

The Aerie

Volume 13 · Spring 2012

# aerie

also aery (âr'e, îr'e) n. pl. -ies

1. The nest of an eagle or other predatory bird built on a crag or other high place
  2. A house or stronghold built on a height
  3. The literary and arts publication of Concordia University, Irvine
- [Med. Lat. aeria < OF.aire.]

# The Aerie

*Concordia University's Literary and Arts Publication*  
Volume 13 · Spring 2012  
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*The Aerie* is an annual journal which showcases work being done in creative writing and art by Concordia University Irvine students, alumni, faculty and staff. In addition, it provides students from both the English and Art departments a hands-on experience working collaboratively to produce a quality literary and arts journal. Students are involved in every aspect of the production from the call for submissions, to the selection of creative work and the design of the journal. The publication of *The Aerie* is made possible with funding from the Office of the Provost.



Cleanse  
Pastel and Colored Pencil  
Kaitlyn Platt

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## Irvine

After Carl Sandburg's *Chicago*

Rabbit breeder for the world,  
Ramen maker, implanter of silicone,  
Planned suburban utopia,  
Boring, gnarly, lame,  
The City of No Grit.

They tell me you are the most planned city and I don't believe them, for I  
have driven on the roads which wind in absolute chaos  
confusing the motorist.

And they tell me you are the safest city and I answer: Yes, it  
is true. I have seen nobody lock their doors again  
and again.

They tell me you are a wimp and my reply is on the  
hands of OC housewives and pretty boys I have seen no marks  
of labor.

Come and show me another city with so much material wealth,  
but such little wealth of the heart.

Flinging California slang amid a crashing wave  
a scrawny blonde haired surfer sits against the  
vast horizon.

Mild as a Poodle wearing a coat on a cool autumn day, dull  
as a hipster "pitted" against the city,  
feeble,  
ineffectual,  
complaining,  
faltering,  
hesitant, breaking, wavering,  
Irvine.

*Eric Korzenowski*



*Cities Collide*

Photo Manipulation

Sydney Parish, Kanani Ann Pang, William Valasquez

## Rumplestil-Son

Phoebe reread the definition of an integral a dozen times, but it was refusing to stick. She slammed her head against the book and groaned in frustration (and newfound pain). Her father would kill her if she failed another test.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here?”

Phoebe looked up to find a boy leering over her table. He looked far too short to be in high school, but his nose appeared to be making up for the size disparity.

Phoebe picked up her things and moved to the next table.

The boy followed her and sat down. “Calculus, huh?” he asked, looking at her notes. “Who’re you taking it with?”

“Could you get away from me?” It was clear he was not the kind to take a hint, so Phoebe decided to be more direct.

“Fine,” he said, getting up. “I was going to give you some shortcuts, but if you don’t think you need them...”. He was only two paces away before she stopped him.

“What kind of shortcuts?” she asked. The desperate sound in her voice was humiliating.

“Who’s your teacher?”

“Mr. Rumplestil,” she said.

“Perfect.” The boy grinned. “And when’s the test?”

“Tomorrow,” said Phoebe. “Can you help me or not?”

“Oh, I can. But I’m gonna need your phone number.”

“No way.”

“So I can text you the answers, bright eyes!”

“Wait,” said Phoebe. “Isn’t that cheating?”

“Big deal,” said the boy. “You’ve never cheated before?”

She actually hadn’t. But she gave the boy her phone number anyway.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The next morning, Phoebe received a series of text messages with all the answers for the test. She was terrified that this was some kind of trap. Still, it was not as if she would pass on her own, so she trusted each one. In a week’s time the exam was back in her hands brandishing a handwritten *Keep up the good work!* from Mr. Rumplestil.

She got nothing wrong (except for the two questions she had missed on purpose).

“Wow, this is embarrassing.” Noel, the only football player smart enough to be in calculus, had seen her score. “I was proud that I got a C.”

“A C’s good!” said Phoebe, filing the test away in her folder. “I actually guessed the whole way through this.”

“Then you must be pretty lucky,” said Noel.

*Lucky that you’re talking to me*, thought Phoebe, taking note of his chiseled body. But she played cool and flashed him her cutest smile.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Phoebe had meant to study harder for the second assessment, but it came much sooner than expected. The night before test number two, she found herself back in the library.

“Tsk tsk. Here again, I see.”

“Do you live in here?” asked Phoebe. The boy did look weasely enough to camp out amongst the book shelves.

“No,” he said, taking a seat. “I just like to hang around and be available to sorry scholars like yourself.”

“You’re right. I am sorry. Sorry you ever talked me into cheating.”

“Didn’t get the results you wanted?”

“No.” She didn’t get the results she deserved.

“Well, then,” said the boy, rising. “Let me know how this method treats you.”

“Wait,” said Phoebe. Her method didn’t have the track record his did.

