up a fucking wall."

"Maybe you should just go with her to church some day." Saying this would help ease Ben's mood, and hopefully stop his ramblings. Ben looked Erik in the eyes and let out a quiet chuckle. Usually Erik could get Ben to let out a few seconds of laughter with a joke like this, but Ben's mind would not allow it. Ben stood up.

"I'm gonna go smoke a cigarette."

"I'll go with you," said Erik, getting up to push his chair in and follow. He didn't mind being with Ben when he smoked, but when they used to work together, Erik could barely tolerate it when Ben would walk out every half hour. Of





course, any intolerance was never shown, so Ben would never know.

They exited out the backdoor of the brick building. The sun was setting and dramatically fired high, rippled clouds. There were also tiny specks with jet streams billowing behind them in the distance. A busy road kept things noisy about twenty yards behind them. Ben took a seat in the gravel stone with his back against the wall. Erik sat cross-legged with the wall on his left, so he could face Ben.

Ben quickly lit a Marlboro cigarette that he pulled from a squashed, half-empty pack out of his pocket. Ben didn't need to bother offering Erik one. After a few heavy exhales of smoke, Ben said while looking at the sunset:

"So Victor is in town. He wants me to help him."

"Are you going to?"

Ben ignored his question for the time being.

"He told me..." Ben impersonated a Russian accent, "'Ben, you have too much talent. I hate to see such a vunderful mind go to waste.' He's a big guy. God, that's a beautiful sunset." This facet always intrigued Erik. Looking at Ben, no one would ever think him to admire the orange and red colors of the sky. But he always did, and he was never afraid to appear sensitive in this regard. He answered Erik's question. "Yeah, I think I might."

"Really? What would you have to do?"

"Some guy owes someone some money. We have to 'encourage' him to pay it. I told Vic I have a friend who might be interested in helping."

"What? Are you serious?"

"Yeah, man. You said you might wanna help."

For reasons Erik could not yet identify, he didn't think too seriously about saying he would help. It sounded good at the time. He continued, "What would I have to do?"

"Just keep the car running."

Ben was looking into the distant sunset, which was getting darker. His finished cigarette was flicked a few feet away. He systematically removed another and lit it. He looked at Erik. "It wouldn't be your car, of course. Vic would supply that."

"Hmm," is all Erik could openly say. Inside, he was incredulous. He knew, of course, that he certainly would not do it. But he also knew, through his intuition, that these people Ben used to deal with always put a price on anything, even human lives. His curiosity took over. "How much?"

"One thousand dollars. It'd be quick, too. You would just have to signal us if the cops come or something."

"When?"

"Next week."

"One thousand dollars?"

"Yeah, it's not much. It's just sort of a beginner's job."

Ben snuffed out his second cigarette and flicked it in front of him. His expression said he was finished with the conversation, so Erik continued, "I don't know, we'll have to see."

"Whatever, man. Let me know. I don't even know if I'm gonna do it yet. The way things have been going though, I wouldn't mind getting back into that stuff."

"Yeah..." Erik realized that Ben was probably ready to go. He never seemed to have much reason to be outside if he wasn't smoking. Ben stood up, and Erik followed. Erik could have just departed, but he knew he wanted to quickly ask one more question. "What does your shirt mean?"

Ben glanced down because he had most likely forgotten what he was wearing. He looked back at Erik and slightly squinted his eyes in skepticism of Erik's intelligence.

"What don't you understand?"

This question caused Erik to naturally feel dumb.





Ben saved him by saying the slogan, not with uncertainty, but with control. "Eat the rich," he said.

"Hmm," said Erik, slightly grinning.

"I gotta go."

"Ok. I'll let you know...about that...job."

Ben had already turned to leave. He was walking home, since he didn't own a car. With his back to Erik, he mumbled, "Yeah."

Erik watched Ben, tall and straight, disappear around the corner. Erik didn't move but stood there thinking in the dark. He wasn't sure if he would see Ben next week while helping Victor because he couldn't see himself doing that sort of thing. He knew Ben would do it, but Ben showed a lack of fear that Erik suddenly admired.

This lack of fear is perhaps what left Ben dead in his apartment two months later. There was a small bag of heroine next to his body suggesting an act Ben had long since abandoned, an act he inherited from his parents. He could not take the break-up with the girl almost half his age, and he sought only one irreversible method of vengeance.

Erik Smith continued to stand there. His thin, blonde hair was moving in the breeze. His dark-blue eyes were wide. At twenty years old, those eyes maintained innocence only a god could corrupt. "He has a good head on his shoulders," said family and friends. But they nevertheless always worried about him. He wished they wouldn't worry, though, and that they would simply let him be independent. He wanted to choose his own path in life.

He never missed work unless he was physically unable to hold himself up on his own two feet. He was never noted as a particularly hard worker at the places he worked, but being persistently dedicated one: someone that put the boss's mind at ease when things were hectic at the store. When fellow workers would watch his small, thin figure work, he appeared

apathetic. But this presumption would be proven wrong when he outlasted them and gained most of the fulltime hours.

He had never done anything “wrong” and never hung out with the “wrong crowd.” He grew up as the son of a software developer, whom his mother divorced when Erik was thirteen for reasons he never cared to investigate. This didn’t affect any catastrophes in his schooling; he still graduated high school with a 3.7 grade point average. He split his time between his mother and father. Everything about Erik Smith was strikingly middle-class, a dull shard of silver in the mud.

Erik decided to walk back into the coffee shop. He purchased a small iced tea and seated himself in a corner of the shop with a clear view of the cash register where customers placed their orders. To his left he noticed a middle-aged man reading some pretentious, self-indulged novel. Erik decided he should ignore him as much as possible because he figured the man would want him to stare. He sat there trying to drown out the pop music with his own thoughts. He thought about how money wasn’t tight for him, and he seemed to buy enough of the things he wanted. The nine dollars an hour he made at a local camera shop paid the bills. He liked photography, but he considered himself an amateur of the art. In Erik’s mind there was no doubt that he felt wedged in a world of mediocrity, and mediocrity meant inexperience. Inexperience meant a lack of living life. Blaming himself would be depressing, he thought. But if not himself, then whom?

His thoughts were interrupted by a man in his early thirties at the register. He ordered a large, black coffee. The man’s black hair was neatly trimmed, parted, and had small streaks of gray at the sides. He was heads taller than the cashier, and his navy blue suit fit snugly, revealing a firm yet agile physique. His shoes shimmered black, brilliant, not a smudge on them.





Whisky Tango Foxtrot

You went home to shave
I was surprised
a little disappointed

I think too much
terrified of falling
I think about kissing you
like drinking whisky

I dance an internal foxtrot
every time I see you
my tongue trips over words
it's learning the tango

22

My imagination runs
away with my brain
blue eyes on mine
I can't look away

You smile that strange smile
not really a smile
I'm biting my lip
so I don't grin

I think about kissing you
it takes some getting used to
but I can't stop
after starting

I'm scared of you
what you mean to me
your arm around me
doesn't help that

Drink the whisky
even though it burns
You may come with me
if you like

I think of your smile
Not really a smile
the whisky of your kiss

Thank you for being
the glint of gold
in the bottom of the mine
looked more like whisky
the color of your unshaven chin



Sara Post





Driver's Ed.

You give me wings
so I can take flight
but I just rip them apart
till all that's left are bloody stumps
because I'm not good with beautiful
when beautifully tragic fits so well.

You pull me up
to take me higher
but my feet are so deeply rooted
in the ground, it's like
I've been sinking for years
and I feel at home in the mud.

24

You love me to
show me how to love
myself. But self-loathing
is skintight, and I can't seem
to wriggle out of its chokehold,
resisting your resuscitation.

You yearn to kiss me
but my lips are cold,
blue from holding my breath
as I drive away, leaving
you shrinking in my rear-view mirror.

Anna Neimark

Sleeping while your friends are fighting

Sleeping while your friends are fighting
Sleeping through the gun shots and dead men crying
Wondering if you'll ever go out and fight
Or stay in your tent shriveled up in fright
Your country, your friends are counting on you
How can you sit there without a clue

You can hear the gunshots drawing nearer
What will you do to make things clearer
Remember your training, don't freeze up
Pull yourself together and show some gut
Pick up your gun and leave the tent
This is what all the training meant

People are dying, your friends need you
Pull yourself together and do what you've gotta do
People are dying and you're just crying
Pull yourself together and go out trying

You're in the thick of battle with your gun
You don't know why, but you feel a rush of fun
Is this wrong or is it right
It doesn't even matter, you're in the fight





The battle is drawing near the end
When you see the face of your friend
Eyes glazed over; mouth gaping open
How oh how could this happen
If only you had been quicker getting to the fight
Maybe your friend would have got through the night

People were dying and your friend needed you
But it took you too long to get through your stew
People are dying, your friends need you
Pull yourself together and do what you've gotta do

To Mrs. Ruben

To Mrs. Ruben
with big fake hearts

You disliked “Ode to Polaris”
(a C?! Ouch!)
but only so many rhyming lines one can conjure
especially in the eighth grade (I mean, c’mon)
and you apparently really hated the re-write
how dare I not rhyme!

I might as well just have gotten you a nice big sign
“No Free Verse Aloud”

I struggled through mimicking those bloody form-poems
“These Have I Loved”
“To an Athlete Dying Young”
and, god forbid, “The Raven”
I mean, really!

And let’s not even mention the analyses
(Well, okay, maybe just a little—
how dare I disagree with you! Let ALONE
be able to argue it coherently!)

But that’s okay
let’s move on
that was ten years ago
(wow, that’s a scary thought—time DOES fly (HA!
An overused idiom!))
and I’m obviously not emotionally scarred for life or anything





But, however

(and yes, I strung them together like that again just
for you)

I would like to say

that I'm technically a published poet now

and that I love free verse

and, also,

with the complete and utmost respect due a teacher

and venerable matron

with your many, many years of experience

fuck you.

Torn

The temptress' smoldering eyes blaze
Reflections of falseness back at you.
Whetted palate of desire
Dried the Rivers of Conscience.
Holding barb-wired roses
Kissing a forked tongue.
Legs, a wicker basket, weave
Beneath knotted silken covers.
Soft white hands
Gripping hard sheets.
A cold bed holds pieces
Of a broken betrothal.
On a heart shaped canvas
Shredded with a cuckolding knife.