“Right,” he said, sitting again. “The first test was a freebie. This next one’s going to cost you.”

“I don’t have any money.”

“That’s ok, I’m buying.” He laid two tickets to winter formal down on the desk.

“Tired of asking your cousin?” spat Phoebe.

“She’s busy.”

“Well, maybe if you tried leaving the library you could meet a girl.”

“Hey, I don’t need to take this abuse,” the boy sneered. He picked up the tickets and put them back in his jacket pocket. “*You’re* the one who’s desperate.” He turned to leave.

“I don’t even know your name!” she called.

“But you’ve got my number,” said the boy. “Text me if you change your mind.”

Phoebe watched him slink back behind the bookshelves, and she resolved to pass her exam the old fashioned way. But after making no progress in two hours, she gave in.

*Alright, I’ll go with you.* She stared hard at her phone before sending the text.

There were no words in the reply. Only answers.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Phoebe had not bothered to miss two questions this time, nor did she try to hide her results. She left the test in plain view, in hopes that it might spark a conversation.

“Lady Luck does it again!” said Noel, spying it.

Victory was hers. “I know! I can’t believe it!”

“You know what I think?” asked Noel. He leaned in close to her and whispered as if he were telling a secret. “I think you’re a lot smarter than you say you are.”

“Nah,” said Phoebe, blushing.

“Well in that case,” said Noel, reaching into the pocket of his letterman’s jacket. “Do you think some of your luck would rub off on me if we hung out Friday?” He flashed two tickets to winter formal.

“I...” She could barely speak she was so excited. “I think it’s definitely worth a shot.”

“Great,” said Noel. “I could really use the grade boost.”

There was a unanimous groan as Mr. Rumpelstil moved to the front of the class and started his lecture, but Phoebe did not participate. There was only one thing that could ruin her mood today. And it lived in the library.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

As soon as she cracked her book open, the boy appeared.

“Back so soon?” he asked.

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you,” said Phoebe. “About Friday.”

“Talk away, hot stuff, but I did you a favor.”

“I know. And I’m thankful! I really am! But,” there was no easy way to ask, “couldn’t you just take someone else?”

“You think anyone else needs help cheating?”

“I don’t know,” said Phoebe.

“Well, maybe your teacher would.” The boy waited for the threat to sink in before turning around and disappearing again behind the books.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Phoebe closed her locker and took a deep breath. The image of Mr. Rumpelstiltsch's face fresh after discovering the source of her test grades was more than frightening. Still, the thought of Noel in a tux was good enough to counteract it, and she resolved for the umpteenth time that day to march over and come clean.

The classroom door was cracked open when she got there, but she knocked anyway.

"Just a minute!" called Mr. Rumpelstiltsch.

She didn't mind waiting. Phoebe was silently rehearsing her confession when she heard another familiar voice inside.

"So can I borrow the car or not?"

"Where did you meet this girl?" asked Mr. Rumpelstiltsch.

"In the library."

Phoebe peeked through the space between the door and its frame to confirm her suspicions. It was the weasel.

"If I say yes," said Mr. Rumpelstiltsch, "do I get to meet her?"

"Whatever you say, dad."

Phoebe decided not to come clean after all. She figured Rumpelstiltsch's son would be easier to deal with now that she knew his secret.

*Ariel Castagna*



## The Moon's Flowering Tree

Digital Painting

Katie Votapka

## A Reminder

The wind will be cold at your back. You're going to want to turn around. You will fumble with the matches in your hand, and the sparks will burn your fingertips. And as you watch that house burn down, your eyes will water. And as you crouch down in the thorny bush and listen to the crying family lose their possessions and call out for missing loved ones and pets, you will claim your tears are from the fumes and not your broken heart. Every cause you hold dear and every rationalization for your actions will be forgotten. You will want to vomit. But I am here to remind you—*do not go gentle into that good night*. Be ruthless. Mechanical. Cold. I am at home waiting for you to return. I will be longing to hold you once more. But more important than that, if for one second you remember your humanity that night, you will not come out alive. Of this I am absolutely certain: you cannot exist as human and destroyer at the same time. Blind yourself. Run. Come home. Then allow yourself to remember who you are and cry.

*Andrea Hawkins*



Untitled

Photo Manipulation

Sydney Parish

## Hemingway's Coffee

**Writer's block.** One look at me and I am as the French like to call it—an “American Paris.” I sit expectantly at a small table in a café sipping a steaming, over-priced, Café Au Lait, while gazing impassively at the blank yellow pad before me. In desperate need for inspiration, my eyes begin to wander in admiration of the grandiose white-crown molding and delineated design of mosaic tile flooring. What once had the historical reputation as a rendezvous for the literary and intellectual elite of Paris, has now become my writing Muse for the next forty minutes. A best selling novel seems far from hopeful.

The Les Deux Magots, a popular Parisian café and now tourist destination on the boulevard Saint-Germain des-pres, once stood as a patronage of Surrealist artists and intellectuals. Today, in the presence of the ghosts of visiting writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, I sip my Parisian coffee, foolishly thinking that if I sit where they sat and drink what they drank, (though it seems a bit early for a rum Saint James), I might be able to write a novel, too. Sitting in one of Paris' legends of excess and lurid decadence, I am just another discouraged literary major, unable to render the seemingly effortless lyricism of Fitzgerald.

Empty glasses reveal that because of current economic difficulties, the pendulum has swung and the American Expatriate life in Paris, once made famous by Hemingway and his gang, is no longer cheap. Removing myself from the distracting noise of hasty tourists, tedious coffee conversations between men in suits, and the frequent ring of a cellphone, I close my eyes. Darkness surrounds me as I quiet the café. With the steady tapping of my pen, I envision myself during a time when Bohemians of the Jazz Age, reeling from the foolishness of World War I, found enchanting inspiration for their novels and paintings. As I open my eyes, the clamorous hum of ordinary life is silenced and old Paris is restored.

Reserved chatter encloses the large crowd of guests inside the Les Deux Magots. The windows are now misted over from the clouds of cigarette smoke inside, and the trays are suddenly replenished with drinks of a harder substance than coffee beans. Voices come and go creating an apparent tension between private intimate circles and partygoers. I am suddenly enamored by the exuberant transformation of style and warmth radiating from the café's nightlife. Like a fly on the wall, I discreetly watch the men in their peaked lapels and stripped suits and the women in their knee length satin dresses and cloche hats. I am amused entirely that the experience of luxury could be obtained at such a modest price. Guests intimately converse while enjoying their evening glass of potent absinthe, inside the café's Art Deco interior, sitting in closely set marble-topped tables and woven chairs on a confined terrace which faces the frenetic activity of the boulevard. A fleet of waiters attired in black jackets and floor length white aprons generously pour drinks to the literary and artistic Parisians and visitors whose color mask the grey hardship battled beyond the glass doors.

The familiar melody of a 1920s Jazz song dizzies my senses until all attention is stolen by my next story. A girl with a smooth porcelain face, comes into the café and sits by herself at a table near the window. Her bobbed hair, as black as a crow's wing, is cut sharply and diagonally across her face. She looks weary, yet ravishing, and illuminated beyond the break of the cigarette smoke. We are worlds apart as I try to hear her thoughts, unable to because of the distance across the room. Getting into her head, I grab my pen and begin writing....

*She braces herself against the rain, quickening her step on Paris's cobblestone pavement and walks into the Les Deux Magots. She had finally come to terms that there could be no cure for this city's curse and part of that was because of the war. She lived in a fast-paced, hard-drinking society, and was always surrounded by exquisite women and competing egos but never enough Dior necklaces to hang herself. Her husband, Ernest, always had his writing, and tonight she had come alone, feeling beautifully blurred among the crowd.*

*“Listen,” Mr. Fitzgerald says to her, huddled in a corner booth. “What you and Ernest have is perfect” He slurs now and his face contorts with feeling as he keeps a watchful eye on his wife Zelda from across the room. Scott is a writer, and everyone knows that American writers especially are the most somber sorts under their skins. To keep them from*

*thinking, there was liquor, always an ocean's worth available in the cafes. That, however, never stopped her thoughts from racing. She had once placed a bet on marriage against all odds when she married Ernest back in the States, but no one gave her fair warning to look out for that girl in a gorgeous mink coat and sleek brown hair.*

*"It is possible I'm too drunk to judge, but you look lonely." A man, tall and lean with very dark hair and mysterious dimpled cheeks reaches his hand out toward hers and she feels a heavy flush begin to emerge in her cheeks. She isn't quite sure if the heat she feels is from him or her third Pernod, but a perfect glove of fog settles beautifully over her as they drift out to the dance floor. Only a few feet from Zelda and Scott, they begin to sway and move to the music of the latest French Waltz. Her anxieties and jealousies melt with him as she closes her eyes and leans into his familiar smell of bourbon and soap. "Let's go home," Ernest says, and after taking a hold of her waist, they head towards the door...*

It's almost 3 o'clock in the morning and my tired eyes feel heavy. Leaving the thoughts of Mrs. Hemingway and her sheath Chanel dress, I look up from my yellow pad of paper now scribbled full of black ink and the Les Deux Magots of the 1920's is gone. All of it. The familiar energetic buzzing of cellphones and laptops immerse the room around me. The Jazz music is now replaced by a cd recording of Rachmaninoff and an assortment of Espresso cups fill the marble tables.

*Carlene Shultz*

## Brotherhood

O great, young and wild buck!  
Caught in the headlights of your youth  
Fractured crown, how perfectly still you lay  
Blood flowing into the white capped waters  
Sucking the last breaths of life.