Shane Schrader





Falling

Talia Sanchez

I step a little closer to the edge. The exhilaration gnaws on me like a thousand tiny hands clutching for the lining of my stomach. The effort it took for me to even just find myself at this ledge in the first place was a great mental battle. I want to say that I slowly crawled there myself, but in all reality I was pushed there by some invisible force. I fought it every step of the way, but the more I fought, the more it pushed. I did not want to believe it was pushing me towards the edge so it came as a shock when I turned around and found a dark chasm staring forebodingly back at me. I almost tripped and fell down into the giant pit, but caught myself just in time. Too many people get hurt that way; I needed to jump on my own. I hate to feel so open, but on that ledge I have never felt so naked. The longer I stand there, the more clothing I try to put on, only to feel even more naked than I previously had.

This chasm has no texture, nothing to grab onto as you fall. It contains only the blackness that results from the unknown. The white marble ledge I stand on immediately fades into an inky obscurity. The chasm is so wide, I cannot even be sure when exactly the blackness takes over. All sense of depth perception leaves in a rush of panic. This black scares me way more than the invisible force which pushed me towards it. I have no idea what lays beyond it or how far down it goes. I do know, however, if I do jump and there is no one there to catch me, I will fall flat on my face. I will be crushed to liquid dribble at the bottom of the pit. Healing will happen in good time, but once I am back together, I will never be the same as I once was. Jumping again will be much harder and, in fact, even finding my way back to a similar ledge might deem almost impossible.

I shuffle my feet in nervousness. A small cloud of dust is formed at my feet. I have not been to this ledge in a while; perhaps I have never been to this particular ledge. They all look the same at the beginning. It is what lies at the bottom that changes. The bottom is what compels me to jump. Although the unknown is scary, never knowing what will greet me at the bottom scares me more. Because of this I know I must take the hazardous plunge. I take a deep breath to try and calm my beating heart. This breath only provokes my heart to beat even faster. The longer I wait the harder my heart pumps until I feel the entire abyss echoing with the sound of my own pulse.

I take one more deep breath, this time not to try and calm my nerves, but to prepare myself for what lays ahead. I am not one to shy away from my fears so I do what I fear the most: I fall head first into the blackness. My stomach jumps through my heart as I pick up speed. I close my eyes to embrace the fall instead of fear it. There is nothing to impulsively slow down my fall before I hit the bottom. I am helpless to the pull of gravity and I begin to enjoy the sensation of this powerful force taking over. If I turn and look back towards the ledge I know I will be frightened of what might lay at the bottom so my body freely falls without looking back, filling my soul with hope as I anticipate the end.

In a flash, I rush into blinding light. By this time I am falling so fast there is no progression from dark to light. The end came in a short loud burst of color. The entire cavern looks pure white at a glance, but when I look closely I can see many vibrant colors dancing around each other like a jovial dance. I am ecstatic to survive, unscathed from my tremendous fall. I suddenly realize that the colors are responding to the song that is in my heart. Our hearts. You have caught me and I am now safely in your arms, protected from all my





vulnerabilities that had overtaken me just moments ago. All my fears anticipating the fall leave in an exhausted whoosh as I look into your eyes. I see something different that I had not seen before. It is a part of my soul that you have captured with your love. A part that can never be changed now, no matter what life brings to either of us.

The colors in the room begin to form a warm and peaceful cyclone. We both understand what is expected of us next. Your protecting arms unfold and I offer you my hand. You take it and this time we both take a deep breath, not to calm our nerves, but to prepare ourselves for what lays ahead. This breath only makes us stronger because we do it together. We look up at the giant oak door that towers before us. We don't know what lays beyond this door. It could be a rocky terrain of treachery and tears or a smooth path filled with bliss. It might tear us apart for reasons out of our control or it could bring us even closer and more inseparable. There will most definitely be obstacles to overcome and traps to avoid, but it is a door worth opening because although the unknown is scary, never knowing what will greet us behind the door scares us more. There is only one way to find out what waits for us ahead. I squeeze your hand as you reach for the knob.

Cowboy

Black hat with an eagle's feather
To emphasize greater height
Stained with sweat and dust
Covering snow-white hair

Countenance angular and long
Azure eyes framed by creases
Shadows hiding the pain
Nose slightly crooked broken more than once

A smile teases behind a smirk
Whiteness of teeth emphasized by brown skin
Hardened and leathery from too many days in the sun
Riddled with scars from days gone by

Blue chambray shirt faded with time and wear
Holes barely visible medals of valor
Jeans once deep blue reflect the color of the sky
Boots shiny mimicking a new brass penny

Buckle bright silver size of a dinner plate
Worn with pride a memorial to success
Happiness claimed in an arena
Accomplishments to share alone

Hands once strong twisted and small
Holding onto a life long forgotten
Age is the enemy to be fought
Destiny realized in a dream

Kristi Punches





Genetics

He gave me all of my logical sensibility
To look at things in sequence
Observing the wonders of the rational
And the analysis that is always needed
A father's objectivity forever
While looking at all the parts,
His gift of the left to my life

Within me are two halves of a whole

but she gave me the random spark
and to intuitively trust the shot in the dark,
while acknowledging the chaotic din
to give the mundane a creative spin,
countered by a mother's subjectivity in full
recognizing the magnificence of the whole.
is complimented by the addition of her right

combined to make this shining light.

Benjamin Weilert





Dream Catcher

A cliff stretches out,
A great chasm
With no end
In sight, the claws
Closing in
On you,
The cliff's edge,
The terrifying height.

Jump, escape
With a fall into safety;
For the Dream catcher waits
Like a silent trap,
For the claws,
The eyes,
Nightmares.

Dreams glide through the trap
Into the endless abyss
Of fantasy;
Down,
Down,
Down;
Though in falling
Greater heights are reached.
As imagination
Has a chance to soar.

The winds of dreams
Kiss softly the cheek,
Tousle lovingly the hair;
And whisper gently in the ear;
Come,
Let thy spirit free.
Live thy dreams
When anything is possible;
Before harsh reality intrudes.

Christina Bailo





I Am

I am:

Red eyes with cracking voices

Tears that cannot heal an aching heart

Sharp inhalations between uncontrollable sobs

Impulsive repentance of everything taken for granted

Longing for another memory that will never come

Cold shoulders turned to unwelcome comfort

Indignant solace in the setting of the sun

Fear of goodbye for fear of forgetting

:grief

Comfiness

The blanket lies forgotten on the floor.
A cool breeze blows the curtain and
Sunlight trickles into the room.
Eyes still closed, you wrap your arms
Around me, wearing only
A smile.
Your sigh of contentment mingles with
Birds singing in the early autumn air
As leaves rustle and fall in
The yard.
Snuggling closer, skin meets skin as
Our bodies embrace.
Silk sheets are an ocean of ripples
On a bed of rose petal islands.
I cannot feign sleep when your lips find mine,
Cannot lay still as my fingertips explore
Your delicate frame.
Passing of time, lying in the arms
Of a lover that trusts and accepts,
Imperfect in all but her eyes. Making
Love while the sun rises and sets on two
Figures glowing in the fading light
As the world begins to sleep.



Shane Schrader





Pain Persists

A flawless portrait, balanced perfectly in proportions and
hues,
At a distance.

Looking any closer, it is seared with ugly marks of past
decisions,
Stained.

Choices made too late and ones others fucked up before
you had a chance to.
But they were your mistakes to make, so be pissed.
It is okay.

40

It is uncomfortable to be near the painting. Unbalanced
contrasts,
And Angry.

The whole painting is shredding from its deepest depths
outward.
Initially, unobservable.

You would only notice how badly it is warped when the
plastic is pulled from the flesh,
Leaving a soul.

Mostly missing, mostly bleeding, and Alone.
Unrecognizable from life's supposed happiness.

Do the scars add uniqueness or destroy something that
may have been special on a better person?

I'll tell you.

They say imperfection is beauty.
Ask the singed portrait how it feels to be cut repeatedly,
Slicing through the bone- Do you feel beautiful?

Scars never disappear.
They don't even fade.

Brittany Rummel





The Rhetoric of Odor

On the M60 to LaGuardia, a woman was asked
to get off the bus she smelled so bad.

“This isn’t my stop,”
she said. That’s all she said. Before that
it was all rearranging, wads of things like lettuce
moved from her pockets to her bags. We smelled
sweaty clothes
suffocated in plastic, rotten meat, and defecation.

Once in Seattle
a man sat in the back of the bus, apologizing up and down,
“I’m old now.
I can’t help myself. I hope it never happens to you.” We held
our breath, opened windows, tried not to laugh
as each new passenger sat down, their faces expressing
the stench.

We sprayed perfume in New York, hand-fanned
the air; opened Emergency Exits, until security boarded
and ushered the woman off

at a stop in Queens’ far reach
that looked as bad a place as any for a woman without one.