How close,  
How close you were to making it to the top,  
The top of the mountain peaks,  
Mountain peaks conquering the horizon,  
The horizon upon which you meet each day anew,  
How close you were.

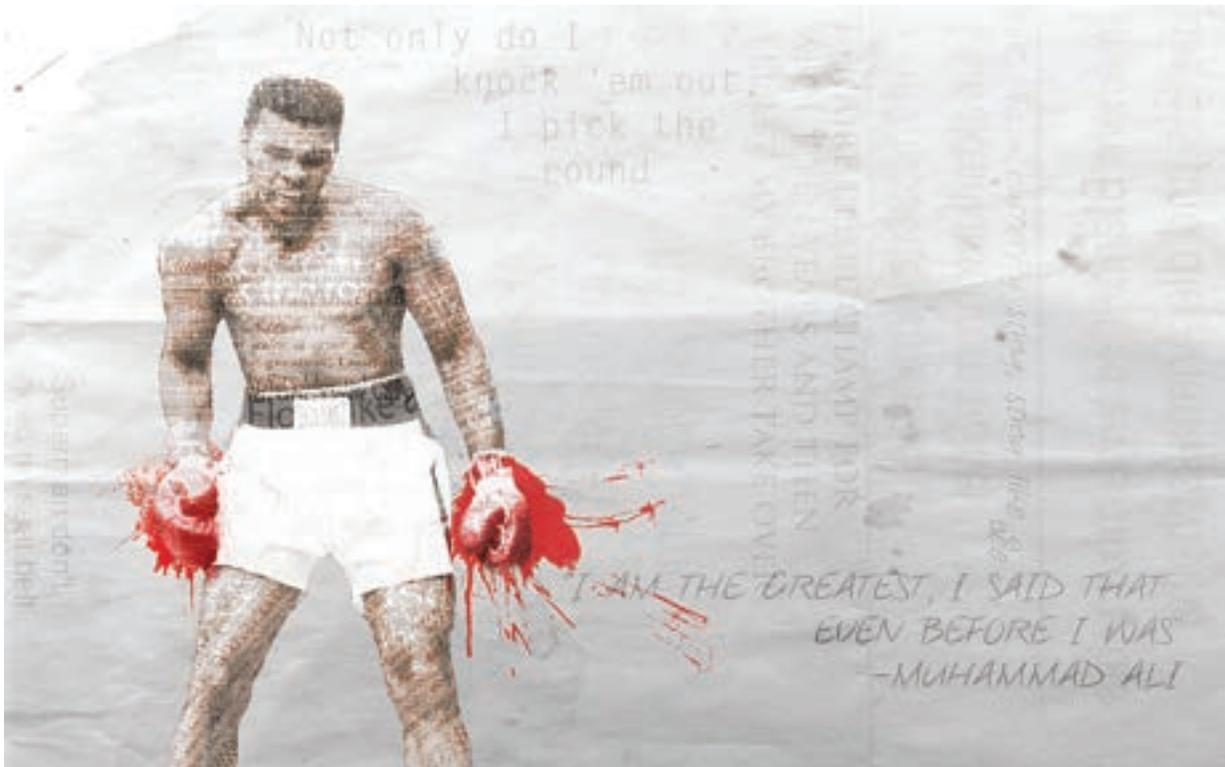
Dear brother, I see myself in your foggy, grayed eyes.  
You and I are the same.  
You and I, brother, sentenced with the same fate  
Drowning beneath youth's glamour  
Breathing together now, until life's cursed end.

Don't give in to the dying breath. Fight.  
With all your soul  
With all of your strength  
And with all of your fading heart.

Go! Conquer the valley floor, drink deep from the rivers below,  
Summit the never ending, never ceasing mountain crest  
Go meet the great sun at the highest of heights,  
...go

O great buck, young and wild.

*Tyler May*



## I Am the Greatest

Adobe Photoshop  
Nicholas Cuddigan

## Live

The first doctor said three months. The doctor after that said nine. The last doctor said six. Those predictions had been made exactly one year ago when Jessie found the small lump behind her ear—a teeny tiny barely-there lump. She had thought it was a zit at first, but when it wouldn't go away she went to the doctor and it definitely was not a zit. How badly Jessie had wanted it to be a zit when she found out what it really was. After what seemed like hundreds of doctors, Jessie figured she had anywhere from three to twelve months to live. She promised herself that was exactly what she would do--live. Live every second, every hour, every day—not like it was her last, but to just enjoy every moment. She would stop, enjoy, and take notice of the small things--the fresh air filling the house with the crisp smell of just cut grass, the sunset turning the park's lake all sorts of pinks and golds, the hummingbirds greedily sucking from the rosebushes outside her kitchen window. She continued with some routines, got rid of others, and did the same with friends, getting even closer to the ones she wanted and needed, and shedding the "acquaintances," because who had time for acquaintances when you didn't even have a year left to live? Now she was three months past that nine month doctor, so she wasn't really sure what to do anymore. She needed to know what to do. She needed someone to give her another timeline, a guide, a plan. So she started with the doctors again. Appointment after appointment after appointment.

Sitting in the stark white of the waiting room, Jessie didn't bother to pick up a magazine, mostly because they were the same ones that had been there last month. She glanced around, making awkward eye contact with the elderly gentleman sitting across from her in a wheelchair. Part of her always wanted to ask something like, "So what are you here for?"

"Ms. Fort?"

Jessie stood, hitching her purse up on her shoulder. "Yes?"

"Right this way. The doctor will see you in his office."

She followed the elderly nurse, who wore pink scrubs, down a long hall. They passed a half-dozen exam rooms, all white, clean, and cold. Then something caught her eye. A brain scan was sitting on light-up wall in the last exam room. She stopped. One hand grasped the doorjamb and the other clasped her chest, her breath catching. It was a year ago today that she got the news, and in some ways what the doctor had said then was still clear in her mind:

"I'm sorry to say I don't have better news, Ms. Fort. If you'll take a look at these scans over here, I can show you exactly what we're dealing with."

As the doctor stood there and pointed to this spot and that spot, repeatedly circling his finger around one dime-sized white spot in particular, Jessie only heard snippets.

"Unfortunately this means...run more tests...can't do surgery...definitely need chemo...doesn't look good...call your family."

She didn't cry. She didn't speak. She didn't feel. She just sat and absorbed. Nodding every once in awhile, keeping eye contact with the doctor, all she could see, all she could hear, all she could think was *Cancer*. It flashed in her mind like a red neon sign in a bar window.

Rising, she had left the doctor's office, scheduled an appointment for more of those tests, got in her car, and drove home.

"Ms. Fort? Ms. Fort, are you alright? Ms. Fort?" The elderly nurse tapped Jessie's shoulder.

"What? Oh, sorry. Yeah, I'm fine." She walked into the doctor's office and sat in one of the leather club chairs in front of the large mahogany desk, behind which the fifty-something Dr. Green was sitting, hands folded on top of a stack of papers. Jessie's medical files and scans. Her past, present, and probably very short future. She eyed the stack anxiously.

"Hi Jessie. How've you been?"

"Oh, as well as can be expected I guess." Jessie set her purse on the floor, crossed her legs, folded her hands in her lap. Looking up, she eyed Dr. Green.

“Yes well...um...that’s good.” His eyes wouldn’t quite meet hers. They looked at her forehead, her hands folded in her lap, the shining gold hoops in her ears.

“So, I’ve looked over your most recent scans.” He absentmindedly tapped his fingers on the stack. “I’ve got some good news and bad news.” He cleared his throat, unclasped his hands, adjusted his glasses, and finally looked Jessie in the eye.

She held her breath and clasped her hands tight enough for her knuckles to turn white. Anxiousness crept up her back and wound around her middle, hugging her, but not the least bit in a comforting way. All of this was really silly considering there was nothing Dr. Green could tell her that was worse than what she had been told a year ago.

“The good news is that the tumor has not grown any significant amount.”

Jessie let out her breath in one short whoosh and nodded her head subconsciously acknowledging that, yes, this was good news. The anxiousness continued to hug her because Dr. Green still had bad news.

“The bad news is there’s nothing else I can really tell you. In other words, if today were the first time I was seeing you, I would tell you the same thing the other doctors told you a year ago, you have probably three to nine months to live. Now, obviously, they were wrong but I still have no idea how much time you have.”

Jessie closed her eyes. Her mind wasn’t blank so much as it was clear, free and open. So this was it. She would continue. Continue to live.

*Jessica Easley*



*Nicohls Road*  
Photography  
Megan Miller

## Move me

You move me like August breeze kissing my face  
You move me like thunder singing to the night sky  
You move me like words unheard hanging still from broken branches

How air needs water

Like rain falling on summer nights  
Like waves breaking on the shores in winter

How water needs fire

Moved like sunrays fading behind leaves of red and gold in autumn

How fire needs earth

Like colors blooming in a field of dust  
Like blades of grass reaching up to touch the wind

How earth needs air

You move me like water dripping from petals in spring  
You move me like pebbles running through rapids  
You move me

*Tatiana Toscano*

## Invasion

Though the story you are about to read may seem like fantasy, I beg you to not overlook its absolute truth. Life had dealt the boy a pair-of-deuces hand to be sure, but he had managed to grow into an intelligent and dreamy boy of twelve years despite the misfortunes of his family. But today, the boy will cease to use intelligence. Today, he will become a slave to an orb of light—a fairy, if you will.

In the backyard of a Midwestern suburban home, a boy steps out to a wooden deck and lets the storm door whoosh, pause, and clap behind him. He winces and shades his eyes with his hand in search of an escape. His aunt's soap operas and tears and tissues like cloudy days were becoming . . .