Cactus Flower and Bee



43

Jessica Stark
photograph

high grade 2009





Zulu Sign



Ron Cohen

colored pencil

Frosted Grass



45

Benjamin Weilert
photograph

high grade 2009





Snail



Drops Not Bubbles



47

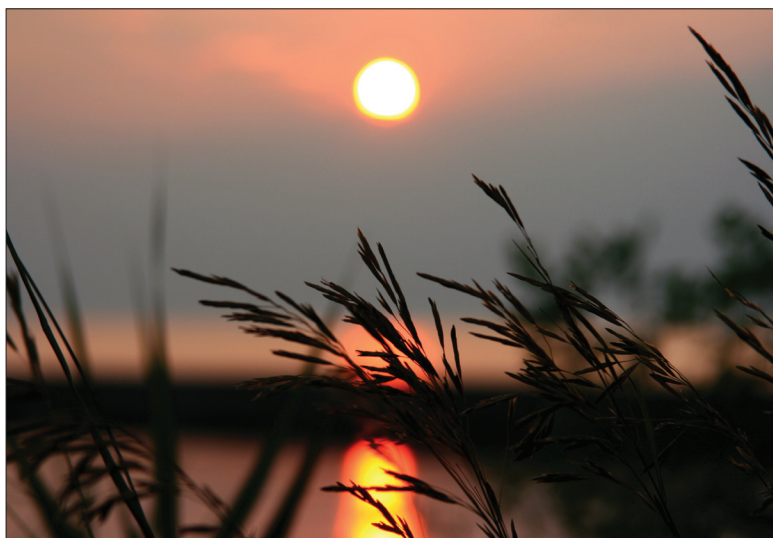
Alex Swanson
acrylic

high grade 2009





Oswego Sunset



Nolan Hannigan
photograph

Cross



49

Jessica Stark
photograph





Legend



Lucas Simmons

glass etching

The Look



Katie Smith

ink





Road Crossing



Sarah J. Cooper
photograph

Brits Old Sign



53

Ron Cohen

colored pencil

high grade 2009





The Art of Smoking



James Jesudason
photograph

Lonely Self



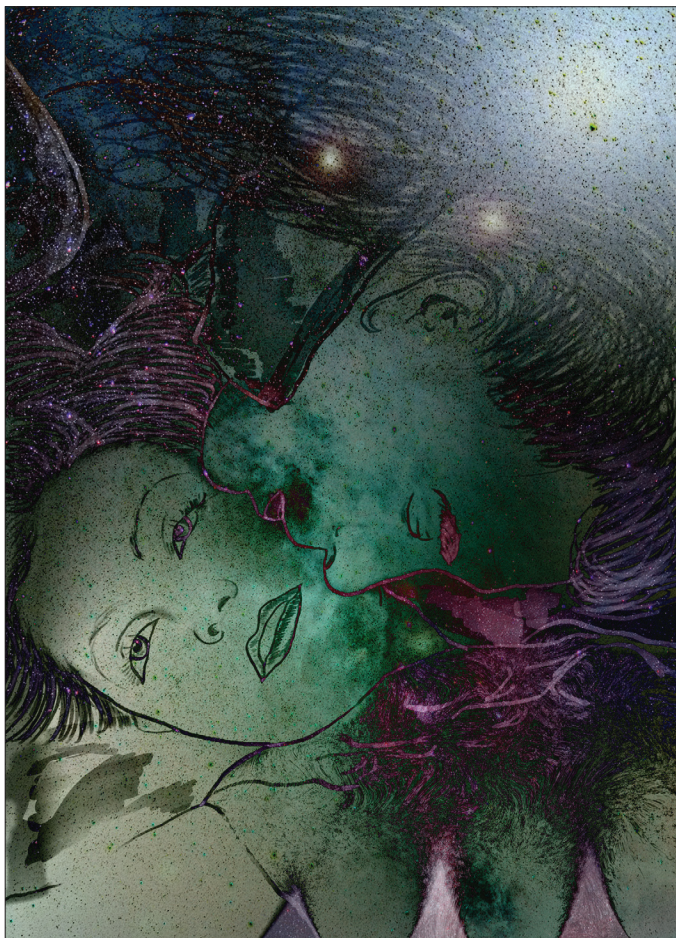
55

Patricia Burgin
mixed media



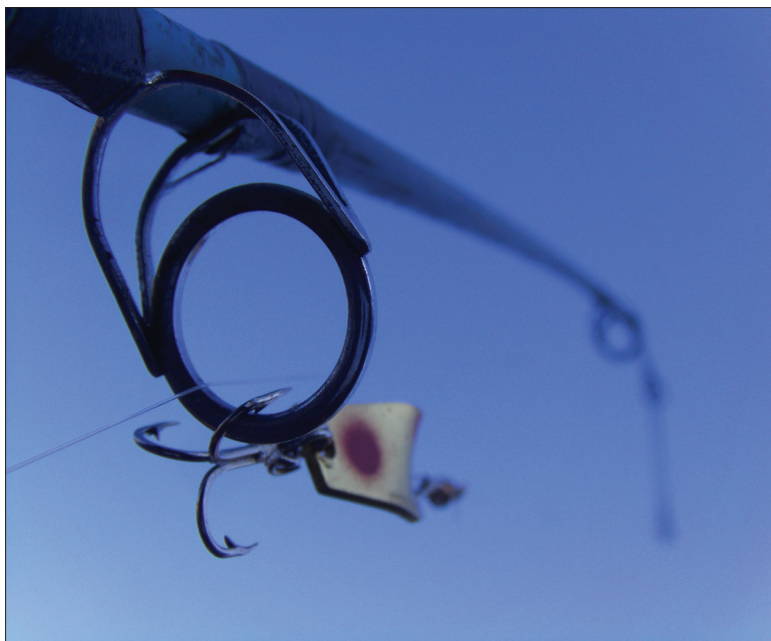


Galaxy



Katie Smith
mixed media

Z-Ray



57

Chris Pederson
photograph

high grade 2009





Worship



58

Alex Bentz

mixed media

Fractal



59

Joe Zeimen
digital

high grade 2009





art

After the Rain



60

Allison Peters

photograph

Central City Sunrises



61

Janee Hodges
photograph

high grade 2009



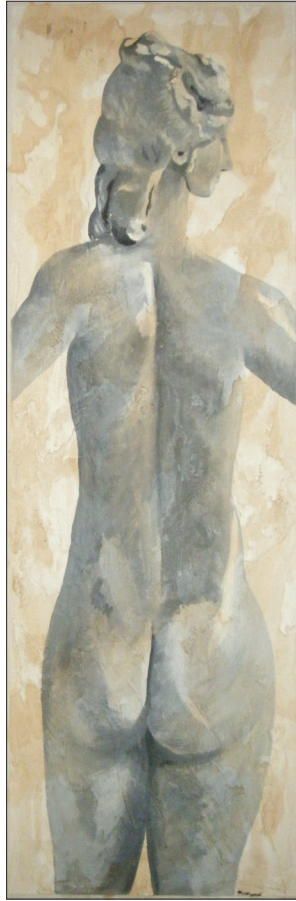


The Shadow Squirrel



Michael Dunlap
photograph

Ancient Woman



Michelle Harris

mixed media





Walter's Box



Walter Unglaub
ceramic

A Glance at Jen



65

Andrew Ferguson
photograph

high grade 2009





Time Is Fluid



James Cuzella

digital

Man and Baobab



Ivar Reimani
photograph





Old Friends, New Hats



November Tears, Part II

Abdullah Ahmed

It was the third night of October. It was the first night that everything turned down-side up. I could not believe it even though it happened before my clueless eyes. I saw them die; their sacred blood bathed the car seats. One by one, I felt their heart beats. None gave a thump. My family died. And so did my heart.

I do not know if the pain had started with the phone call that informed me that my father was killed in a military operation against the invaders, or with the news that the invaders were half an hour away from my home. My family, not knowing anything about the phone call, decided to flee north—to an old village called Sahera.

I still recall what had happened vividly. My veins battle harshly against my bones every time the pictures rewind painfully in my mind. My older brother, Rami, took over the driver seat to drive. He had only a few hours of driving time before, but at least he did not have huge waist like Muna. She was pregnant in her last month, yet her pain was far deeper than ours at the time. She had lost her husband nine months ago to a missile that kissed him. Well, on the other hand, I was the only one who knew father was dead. But no pain is greater than another. Pain is pain: a four-letter word.

I try to fast forward the images because the faster they were, the less anguish I felt. Rami drove the pick-up truck, but not before taking the neighbor's dog with us. They had already flown north since the early morning. Their only son, Loay, was more than a friend to me. He was a son of November, like me. However, since our birthdays differed by a few days, we one day decided to make November the nineteenth our





shared birthday. I can't remember why we choose the nineteenth, maybe because he was born at the end of the month and I was born at the beginning of it, and we wanted to compromise on a date in between; maybe because we both were optimistic about that number; or maybe we choose this number randomly. Ah, and I thought happy memories will never find their way into me. I hope I was wrong.

With my five-year-old twin siblings on my lap, and my mother next to Muna on the back seat with us, the car moved. The road we took through the desert was flawless. It was so ready for us. Little did we know, a rocket was waiting for us. It was cleaning its teeth and claws from the dirt, so that when it hit our car, we wouldn't get grubby—just dead.

Before it was time to meet the fiend, Mom had handed my sister Muna a breath-taking knife as a gift from my father. I can remember her unwanted smile. I had escaped her face and peered in the notebook she was writing on. She had some sort of a majestic poem written along the sad lines. Yes, it had felt like heaven had come down and dipped her pen-tip with heart-full ink. But soon, that pen and the notebook and the knife and the car and dog were burned up along with everyone else. Yet somehow...I survived.

There was more to it than I thought. Another life was saved. It had the only thump I heard thereafter. She was Maryiam, Muna's unborn child. Mom, taking in her last breathes, took the baby out of—there was a line I drew in my mind between agony and beyond suffering. And when it came to seeing the birth of Maryiam, I surrender all my senses and think of it no more. Please no more. Please no more. Please... no more.

I had taken the minutes-old baby and ran away as fast as my legs could, not daring to look behind. I wasn't aware of where I was heading to, but it had occurred to me that the farther I ran north, the closer I would get to Sahera.

The view kept empty, the sun kept burning up, and my tongue dried like the desert I was walking through. I did not care; I was only looking at the tiny baby between my hands, wrapped with a torn cloth. Oh, God, she was crying—was she dying? Or was that normal? I had held her closer and kept on moving faster. Suddenly, I had noticed she was not moving. But I did not stop to check; it was enough that I already had lost six people. No, I wouldn't lose you, Maryiam, I had said to myself. With that, like a headless bird, I hammered my feet harder on the ground and dashed even faster, not giving grief another lick of thought.

I had walked for hours, not knowing that my shoes had torn up and now my feet were bleeding. But...

"Where are you, Sahera? I can't see you in view. Show up now...I beg you," I had said to myself. I could already feel my soul rattling against my young throat. A blurring fog conquered my eyes. And then I started seeing several ruined houses in the distance. There was fire, smoke, and lots of heat as if the Phoenix was given a rebirth there. I wasn't sure if I was feeling happy for finding some place where I might find help, or if I was feeling grieved for seeing those burned homes. Only now I slowed down as I was very close to that place, which I couldn't recognize.