“Invasive.” The boy tests the word out loud, but it bites his lip on the way out.

The backyard air is the thick-as-Jell-O, sticky summer kind—the kind of heat that melts flowers and smells like sweaty grass. A Sweet Gum tree, slightly off-centered, breaks the monotony of a clover-patched lawn and casts a pool of shade beneath its cool, green limbs. To the tree's shadowy oasis, the boy makes his way.

The boy's aunt had played leapfrog over the Sweet Gum tree when she was a girl, or so the boy had been told. But now its trunk is thicker than an elephant's leg and its branches stretch above and between the telephone wires that run parallel to the wooden fence below. The boy imagines his aunt's head as it looks now—crinkled blue eyes and spiked gray-blond hair—glued on the body of a small child who twirls and hops and holds hands with another little girl. On the second girl, he attaches the head of his mother—bald and shiny like this year's penny. The girls sing Ring-Around-the-Rosy and spin and squeal. Beckoning the boy over, they dissolve into the sky.

The boy leans against the gnarled tree bark and stretches his legs out in front of him. All but his toes are blanketed in cool shade and he wiggles them in the sunlight, allowing his air-conditioned blood to tingle warm and swirl away. He closes his eyes and listens to cicadas' fiddles like beating hearts and whispers behind adult doors.

No one bothered to sit the boy down and say, *son, your mother's sick*. He wonders if they all just assumed he would figure it out on his own. That he would catch on eventually, like how he finally understood decimals and fractions three days before summer vacation. Or maybe they thought they could hide it from him—that knowing would be too much for a twelve-year-old to handle. So they shut doors and pick up the phone on the first ring and stop watching re-runs of *ER*. But the boy knows. His stomach knows. He hears the worry and smells the sick on his mother's breath when she kisses his forehead goodnight. He tastes the neighbors' asparagus casseroles.

The boy lets his fingers roam over the Sweet Gum's root imagining the way his mother's skin looked that day he came home from playing in the muddy field down the street.

It had been a Saturday and the sky had churned moody-brown for days before exploding. Rain fell like marbles and filled backyards with rivers and waterfalls. The pitter-patters pleaded and the boy answered by sneaking out and letting the cool rain soak through his pajamas.

Hours later and covered in muck, the boy had trembled on his doorstep. But when he stood in the entry way and dripped mud onto the wood floor, his mother's mouth stretched to a half smile and she began to build a fire. They roasted marshmallows on serving forks and watched each other twinkle golden-orange. But the boy had noticed in the shadows cast by firelight that his mother's skin had begun to sag against her eyes. Deep valleys had formed in her forehead and around the entrance to her ears. Her skin glowed gray.

The boy's fingers travel from Sweet Gum root to grass to the stem of a dandelion. He sits like that—eyes closed, listening to cicada lullabies, dreaming of his mother's skin and her Jell-O fruit cocktail with whipped cream, fingers kissing the fuzz of a dandelion.

Without warning, a paper-cut-like sting strikes the tip of the boy's index finger.

Goosebumps scuttle from wrist to forearm. The boy shivers. His eyes flap open and he brings the assaulted finger into his field of vision. A pool of blood forms there, the shape and size of a keypad parenthesis.

The boy expects a bee, maybe a chigger or a spider, but when he focuses on the dandelion, the fuzz of which his forefinger had just rested, he sees a miniature woman dressed in a blue business suit. She is no larger than the boy's pinky finger and she sits cross-legged upon on the dandelion's yellow carpet.

"You bit me." The boy is not afraid or angry because the fairy-woman's airbrushed skin and cascading silver hair obstruct all doubt. But he is curious.

The woman smiles.

The blood on the boy's finger becomes a miniature clown nose before falling and soaking into the soil.

Dusting puffs of pollen from her clothing, the woman stands and sneezes. The boy's heart thuds against his ribcage and warm-red roses blossom on each of his cheeks. He stretches his finger toward the woman, wondering if her hair feels as silky as it looks, but she leaps into the air and hovers.

The boy's finger finds its way toward the woman a second time, but she swerves to the left and bares her teeth like a cat backed into a corner.

"Okay, okay, I won't touch you," says the boy, hands raised.

The woman's smile stretches the width of a fingernail clipping and the boy cannot help but smile back. She stands upon the dandelion once again and looks up at the boy, eyes like blurred moons on water.

From her feet, silver spindles erupt, enclosing the dandelion in a coffin of ice. Admiring her work, she taps her fist on the smooth, cold surface of the dandelion's silver sepulcher.

From dandelion to dandelion, the miniature businesswoman leaps, seizing and freezing and transforming the yard from summer green to white. Frost trails from her wings and sparkles cling to the leaves and branches of the Sweet Gum as she weaves her body in and out. The gumballs entombed in crystal might scream if they had voices, but they don't and the boy is too bewitched by love and spectacle to notice anyway.

Two, three, four, then hundreds more beautiful ladies in blue blow through the yard. They cast spells of snow and diamonds and send prickles up the boy's arms and legs.

The backyard is a chrome forest, a computer chip, a snowy television set. The women twitter and float and whisper, *follow me*. They beg the boy to share his secrets.

He does because he's in love and he's escaped—or so he believes.

Before the boy knows it, he is making snow angels and dreaming of nothing but white.

*Johanna Saleska*



*Angel of Light*

Digital Painting

Katie Votapka

## Television

Staring at its endless surface  
I wonder  
what tiny elves  
run behind  
the slate of black

What mischievous men  
control the magnificent  
blooms of color

Perched on its ledge  
it doesn't seem agile, nor  
does it appear frightening

What of its heart,  
its organs?

Am I predator or  
am I prey?

They say the source of its  
power lies in its tale.  
They say.  
But I cannot see it.

Could I steal it away?  
Could I teach it to obey me?

The strength is mine to revive,  
but once awake, do I have  
the strength to put it to  
rest?

*James Muñoz*



## Blue Peach Dream

Photo Manipulation  
Aaron Rivadeneyra

## Connotations

The front corner table of Oscar's Sandwich Shoppe felt like home to him. The coffee was cheap and tasted like it—a welcome compromise these days, but it was not enough to keep him from coming back. The truly gravitating quality of that hard orange seat was hardly even part of the shop—it was the urban ecosystem so perfectly framed by the large front window and the steady procession of characters that so faithfully filed past, producing snippets of conversation that drifted through the glass with just enough distortion to strike his curiosity and feed his muse. That was why he came. And yet, the movements of his hands and the terse, impatient little breaths that he sent through the hole in the plastic lid to cool his coffee gave away his frustration with this morning's display—the decline in originality was becoming impossible to ignore. He had been sitting for nearly an hour as a parade of high school cliques intercepted whatever remnant of reality was left out there. Leggy bleach blondes gasped “guess-what-he-said”s into bedazzled cell phones, bands of thirteen-year-old boys chuckled about implied sexuality, businessmen with their briefcase tilts kept eyes locked ahead of them. “Types, why are there so many types?” he muttered as he spit out the little coffee granules that always seemed to take refuge in the bottom of his cup. His pen, displeased with idleness, found its way to his lips, where it left thin blue apostrophes to accent the developing crevices.

The jingle bells that were strapped to the door handle clamored. A young woman with a shoulder bag and an airy-looking skirt stepped in and approached the counter as Marina shuffled up from the back with a tray of bagels. Interesting. *Lainee*, he wrote down, *smells like a vegetable garden. Plays piccolo*, he decided. He watched the poetically unusual curve of her face shift as she looked around, her light eyes falling on him just for a moment. She stepped close and let her fingertips rest on the edge of the counter as she placed her order. *And piano*. He listened carefully to her low but weightless voice as she ordered two sandwiches. *Fast metabolism*, he wondered. *Or meeting an old college roommate for lunch? Maybe a love interest? Or... both?* The corner of his mouth twitched at the idea. He wrote it down, but mostly for his own entertainment. He was wary of any plot details that would draw desperate middle aged men... not exactly his target demographic. *No*, he mused as he let his eyes shift out the window, he wanted to be read by the emerging intellectual generation, eclectic collegiates and twenty-somethings—not excluding, of course, the occasional thespian. That generation had called out to him even when he was still a part of it. *Was it really so long ago...?* He could go back there in his mind so quickly—the smell of old books in six-story libraries, the quiet comfort of tomorrow being the same as yesterday, the hours spent in his dorm room recording words as they came tumbling out of him in awkward, vulnerable rhythms like falling down stairs. The world was warmer then. He closed his eyes and tasted two a.m. donut runs. He smelled the flowers he found on his doorstep after his first poetry reading. The poems weren't very good, but someone had really loved him then...

His eyes flew open as her closeness brought him back.

"Here ya go," she said, setting the mysterious second sandwich between his hands. He stared at the gift, jaw slowly clenching as heat ascended to his face and threatened to boil his downcast eyes. In the three months since he had found the pink slip of paper on his apartment door, he had been a bohemian, a starving artist, a fringe dweller, even. But in that moment all of those words melted away into that warm, condescending smile and the way her lips formed around the words, *God bless you*, He was, quite suddenly, homeless.

*I was happy*, he wanted to tell her. *I was happy until you gave me this sandwich*. But the clattering doorbells precluded his delivery. His pen pressed to the paper to inscribe the thought, but he hesitated, withdrew. It sounded fictional even to him.