I noticed a big, green sign that had fallen on the ground. I walked to it and pushed the dirt away from it with my left foot so I could read it. I almost dropped the baby from my hands because of what I read. I held her tighter and left my head up. I could not believe it. I could not even stare at the sign again, the sign that read "Welcome to Sahera."

The hellish images of the houses before me stroke my head. Sahera was the most peaceful and beautiful village around. Its people somehow had always filled it with flowers; all kinds of flowers. But what I was looking at was





out of mind. The invaders bombed this innocent village to its core like there was no tomorrow. I can't remember what happened next; blackness took over me and I fell unconscious over the flaming earth.

I opened my eyes. I didn't know for how long they were closed. Sure enough the air smelled cooler now. I looked around. I was on a bed among tens of other beds filled with wounded people. There were children, men, women, and a few nurses. I pushed myself forward and combed the room for Maryiam. She was not there. A nurse came to me with a sad smile on her face. Her fingers were threaded with each other. I sensed wrongness.

"Hello there! How are you feeling?" said the nurse softly. Another nurse came toward our direction.

"Where is my sister's daughter, Maryiam?" I said stiffly.

"You really should get some rest," said the nurse.

"I am not speaking a language you don't understand—*where is Maryiam?*" I said in a higher voice. I realized how much I had changed, but I did not care. The nurse uttered for a second before eyeing the other nurse that just came. They exchanged strange looks, looks that said, "Should we tell him or not?"

"Where is she?" I said once again, yet I did not want them to answer.

"Umm...listen, son," the nurse could not say another word. She only turned to face a small bed on the far corner. There was a white cloth covering something on that bed. I shook my head "no." And I couldn't control a tear that ran down my cheek.

I walked slowly toward the bed, feeling more scared with every step. I stretched my hand to uncover her face, but I retracted them quickly. What would Muna say if she was alive? I let her first and only child die? What would Mom think of

me if she was alive? I killed her first and only grandchild? What would my father feel? How was I going to live with myself? How, for God's sake, how? If death were a glass, I would break it. But it wasn't, and I couldn't.

"Some members of the Red Crescent found you both just outside of this village, or what's left of it," said the nurse from behind me. "Your body was very dehydrated. However, we were able to save you. But the baby..."

"Did you see her...die?" I said, taking breathes full of ache. "I mean, did she suffer, or was it quick?"

"Sorry, my partner and I just arrived to take our shift. We weren't here when they brought you and her," said the nurse. I wasn't just going to stand there; I wanted to take a last look at Maryiam's face. Watchfully, I reached for the cloth and slipped it away.

"She is...she...she is not my sister's daughter!" I said, looking back at the nurse.

"Excuse me?" said the nurse, raising her eyebrows. At some point, I even said that to myself.

"This is not Maryiam!" said I, gazing back at the motionless baby. The nurse turned away, but then—

"Wait...I think they also had brought another baby on the other room—"

I stormed away quickly without replying to the nurse and entered the next room I saw. She was there, moving. She was there, pushing her hands in the air aimlessly. She was there...alive.

That evening, not even a single candle was lit. Mother Rokaya, the executive director of the NRC (Northwest Red Crescent), warned everyone at the shelter that a candle in the night, or even a match lit, was an ignition to a catastrophe. The F-16 fighters and the Hawk helicopters of the invaders targeted anything that gave light. Luckily, the moon was





very bright that night, which provided us with some light to kill the loneliness of the long hours. I saw some nurses and the director walk out of the hall. They sat in a small circle just outside. I wrapped a blanket around myself and went to check on Maryiam. She was fast asleep. I did not want to wake her, so I left and headed outside. I stopped behind the door. I did not mean to eavesdrop, but I couldn't stop my ears either.

"So only for another day, huh?" whispered one of the nurses in the circle.

"I'm afraid so," said Mother Rokaya, "We'll have to leave tomorrow evening; I am not even sure the food left is enough for another day. If we can manage to contact the Red Cross in the south and get some medical supplies, we might be able to save some of the wounded people. I tell you, many of them won't make it through this night."

"I heard the situation is even worse in Tageera; maybe we should not go there," another nurse said.

"Of course we're not going there," said Mother Rokaya, "Our best bet is Saradine. I know it's a little farther, but surely safer. Besides, I have good connections there. We might also get to the Manhal Hospital if it's not destroyed yet. I made some calls with the main office, and they will send two big trucks for us tomorrow afternoon for our departure. Oh, Sura, can you please go check and see how many more blood bags we will be needing?"

I backed away and ran to my bed speedily. The light of the moon that penetrated one of the soft curtains had laid over one of the patients next to my bed. She appeared to be an old lady; however, she was not moving. Her eyes were wide open and fixed on the ceiling. I held my breath and watched. I was too afraid to get near her, so I just stayed in my place. When I almost believed that she was dead, she blinked. I let go of my breath.

"Do you need anything?" I said to her in a low voice.

She barely shook her head with a slender smile. I knew she was in a pain beyond words. I nodded and lay back on my pillow. It was the most depressing night in my life...ever.

Early morning, I woke up at the sounds of three nurses talking rather loudly. They were standing next to the broken water cooler. Two patients joined them. They were all looking above at a small hole on the roof that I did not notice before. I looked over the door at the watch that read, "8:23 am/ Nov. 18."

Minutes later, the nurses began spreading breakfast dishes to everyone. I saw a large table at the far end of the room and headed to it. I sat there for a few moments before a nurse spotted me and brought me a plate. She told me that she would personally feed Maryiam.

I looked down at the brown dish. There wasn't much in it but a handful of green beans and corn, some aged rice that was left overnight, and a piece of bread. Still, I couldn't be more thankful.

Mother Rokaya, having checked all the wounded people on the back row, came and sat with me. There was nothing but some corn in her plate.

"The date of the watch over there is wrong," I said, trying to open a conversation.

"Well, because of that, we almost withdrew you from our support forty five days ago!" said mother Rokaya. I lowered my eyebrows.

"What...what do you mean?" I said, puzzled.

"I believe no body told you yet, but that date on the watch is correct!" she said.

"How come? I mean, yesterday was October third or fourth," I remarked.

Mother Rokaya smiled. "We found you on the third of October with Maryiam. She recovered quickly, but





you... you were in a really bad situation, apart from dehydration. You were in a coma for forty five days, dear!"

"Forty five days?!" I flinched. All of the sudden I found myself checking my body and thinking that that could never happen to me.

"Sometimes that can happen to a person if they see something terrible. Hypoxia is sometimes a result of an unbearable shock," she said, putting her spoon aside.

"God, but how did you know that I will wake up after that long?" I asked with perplexity.

"We didn't, and that's why we almost withdrew you from the medical help if it wasn't for that old woman next to your bed there," she said, looking at the elderly woman. It was the same woman I thought was dead the night before.

"Really? How?" I said, keeping my eyes on the motionless lady.

"Well, about thirty days ago she was able to move with no problem. Back then, she looked at you and told me that she sees life in you. For some reason I believed her. Poor woman, she only had an infection on her left leg and all we need was some type of MXe aspirin to kill the infection. But we didn't have it, and now she's completely paralyzed. As they all say, when death comes about, water won't heal the drought."

I finished my dish very fast. The nurses that were standing under the hole on the roof had spread around to help. I turned to Mother Rokaya who was talking to the wounded child next to our table.

"Is that small hole on the ceiling new? I just don't remember it from last night!" I said. Something felt not right inside me.

"Yes, it's new. It's like a miracle really; at about 7 o'clock in the morning the roof was hit with some kind of a small bullet or something, but thank God no one was hurt; it only left a hole as you can see. Well, many did not even hear it. It

was oddly quiet," she said. The words Mother Rokaya spoke seemed dreadfully familiar to me. I wasn't sure why, but memories of me and my dad sitting in our garden came to me. But then, I remembered him telling me about—

"YOU'VE GOT TO GET EVERYONE OUT OF HERE!" I cried, wide-eyed.

"What's wrong, son?" said Mother Rokaya apprehensively.

"Look, my father had told me about this before. He was a pilot, and he told me that one technique to get to shoot the aim right was to hit the aim with radar-transmitting missile first. And then, after two or three hours, a jet fighter would head to the area and hit the aim precisely!" I said in one breath.

I left the table and ran to the place of the hole. I drew a chair and stood over it. I looked closely at the hole in the ceiling. I noticed that there was some blackness on the wall; apparently the bullet, or whatever it was, pierced the roof and rested inside the wall. I brushed away the blackness with my hand and pushed my eyes closer to the tiny hole in the wall. There was a small red light—flashing!

The next several minutes were a mess. The nurses, panicking, ran between getting the wounded people out and packing the medical and food supplies. Mother Rokaya had hurried to the phone and requested that the two trucks come immediately. Before long, the two trucks arrived and the people began riding aboard on the back.

Soon enough, the two trucks were full. The first truck had already left. I, holding Maryiam in my hands, rode last with mother Rokaya next to the driver on the front. When the driver started the engine, Mother Rokaya jumped from her seat.

"Oh, no, I forgot the records file in the office. Wait a second for me, I'll go bring it," she said.





“Let me do it. I am faster,” I said, “Here, take Maryiam.” I sprang from my seat and headed out of the car. I ran around the small shelter, as the door was located to the south side. I sprinted into the big hall. There were two doors on the back of it. I entered the first one, but it was the kitchen. I headed out and entered the second room. The yellow file was right there over some books on the table. Relieved, I grabbed it quickly, only to hear frightening screams coming from outside. When I made it to the back door, I heard a blaring sound coming from above. I looked up, and I wished I didn’t.

There was a black dot on the sky. The dot became larger and larger by the second. I knew it was a rocket launched at the shelter. I looked at the truck that was moving away slowly to avoid the explosion. I knew that if I came out from behind the wall and ran toward them, they would stop and wait for me, which would endanger everyone in the truck. Therefore, without giving it a second thought, I ran away to the opposite direction. I did not look behind. The sound of the rocket became deafening now. But then I couldn’t help it and turned around. I saw Mother Rokaya get out of the car, screaming my name. I saw Maryiam in her hands. At that split second, the missile hit the shelter, and the ground rose to the sky.

I opened my eyes again. My body was all dusty, and I was afraid to move thinking that my right leg was broken. The records file was still in my hand. I looked at the other direction through the thick smoke. There was no one there; the truck had left—seemingly they thought I was killed. I lowered my head on the rocky ground, wondering if they would be ok; if Maryiam would be okay.

I spent all afternoon wandering from one wrecked house to another. I saw many dead bodies lying on the street and inside the homes. As much as I could, I avoided looking at

the corpses directly, but after a while, I told myself that I could have been one of them, and that there was no reason to be afraid of them. If these bodies were anything, I thought, they were holy, wingless angels.

The rays of the sun were like an acid. Finally, after failing to find some water, I sat under the shade of what seemed to be an old lollipop shop. I tried to close my eyes to rest, but there was so much death around that I felt that my chest was compressed with iron plates. I gazed at the yellow file and began turning the pages. I saw my name and Maryiam's. The file recorded information about every patient who checked with the NRC for the past several days in Sahera. I ran over the names quickly, but there was one particular name at the end of the fifth page that caught my attention. I looked at the name again.

Name	Age	Date	Medical Purpose	Other Notes
Afrah Khaldoon	44	Oct. 1	Anti-epilepsy dose	Due to unavailability of the dose, patient was told to come back Nov. 16 in hope to find the needed (157mg) shot.

I knew this woman; she was our neighbor. She was my best friend's mom, Loay. I recalled her having problem with epilepsy, but it wasn't a big deal for her family. Loay had told me that his mom lost control only when she was extremely worried or distressed. I looked back at the notes. It clearly said that she should come back on November the sixteenth, which was two days ago. But if they had come for the dose two days ago, they would have seen me on the bed in a coma, I thought. And if they did see me, then they would have stayed with me; they were my second family. I kept thinking and





thinking until I concluded that they had not come back. I was afraid that something had gone wrong with them, which would only explain them not coming for the drug. I closed the yellow file and rested my back against the wall. Miraculously, I fell asleep.

Near evening, I walked alongside the main road, hoping that a passing car would spot me. But as bad luck had brought it, the road was whistling nothingness, and the sunset came faster than I expected.

I entered a building that was not ruined. Surprisingly, I found a few bottles of clean water. I wasn't sure if staying in that building was the best thing to do or not. I then decided to leave it as I thought that the invaders were interested in destroying anything that was not destroyed yet. Besides, I needed to leave this village as soon as possible, so I could catch up with the NRC and my dear Maryiam. By the time I walked out, it was pitch-black.

Despite the day before, the moon wasn't very generous with its light this night. I walked for a long time before I started seeing some lights in the sky. I quickly ran under a fallen house, afraid of being spotted by the enemy. Until the lights faded behind the clouds, I moved again. However, I saw a familiar car parked in front of a small fallen inn. I got closer to the car. There was a sticker on the side window that read *Bless You, Land of the Two Rivers*. The phrase jolted me very hard on the head.

I ran inside the ruined place. The first thing I saw was Mrs. Khaldoon dead on the white carpet that was now red. Her husband was next to her. My eyes traveled from one corner to another searching for Loay, but he wasn't there. I hurried outside and ran around the shapeless house. There was a cracked wall and half of it was already on the ground; apparently a mini rocket had visited the place. And then, I saw a hand underneath the rubble. I smiled desperately and said,

“Not you too, brother.”

I managed to get the bricks over his head away. However, the rest of his body was crushed under the angry wall. Loay was dead, but I wasn’t even crying. I was beyond any feelings. My nerves had died longer than I could remember.

I looked at the watch Loay was wearing. It was around eleven thirty at night. I sat next to him and started talking.

“I am sorry, but I can not light a lamp or anything,” I said, “It’s really dangerous. I know you always hated darkness, but be strong for me now, please. You remember Sandy—yes, your dog—well, you left and you did not take her with you. But don’t worry, my brother, Rami, and I took her with us, and she is fine. I left her with my family. They are all having fun. Even your mom and dad had gone with my family. I am sure they have a lot to talk about. Tell me now—wait a bit, it’s going to be November nineteenth in a few minutes...Do you know what that is? It’s our birthday. I am sure you did not forget. Now what should I get you as a gift? Oh, I know! Just wait here for me; I’ll be back in a second!”

I walked back inside the inn. I searched and searched in the darkness until I found it. I took it and headed back to Loay.

“Now don’t think I am crazy, but you really deserve this gift,” I lit the lamp that I found with a match. I placed it on the ground and looked back at Loay.

“We lived in darkness, but we deserve to die in the light,” I said. “I know it’s better the other way around, but—” I looked at the watch. It was exactly 12 at midnight. It was November the nineteenth.

“Happy birthday, bro,” I said. Only now reality knocked me over. I realized that I would never see him again. I would never talk to him again. There would be no more of him. No more.

In the middle of my weary thinking, I saw a light





over the distance descending to the ground. At the beginning, I thought it was an illusion, but then the shape of a Hawk helicopter appeared. It came closer to the ground. I looked at the lamp, knowing that the helicopter had spotted us. I wanted to blow the fire off, but then I turned to Loay.

"Don't worry; I am not going to turn it off. Let them come; we shall face the fiend together," I smiled genuinely.

Oddly, the helicopter came too close to the ground. And then, it descended until it crashed over a short distance away. There was a fierce fire. I left Loay and ran toward it. By the time I got there, the fire was somewhat lower. The back door of the crashed machine was open. I took my alert and moved slowly. I saw a small box that obviously had fallen from the helicopter before it had hit the ground. I opened the box to find several loaded pistols. My hand went in the box and grabbed one, unsure why.

I walked around the helicopter, jumping every time there was a small explosion inside it. There was a blood trail that started from the back of the helicopter and extended to the high bushes where there were some old, twisted trees. I immediately held the gun higher, realizing that there was one survivor. A rat had come to meet a vicious snake, I thought.

Walking at the tip of my toes, I followed the trail. Before long, I saw two eyes glittering in the darkness. I came even closer, the gun in front. Happiness rode me when I saw a helpless soldier lying on the ground. Both of his bloody legs were seemingly broken, and now his heart stopped in its tracks. He did not move a muscle, only continued blinking.

The fire of helicopter now rose high again. I looked at the face of the soldier. It was covered with black dust, and he had some burns around his wrists. He looked up at me from his place, trying to figure out what I was going to do to him. I did know what I was going to do, and it wasn't going to be very pleasant...at all.

"I can't believe..." I said. "You know, a smart rat would NEVER bother a snake—especially if that rat had killed all the family of that snake!"

The soldier moved his lips, but I heard nothing.

"Do you have a family? Any children?" I said with an angry voice. The soldier nodded slowly, and raised two fingers, indicating that he had two children.

"T-Twins," he managed to say. I tried to block the image from my mind, but Omar's and Sarah's flashed right before my eyes.

"Great," I said. "Now picture the twins in your mind. Dress them well. Make them look very happy. Now make them dance freely. Now make them play with each other. Now make them look even happier. Now kill them!"

The eyes of the soldier opened wider. But still, he said nothing.

"How do you feel? Whatever you're feeling, I am feeling a million times angrier, sadder, and have more desire to punish. Any last words to say?" I reloaded the pistol and aimed it at his head directly.

"P-Please no, please," he said.

"It's funny, you know why? I had said that before to the rocket that killed my family. Yet still...it did not stop. It did not. You killed my family, my land, and my country."

"No, this is not true," said the soldier, somehow getting some courage. "We never intended you or your people any harm—"

"Rubbish," I said angrily. "Then why would you bomb a shelter for the wounded? Why would you kill innocent people? Why would you kill my parents?"

"War is hell. Can you imagine entering hell without getting burned?" said the soldier.

A drop of water fell on my forehead out of the





sudden. And then, another one fell, and another, and another. It was raining. The air smelled much fresher now. The soldier and I were completely wet.

"Raining in the middle of November? *Here* in Sahera?" I said with a laugh, looking at the clouds. I felt that my heart was much lighter now. I looked back at the soldier.

"They said water is the source of all life," I said. "But maybe it's not for you!"

"Maybe you're right," said the soldier slowly. "You can release the bullet if you feel obliged. But please remember that no wrong can do right... Wish me luck."

"Good luck!" I whispered as I clicked on the trigger of the pistol and fired. The shot echoed all around Sahera. I knew that every dead person heard it that night. In my heart, I said, "This is for you all!" I left the pistol on the ground and, happier than ever, walked away.

The only other sound that was heard that night was, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!" The soldier wrapped his hands around himself and with diluted eyes, looked at the bullet that rested on the ground, a meter away from him.

Now, At This Juncture

Imagine a world without pain;
Bliss without bane:
Dream of sweet chocolate cake nights
With white sprinkle star lights.
Elevate to the top of the highest mountain,
Drink of the coldest fountain.
Hold nothing inside,
Fill mind, soul, and body with pride.
Radiate thoughts into the air,
Know that life *is* fair.
Win what is wanted,
Disregard ignorance; undaunted.
Exist from event to event,
Realize how easily life can be spent.
Understanding is all that is needed,
Caring is where joy is seeded.
There is not enough time for regretting what's done,
The past is over and its path has run.
So—this time from birth—
Create your Heaven on Earth.



Stacie Biava





Bloodletting

My veins are too full of poetry
for me to bleed.

A pencil is my butter knife
because a pen's sharp point
has too much permanence.

Place lead tip to parchment,
my parched skin makes the barrel
turn like a top; the pencil
creates my teleportation device; the eraser
is the time machine I could never build.



My thoughts bleed charcoal grey, but
flow in rainbow hues upon the page.
The colors melt together and subside
revealing subtle shades of addled mind.

A butter knife's dull steel
fails to scar flesh,
but a pencil to paper carves trenches,
the gashes of catharsis
still fresh.

Anna Neimark

The Blind Girl and the Dog

Marie Patton

Everyday, Ana sat on the same stone. Alone. All she had were scraps of memories and tattered fragments of a life.

And everyday all she hoped for was the next day to come. Small hope though it was—she could nearly always rely on it. It wouldn't let her down. It wouldn't deceive her.

On this particular day, she closed her eyes so that the many passersby might not see the pure white of her eyes and ostracize her even more than usual. She held out her tin cup, miniature fingers laden with dirt and grime and gripped so tightly around the handle that her knuckles turned white from lack of blood flow. Her whole body shivered and her exposed toes had hardened like ice. Ana drew her paper-thin shawl tighter around her shoulders. She coughed quietly, hoping, as usual, that someone might pity her enough to spare a dime or a scrap of food. Or a whiskey when she was lucky.

Ana's mind drifted, as a habit, to those pieces of memories that she could recall—however faintly they whispered about in her brain. Often these thoughts subconsciously lingered on two memories in particular. One of them was the last night she had spent with her parents before they died. Her mom sang to her. Her dad tickled her. The other was not quite so pleasant. It was of a very strange man with a dark voice that echoed—and he had leaned close to her, so close that she could smell the sour of his breath—and he half whispered, half growled something that frightened her. She recollected his words with pristine clarity. "You'll never make it." And laughter. It was a hair-splitting laughter that followed her like a shadow. She could not shake it.

A sudden wetness on her hand interrupted the





free-flow of her thoughts. Ana reached out with her other hand, willing herself not to hope. Because hope, for her, could only end in disappointment.

But heaven smiled down upon Ana that day. Her heart skipped a beat at the discovery of what had caused the wetness on her hand. In extending her reach, her fingers grasped around the long, scraggly hair of a sheepdog. He licked her outstretched arm. Ana giggled.

Then she gasped and withdrew her arm with inhuman speed. She hadn't remembered laughing since the night before her parents died. A smile crept across her lips. She brought her fingers up to inspect the unnatural, upturned corners of her mouth. The smile quickly spread. A tingly sensation, unknown to her, crept down to her toes and fingertips.

She sneezed.

Just as quickly as the sensation had come, it vanished in an ephemeral puff of smoke. Sniffing, she realized that her dreams must have deceived her, like so many other things in the world. Ana heaved a sigh. The dog had felt so *real*. Willing the dream to continue, she reached out her hand to where she thought the sheepdog must have been sitting, though she was not expecting anything more than a handful of sooty air.

Which was why she nearly thought she was dreaming again when her fingers intertwined with the same shaggy fur as before.

This time Ana did not wait to see if she was dreaming. She opened her arms as wide as they would go and pulled the dog in close to her chest, drinking in its wild-grass-smell as deeply as if she could live off of it. It licked her face.

Ana could not help herself, and erupted into a fit of giggles as the dog smothered her with kisses. She lost all track of time. Life as she had known it had been turned upside-down.

The next morning the little girl woke up and the dog

was gone. Ana hesitated. Was this another of life's deceptions? A cruel practical joke?

No. A little voice in her head whispered. He will come back. Just be patient, it assured her.

So, once again, she sat on the same stone. Alone. With her scraps of memories. But her ears were a bit more alert. Her back was a bit straighter. Her nose was a bit stronger. Her fingers were a bit *itchier*. In fact she itched everywhere. She could hardly sit still. She knew it was dangerous. Hope was always dangerous.

Which was why she nearly thought she was dreaming again when the same wetness tickled her arm. Golden laughter spilled out of her as the sheepdog's tongue rolled across her hand. Ana leaned up to it and, as gingerly as she could, said, "You are Hope." After naming him, Hope wiggled with delight, and Ana was shocked and pleased that she could feel his tail thumping against the side of her leg. Hope licked her once more and ran off.

This time, Ana did not doubt that he would return. And indeed, she was not disappointed when Hope greeted her with a loaf of bread the next day. The following day he dropped a much-loved bone into her lap, and the next day was a wedge of cheese. Day after day, Ana sat on the same stone, but only half-alone. She had a secret. Her scraps of memories soon turned into a patchwork quilt of sounds, touches, smells, and tastes of Hope's devotion. For the first time, Ana did not fear to hope. Because the sheepdog made it that much easier to trust again, as she had longed to do for a long time.

Trust.

Trust that things would be okay.

Trust.

Ana lost track of the days, months, years. It didn't seem to matter like it used to. She felt older now. She felt





happy. And that little voice inside her whispered, see, *I told you so. Didn't I say everything would be all right?*

And it was.

Until the day came that Hope failed to show up. Ana's beliefs faltered, but unwilling to give up so quickly, she decided to wait a little longer. The next day Hope came. He dropped a child's rag doll into her lap as an offering as simply as if he had come the day before, on schedule and as expected. As hoped.

Relieved, Ana hugged him just the same. *He is my Hope*, she comforted herself. However, the next few days came and went and there was no sign of him. No sign of Hope. Her faith began to dwindle.

That night, Ana dreamed of the sheepdog. In the dream, she could see. And he could talk. They ran through fields of wildflowers. They laughed as they waded through the icy waters of a mountain river. They walked long distances in each other's company, enjoying the silence. They went out of their way to forget the rest of their lives and looked for adventures only the two of them could have. But then the dream changed. It was night. And the Hope that could talk approached the Ana that could see and told her he must leave, for both their sakes. *A dog and a girl were never meant to be companions. You must find your own path now. But it's okay.* The dog licked her forearm. *You will find someone who can take you anywhere. A human. And you will be happy.* Ana thought she could make out a single tear escape the corner of the dog's eye. And she could feel her own welling up behind her eyes—that-could-see.

Abruptly, as if shaken, she woke up, feeling cold. She shivered violently and *looked around*. Gazing over her, watery-eyed, stood Hope, his shaggy gray-and-white coat hanging limp at his sides. Then he darted away.

It took Ana a full minute before she realized that she had *watched* him as he ran away. She blinked. Her eyes were

open. She could see.

But suddenly she did not want to. She squeezed her eyes shut as tight as they would go. The sobs bubbled up through her. The quilt of memories she had woven seemingly meant nothing. Hope was gone.

Slowing her breathing, the memory of the strange man with a dark, echo-y voice sprang back into her mind and laughed at her. Cold and dark. Tears streaming silently down her face, Ana slowed her breathing until it all but disappeared. And with a faint "I'm sorry," she willed her heart to stop. And stop it did.

The villagers who discovered her body found nothing of importance. They threw away an old, much-loved dog bone and a beat-up rag doll, both of which had lost any value.

They had nothing to say except "I told you so."





Facade

(Excerpts from Nigerian Spammer Emails)

She looked fine.
Her heat,
the damaged crocus dress she wore,
Lowcut.
Livid face and pendent eyelids,

He stood rigid as if they had found out he was a spy.
He looked over the edge of the balcony,
snatching up the cloak



92 The cloth a voice of mass warning

Latin again.
"I had to get into the open, away from the bugs."

He smiled and blew a kiss to her
his lips asserted themselves unconsciously
as if they were loathsomely alive.

They hear snow garden music.
The chords harped slower, playing them like birdlime.

Laura Lacanette

Ode to Solomon*

(with apologies to Elizabeth Barret Browning)

How do I love thee? Let me count the piggies
as they run away giggling down the lane.

I love thee to the height and depth and breadth
that my arms can reach, when I stretch to wipe
up the chocolate milk on the ceiling
And patch another hole in the plaster
where you hurled your plate at breakfast.

I love thee like the moon loves the stars
distant and unobtainable yet we share
the same night sky
I love thee like the fish loves the fish tank
A small safe world trapped behind glass.

I love thee because I have no choice
And sometimes that is
Just what a soul needs to grow.

*Solomon is my 7-year old son who has autism.



Carrie Sonneborn





Lost in the Gardens at Versailles

Ivy slinks through mute statues
crumbling in solitude

Here, take this worn, bound volume.
I set it upon immobile feet, a small bow of chin.

You'll find enough to pick up carved
legs, forgetting a toe on the base,
as your garments gnash and grind
to pieces. Trust me,

perfection is pursed where the ribbon
slices the papers in two.

I was found wandering within hedges
caressed by the deep green.

The words laid bare the breadcrumb trail.

At the Grave

sharp rain Scours
open skin,
Masking creeks of tears.

the Unstable void,
A last home.
small Landslides
Cascade nearly silent
as the Solid coffin,
black Hole of memory,
descends Wrenching hearts
down inch by Jerking inch.

shallow bouquets Tumble down
Empty vessel full of tears,
rest abruptly upon
the Mirrored
wood and metal
Coffin top,
petals Defiantly hold together,
Symbols for those above.

Thick showers of dirt
and small Uneven stones
Fog-like settle
easily within the Void,
filling the Grave
But
Still
We are Empty...





Moving Away

Remember that we are moving away
From those years
Of innocent idolization
And predictable hugs and kisses.

The chasm between us
Expands out of misunderstandings
And attempts to preserve the past
Not accepting the present.

All those nights we have let the sun
Set with the conflicts unresolved
Fists clenched and eyes moistened,
Dilated by the light of the moon.

The laughs and smiles
Accompanied with four hands
Each time, a moment of coming together
Forgetting the unharmonious yelling
That taints our past, scars my heart.

Remember that I am moving away
Because you pushed so hard
For everything to stay the same
I seek those who accept me
Just as I am now, as I will become.

Jennifer R. Conner

A Visit

Katie Smith

The white house on the corner of 20th and Grant was always a mystery. It was older than the rest, and the only house with a fresh coat of paint along the street of plain, tan houses. Yet, for as mysterious as the building was, even less was known about the occupant, a Mrs. Lily Watson. Every afternoon, she poured herself a glass of iced tea and rocked, placidly, in her wicker rocker. She waved to whomever passed her way, although, the townspeople rarely acknowledged her. She was a commanding figure, yet gentle. She was tall and fairly thin. The soft pastels of her dress made Mrs. Watson seem like one of the many foxgloves that lined her immaculate porch. She wore her silvery, white hair in a flip do, tying her bangs back with a thin pink ribbon. The only thing the town of Wister loved more than their annual orchard festival was the neighborhood gossip about Lily.

"I hear she's a communist. She has all those foreign books," the neighborhood hens pecked over.

"Well I heard that she is a spy for the Russians. Sometimes I hear that radio of hers," gossips whispered over their fences.

"Oh, well that's nothing. Sometimes, in that house, I can swear there's another person. But I haven't seen anybody go in or out," a neighbor speculated. Not a soul from the town spoke to Mrs. Lily in twenty years, for fear if they were seen talking with her, they, too, would become an object of speculation.

I was only seven when my family moved to Wister. My mother had an absolute edict, "Love thy neighbor." One fall morning, my mother called me downstairs from the new





kitchen. As I walked down the stairs, I caught a whiff of her unmistakable brownies. She had five plates already laid out on the table, and two more batches were baking in her oven. My red wagon was sitting by the door.

"I want you to take these brownies to all of the neighbors," Mother instructed me, "and deliver these notes to introduce us."

I loaded up my wagon and I walked down the street. I stopped briefly at the Jones', the Applegate's, the Thomson's, the Michaels', and finally to 21 Grant Street. I walked the three steps up to the porch. I imagined that the purple foxgloves were dancing ladies, as I smelled their light perfume. Lily's chair was occupied by a small, moth-eaten teddy bear and an old letterman's jacket. The ice in her empty pitcher was starting to melt. When I walked up to the screen door, I could see Lily reading in her living room. I knocked, shyly, at the door.

Lily looked up from her book, surprised. "I don't get many visitors." She set her reading glasses on the table.

"I just moved here with my family. We live in the second house from the end of the block. My mom wanted me to give you these." I handed her the brownies.

"My, they smell delicious. Sit down. I never have anyone to share a treat with." I sat on the yellow day bed. The bright linen fabric was dotted with a pattern of delicate, purple foxgloves. I figured that these must be Lily's favorite flowers. She came back from the kitchen with a bottle of milk. "This was delivered fresh this morning. I kept it in the icebox, so it ought to be chilled by now."

I sipped the milk from a yellow glass and tasted one of my mother's brownies.

The living room was clean, and yet housed nearly a lifetime of books, records, and photographs. Each of her five bookshelves was crowded with books: Faulkner, Shakespeare, Voltaire, and Hawthorn. At the time, these names were a

mystery to me. She had textbooks on mathematics, biology, literature, and botany. The four piles of records next to the small record player were each taller than me and were freshly dusted. I was most fascinated by the treasures in the corner. There, Lily had a display of toys: dolls, bears, wagons, tin soldiers, blocks and Tinkertoys. My attention was, again, focused on the brownies and the book sitting on Lily's coffee table.

"What is Can-did?" I asked.

"*Candide*," Lily corrected. "It's a love story, one of my favorites. The boy and the girl meet, fall in love, and then are separated. Many years later they find each other and tend a garden."

"So it's a fairy tale?" I asked.

"It is a lesson on life," Mrs. Lily looked dreamy-eyed and trailed off.

I got up from the sofa and looked around at the many pictures on the wall. Many of them were of a young woman with dark hair and porcelain skin. Her eyes were bright and hopeful and she wore a small heart pendant. Next to this portrait was a picture of a young man in overalls. His hands were in his pockets and he smiled at the camera, a brilliant handsome smile. He wore a leather letterman's jacket, embroidered with an "L." I lifted the framed picture off the wall.

"Is this the jacket in the chair?" I asked. Mrs. Lily did not answer. I left the photo on the coffee table. Another portrait caught my eye, it was of a small, country wedding, the same girl as in the other portrait, but a different man was at her arm. His hair was dark. He had the same, kind features as the boy in the letterman's jacket, but his eyes were different. Mrs. Lily walked across the room to where I was standing. I could see that she was wearing the same heart pendant as in her photo. She pointed to the picture I was studying.

"That's Lawrence," she sighed. "He loved music,"





she gestured toward the record pile. She thumbed through the many records, settling on Artie Shaw. It was bright and upbeat. "We met in college. This was his favorite album. He was studying botany. I was studying literature, so we amassed quite a collection of books and plants. The foxgloves were his favorite plant and he planted them out on our porch. He took care of them. If I touched them, they would have died." Yet, the evidence on her step seemed to point otherwise. "Most folks believed I tended the garden. The neighbors just couldn't understand that a man could have a garden."

There was a distinct buzzing coming from the bedroom. Seeing that I was alarmed, Lily showed me into her room. The buzz was coming from her radio. I could here some unintelligible babbling. She had a ham radio before most folks in the town had telephones. No one had any reason to have a personal telephone. The only people the townsfolk knew were within five miles, and it was customary to visit friends in person during the weekends and during the orchard fest. I was fascinated by Lily's radio and the voices coming from it.

"What's this for?" I asked.

Lily did not answer and gave the same sigh as she had looking at the picture of the man in a letterman's jacket. We walked to the kitchen where she pulled a fresh pitcher of tea from the refrigerator.

"Shall we sit outside?" she asked. She pulled up a small, child's rocker from the corner of the patio. We sat out in the sun. Lily held the jacket in her lap and sipped the tea, looking longingly down the road. I posed the same question I asked in the living room, "Did that belong to the man in the photo?" I pointed to the jacket.

Lily spoke quietly, touching her necklace. "George," she whispered. She jumped at the sudden buzzing and babbling of the radio. "George is calling!" Lily Watson ran into the house, leaving the teddy bear rocking in her wicker chair.



2008 Blackwell Prize

Creativity. Imagination. Inventiveness.

These attributes are among a growing list of “extra-technical” talents that are considered vital for 21st century engineers and applied scientists to be successful professionals in a world of constant and complex change. The Division of Liberal Arts and International Studies (LAIS) has enjoyed a minor explosion in its ability to cultivate the creativity, imagination, and inventiveness of Mines undergraduates through academic instruction in creative writing, film, music performance, and studio art.

Thanks to the generosity—and imagination—of Colorado School of Mines alumnus J. Michael Blackwell, Class of 1959, LAIS acquired the capacity to recognize superior student performance in these areas with the establishment of the Blackwell Award for Excellence in Creative Expression in 2006. The Blackwell Award recognizes those who have excelled in the evocative representation of the human condition through the genres of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, music, or the artistic representation of academic inquiry. The winner of this award will have produced a creative work in the fine arts, literature, poetry, music, film, or technical arts of stunning originality.

It is a distinct pleasure to be able to showcase the work of this year’s recipient of that award, Abdullah Ahmed—Petroleum Engineering Class of 2011—whose creative non-fiction appears on the following pages.





Nomination for Abdullah Ahmed

In past semesters I have had the good fortune to nominate exceptional work from my senior level courses. Students in my upper division classes, because of their experience, are more likely to embrace the imaginative worlds outside of the academic box. Those creative portfolios often represent not just the final project in a poetry or literature class, but the last exploration in a liberal arts course before students hit their careers head on. In this case, it is my absolute delight to have that type of experience with a student in a 100 level course. The essay included in this edition of *High Grade*, "The Paradox of Life and the Boy Who Was a Terrorist" is one of four Abdullah Ahmed included in his Blackwell Prize winning portfolio titled *Execution of a Palm Tree*. This work was originally submitted as a final project in Nature and Human Values.

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Abdullah has not just found language, but the content of language. I would sit down to grade his essay, losing my pen in the folds of the couch, leaning in as he described a street in Baghdad, catching my breath, and sometimes, wiping tears from my face. Working with Abdullah allowed me to see him struggle with the words on the page, often mulling over the translation from Arabic to English, in order to take me back into his life, to palpably show me the beautiful landscapes and the literal rubble of his past. His writing also carries the reflection of hope, and in a class based on the ethical analysis of the human condition, that hope carries a very great weight.

With hearty congratulations to Abdullah Ahmed and deepest gratitude to J. Michael Blackwell for making this award possible. Enjoy!

Toni Lefton

The Paradox of Life

And the Boy who was a Terrorist

Abdullah Ahmed

"[A] memory may be a paradise from which we cannot be driven; it may also be a hell from which we cannot escape."

- John Lancaster Spalding

My legs trembled beneath me, like a young castle without foundation. I slowly raised my fingers to tell them goodbye. There was no going back. My life—all of the fifteen years that I had—cried for me. The minutes and the hours and the seconds moaned, resembling clouds disowning their water, as if to correspond with my eyes that forged angry seas. Somehow, my heart told me it was going to be alright. My heart was such a liar.

Memories, as faint and as feeble as they can be, strike like thunder; and once they leave, their trace is never forgotten. They carve themselves in the deepest places where they can stay safe. No matter how much we try, they prevail. No matter how much we strike back, they overcome every obstacle and linger, the same way a catfish sticks to the walls of a tank. What if a technology can track those carvings and dust them away? What if I can forget each of those burning times? My concern is not that I will miss those memories. It is the fear of losing them—the fear of who I will be without them. This is me, and this is how I wrestled with the paradox of life.

It was the last weary days of 2001 when my family and I took the sudden and long ride to Jordan, leaving Baghdad at dawn when everyone was asleep, except of course for the roosters, who I felt were saying their goodbyes. Our visas to the United States were waiting for us somewhere in the drawers of the US embassy at Amman. The van drove





through the day until nightfall coated the clouds. Everyone managed to sleep. I couldn't. I was not the movie star who had to stay awake to observe every detail; I was a confused thirteen year old boy. I was a boy who wasn't sure whether he was happy for grasping a new life, or devastated for leaving a life that nurtured him and defined to him the meaning of contentment. The minute I rolled down the window of the van, the answer leapt at me. We passed restaurants that I thought were deliberately open late to present the scent of Humas and Khabab for one last time. We passed Arabic banners that reminded me of how much I loved going through the streets of Al-Shorjah to buy clothes for the Eid. But the last banner that I read extended a limb and ripped my being into shreds, a banner that said, "Goodbye." I wished the road beneath our van would twist and bring me back. It was too late by then; the vehicle had moved on, and my eyes managed to shut.

Like fungi, memories thrive in the strangest places. They can be both aggressive and poisonous, or they can be supple and full of charm. When I opened my eyes in the van, I felt the venom of a particular memory: one that I called Lo'ay. Lo'ay was a boy my age who was more than a family to me. He was a best friend; one that only existed in the adventurous stories the elders used to tell. Our swift ride prevented me from saying goodbye to him, which forced a memory of deepest regret to carve itself in me. I wanted to dust it away and erase that memory. I wanted to forget about Lo'ay and pretend he never existed because that was the only way I could relieve myself. I told myself that if I erase him, I can always go back to Baghdad and see him there once again. If a technology of erasing memories was available at the time, I would not have hesitated to take a sip of it. Lucky me, there was no such technology, and a fast-forward of time would explain why I was lucky. We get to Jordan and our visas need two weeks to be ready; before the two weeks end, the tragedy of September

I I occurs; our visas are denied; we apply again; we wait; we wait even more; the Iraqi war ignites; my father disappears on his way to Yemen; we discover he was sent to Iraq on the very first day of the war; the war ends; my father reunites with us in Jordan; my father tells me Lo'ay was killed...

Like an electrical throb, memories can electrocute with unprecedented generosity. I can still feel the memories of Jordan at the tips of my fingers, mingling rhetorically. I am forced to believe that life and memory work together. Life's job is to juggle us and play tricks on us, and memory comes afterwards to remind us of those days. The two weeks in Jordan turned into two years. The nights pulled the days, and depression became a friend. Time proudly stretched itself as gaps of boredom left our cores decayed. Finally, we got the call. My parents visited the embassy, thinking our best memory was at the door. It was, in fact, the worst yet. And there is only one way to describe it:

A melody played as my shadow

disappeared in the shade.

I kept asking why; yet I had to say goodbye.

There were five visas and we were six,

and that's how life plays its tricks.

At sixteen I was a terrorist in their eyes;

I didn't know what to feel

but above everything I had to rise.

I told them it was going to be alright





and at the airport we all cried
until there was a minute to the flight.
My legs trembled beneath me,
like a young castle without foundation
as I was filled with pain and frustration.
That aching, dreadful sensation.
And when they finally disappeared
behind the wall,
my body took a fall.



The passers, not amused,
looked at me with wonder,
not knowing that memories in my head
were rumbling like thunder.
I pushed and pushed and dragged
myself to my place, to start a journey back
that I wanted to erase.

How extraordinary it is when irony stumbles over our lives. The paradox of life kept singing its bitter melody over and over again. Regular visits to the embassy proved failure, and the daily phone calls to my family—which later I had to reduce to save money—were the only thing that kept me

going. After a month of misery the embassy called, delivering the good news of a new visa. I called my family, and we cried until there were no more happy tears to shed. Hours later I found there was a mistake with my name, and there was no visa for me. Calling my family back and telling them the news was the hardest thing that I had done in my life.

As it seems, memories can bear some of the cruelest faces. But if I hadn't gone through the agitating Jordanian nights and the separation that stretched my veins miles, I wouldn't be me today. If I hadn't learned at a young age to cook, to pay rent, to exterminate an apartment filled with cockroaches, to visit a department of exterior and request an immediate deportation to avoid fees, to face the consequence of losing a visa the day it was given to me, to buy flight tickets, to take care of myself, and to be patient, I wouldn't be me. Memories, as I came to understand, are everyone's foundation. They are like solid bricks, built on top of each other, and breaking any of those bricks is a tragedy. Back in the airport when I said goodbye to my family, my castle's foundation did not collapse, because their memories whispered to me that I would see them someday. And when I do, it would be magical. And it was.





biographies

Abdullah Ahmed: I was born and raised in Iraq. I spent some of my teenage years in Jordan, and finally landed in Colorado by the end of 2003. Writing came to me by chance and, falling in love, I proposed to it shortly after. We have been married since the completion of my first novel, and our children, endless poems and short stories, are happy to welcome their newest sibling yet: a memoir entitled *Release*, which is to be completed this year.

Hilary Brown is originally from Rochester, MN. She has resided in Golden for five years – first as an undergraduate student in Physics and now as an aspiring poet. Although a longtime fan and writer of poetry, it is only recently that she has begun to read her poetry aloud. In public, no less. She is working toward a Masters degree in Electrical Engineering.

Alex Bentz was born in some desert town in California and moved around a lot until settling in Colorado Springs. He's been in band since 5th grade and loves mountain biking, skiing, climbing, and off-roading. He's been to Russia twice as well as Germany, Austria and Slovakia. Alex will graduate with a degree in Petroleum Engineering in May.

Stacie Biava is as a "Super-Junior," double majoring in Civil and Environmental Engineering. She enjoys spending time with her husband and dreaming big. "Remember my name," she says, "because someday it'll be in the history books!"

Khريس Clymer can solve a Rubik's cube in 23.79 seconds with one hand. He has 368 friends on myspace (excluding Tom), and 3 friends on facebook. His favorite game is Wizard Quest VIII where he plays as a paladin and slays krynoks with his Sword of Magic. He thinks World of Warcraft is good, but

after 7,359 hours he felt it time to move on. He really wants to talk to a girl on campus but is scared.

Sarah Cooper grew up on a farm in north east Oklahoma. She graduated from Labette County High School in 2008 after being on the technology team and very involved in band. She is now a freshman at CSM. She is involved in band, Cru, SWE, Ballroom Dance Club, IM sports, and, of course, photography.

James Cuzella is an Electrical Engineering student with interests in Computer Science, web design, Photoshop, programming and Linux. Born in Colorado, James has lived various places around the state for all his life.

Michael Dunlap is a junior in Mechanical Engineering with an inkling towards Nuclear Engineering through Mines graduate school. Born in Dallas, TX, he enjoys hiking around Golden with his camera, RockBand, and isn't very good at writing biographies.

Nicolaus Faino: I'm from Southern California, born and raised. I love engineering, San Diego, and my girlfriend.

Andrew Ferguson is a graduating Electrical Engineer with a passion for photography. He will be returning to the Seattle-area to work in the aerospace industry and encourages you to read his blog: <http://AndrewFerguson.net>

Michelle Harris is a senior in the Chemical Engineering department planning on going to grad school for a PhD in infectious diseases. When thinking about what to do with her life, Michelle had to decide between art as a career and science as a hobby or the other way around...I think you can decide which she chose. Michelle hopes to one day retire from science and go back to art.

Nolan Hannigan: I am from a small town called Redvale, CO. In May of 2008, I graduated from Mines with a BS in Metallurgy and Materials Engineering and continued on to graduate school in Materials Science studying Biomaterials.





Photography has been a passion of mine since I came to Golden. It was then that I realized what beautiful things I was leaving behind and had taken for granted for so long. I will never forget the day I went home for the first time having been gone only a couple of months. Camera in hand, I started taking pictures of the mountains, trees, animals and sunsets so I would always have them close by. That was when I found out that home is where the heart truly is. Now, I carry my camera every place I go.

Janee Hodges was born & raised in Colorado. She graduated from Golden High School, has been married 29 years and has two daughters. Janee has worked in the CSM Admissions Office for 27 years. Currently, she lives in Central City with her husband and five Labradors.

James Jesudason teaches in the Division of Liberal Arts and International Studies. In the past summer he traveled in Cambodia and China, with the aim of enriching his classes at CSM with real life anecdotes, and to just take pictures. As a person from Asia, he has a strong desire to capture its changing forms and to reflect on his own place in it.

Amanda Noranzyk is a freshman seeking a degree in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. Bound by multiple credit hours she takes all her stress out on in math problems or in the game of Rugby. No doubt she doesn't sleep much, like any ol' sap at Mines, but she says she'll get plenty when she's dead.

Chris Pederson: I grew up in Berthoud Colorado. Always had an interest in art, took all drawing classes through high school including AP studio art (the drawing portfolio). I'm currently a freshman here at Mines trying to keep the artistic spirit alive in the face of all this high pressure math and science.

Sara Post is a junior in Geological Engineering. She enjoys reading and writing poetry in her spare time, and is lucky enough this semester to be in Professor Lefton's poetry class. Sara is from Boulder, Colorado, and has lived there for most

of her life, except a year and a half on the lovely Oregon coast and the time she has lived in Golden.

Kristi Punches hails from the great state of Texas. She has lived in Colorado for the last ten years and arrived here by way of Arizona and New Mexico. Kristi has a Master's degree in Organizational Leadership, but at heart, she aspires to be a writer and a poet. The poem that was chosen for this publication was inspired by Kristi's many years of living in Texas and attending rodeos. The image instills a sense of nobility and defeat. Age eventually gets to all of us and it is the way we handle it that sets us apart from everyone else.

Shira Richman is delighted to have poems published or forthcoming in *Third Coast*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, and *Knockout*, among other places. She teaches Nature and Human Values at the Colorado School of Mines.

Talia Sanchez is from New Mexico. She is a junior majoring in Chemical and Biochemical Engineering with a minor in Public Affairs. She likes playing soccer and basketball and she thinks that cookies are probably one of the best foods on the planet.

Shane E. Schrader is originally from Kansas. He started out as an English major at Cornell and is now a Biochemical Engineering major with an Economics minor. He's been writing most of his life and he wrote "Comfiness" for his love, Mariah Stettner. Amor Vincit Omnia.

Katie Smith is a junior at Mines, majoring in physics. She likes all things creative and enjoys painting, drawing, sculpting, or just doodling in the margins of her notes. Katie also likes creative writing and has been telling stories since she could speak.

Timothy Spencer is an Interdimensional Entity of Imagination. A constant force of weird ideas and fantasy worlds, often flowing through carbon lines onto maps/





poems/crude-drawings. Hoping to balance these forces, Timothy studies the logical field of computer science. No progress thus far, but the omnipotent Galaxy Queen has high hopes.

Jessica Stark: I grew up in Abilene, Texas where I enjoyed photography, watercolor, and playing soccer. Currently I'm a junior at Mines and I try to continue my art as a hobby, while keeping up with playing varsity soccer and pursuing Civil Engineering.

Benjamin M. Weilert is a graduate student at Mines. Ben is an avid nature photographer. For years, he has been trying to get one of his photographs into *High Grade*, with this year being his only success. "Frosted Grass" was taken on the trail to the peak of Mount Bierstadt. His poem, "Genetics" was created after he realized that his parents contributed to the growth of both the right and left sides of his brain, producing a well-rounded adult.

Joe Zeimen is a freshman and loves his first semester here at Mines. When he is not studying and doing homework, he can be found on his computer or hanging out with his good friends. He has lived in Arvada his whole life until he moved up to the dorms and is known to have a strong interest in computers and math.

High Grade would like to thank all of the outside organizations and individuals who made this year's journal possible. In particular, we'd like to mention:

Associated Students of the Colorado School of Mines
The Department of Liberal Arts and International Studies
The Student Activities Office

Your contributions help make this journal possible. Thank you.