*Elizabeth Rhea*



Cycles  
Photography  
Megan Miller

## Dancing on the Toes of Forever

*Tale as old as time, true as it can be.*

Swaying in anticipation for the song to begin, I grab a hold of my yellow gown, taking a small curtsy without a care in the world. As the violins faintly begin to hum, I clear my throat and shoot an expectant look across the room so that my prince remembers to take his routine bow. After a long day, with tired eyes and a proud smile, he gleams back at me knowing that there is still work left to do.

All it ever took was one foot in the door for me to be pulling at his dress shirt, dragging him to the center of the living room. He wore the weight of the world on his shoulders, but as he loosened his tie and rolled up his sleeves, he never missed a single dance practice for the ball. Meeting him under the chandelier, he bends to place a kiss on my cheek, and reaches out his hand for me to grab, giving me a boost as I climb on top of his leather shoes. The view is surprisingly different after being lifted an inch off the ground and with one hand placed firmly on my back, it is as if we are floating on air. Never having to worry about any eight counts or the direction of my own steps, I trust my prince to lead me across the dance floor.

With every twirl my tiara loosens and strands of blonde hair fall down from my bun and into my face. Escaping the realities of school bullies, first-time swim lessons, and riding a bike with no training wheels, I close my eyes and burrow my face deeper against my father's stomach. With no intention of ever letting go, I tighten my grasp around his waist, hearing a soft chuckle as the song slowly comes to a stop. He steps away momentarily to play it a second time. Halfway through the fourth waltz, my body fights to stay awake as I still cling to his shirt. Sweeping me off of my feet, he lifts me onto his hip, and finishes the dance while still holding my hand as we sway back and forth. Feeling myself drift off to sleep, the song and his humming become one, and I lay my head down upon the comfort of his shoulder. My exhilaration slows down to the rhythm and vibrations of his heartbeat. With no energy to protest, I let my carriage take me up the stairs to my bed. With a kiss goodnight, I sleep soundly while the excitement for tomorrow's ball puts me into a deep dream.

As time goes on, I hold my own balance and memorize the steps, no longer needing to stand on my dad's feet. I take the lead, mapping out every step and twirl, finishing the routine with a grand dip. As my hand rests lightly upon his shoulder, it feels liberating to know that if I trip, he will still be there to catch my fall. It has been awhile but the scene is still fresh in my memory and in his too, for he still knows exactly what to do. Tie loosened. Sleeves rolled up. Take a bow. It is the same old routine, but it is ours. I shuffle my Mary Janes across every familiar scratch in the hardwood floors. Confident with my every move, my dad studies my face in amazement, as I no longer need his guidance. While I was always worried that the clock would soon strike bedtime, my father had feared the chime of a different hour when I would no longer be dressed in the yellow gown, waiting anxiously at the door for him to come home from work. He knew that someday the clock would strike midnight and another prince would come riding in, stealing his Cinderella.

Eventually came the nights when I forgot to watch the clock, and gave him a chance to actually breathe when he stepped through the front door. I would sit at the table doing homework, while my mom cooked dinner in the kitchen, and he would ask me those three simple words that would commence the all too familiar excitement.

"Shall we dance?"

Using the one-three-count measure of steps, he placed a hand on top of my head, noticing that I had stopped wearing the tiara that now sat dishonored on a bookshelf in my room. I looked up at him as the guilt stabbed sharp in my stomach. With tears shining bright in his eyes, he gave a faint smile. "You're growing up," he whispered. "How about you finish this part on your own?" And with a swing of his arm, he twirled me around letting go of my hand to take a seat on the couch next to my mother. Standing alone in the middle of the living room, I had an audience. Looking solemnly into their familiar faces, I let the music free my fears, as I sashed back and forth, leaping from corner to corner with my turns and pirouettes. With the song coming to an end, I took my curtsy as my audience applauded. It was my

first curtain call alone for there was no prince to take a bow beside me.

My dad was right. The clock eventually struck twelve, and that night was the last time he and I had danced at the ball. Seventeen years later, after hundreds of recitals and dance shows that he proudly sat front and center for, I am more than grateful for those late night practices we had shared in the living room. My waltz with my dad was a gift and one that I will forever cherish. Tie loosened. Sleeves rolled up. Take a bow.

*Tale as old as time, song as old as rhyme.*

*Carlene Shultz*



Waiting for You

Digital Painting

Katie Votapka

## Ma Cherie

Pulses of blood run warm into the body,  
So voluptuous a perfume, so sweet an edge.  
Let her breathe, they say, swirling her hips,  
Kissing the rim, leaving a faint film of burgundy.

Her opaque physique, stately and slim  
Once stood titanic, a king's courtly chalice,  
A sacred vessel, both holy and poisoned,  
With stained lips blessed for the Eucharist.

Fingerprints smear above her cinched waist,  
Blushing at the touch, bowing before her suitor.  
Soft, delicate lips press firmly on her crystal brim,  
But she bites back bitterly.

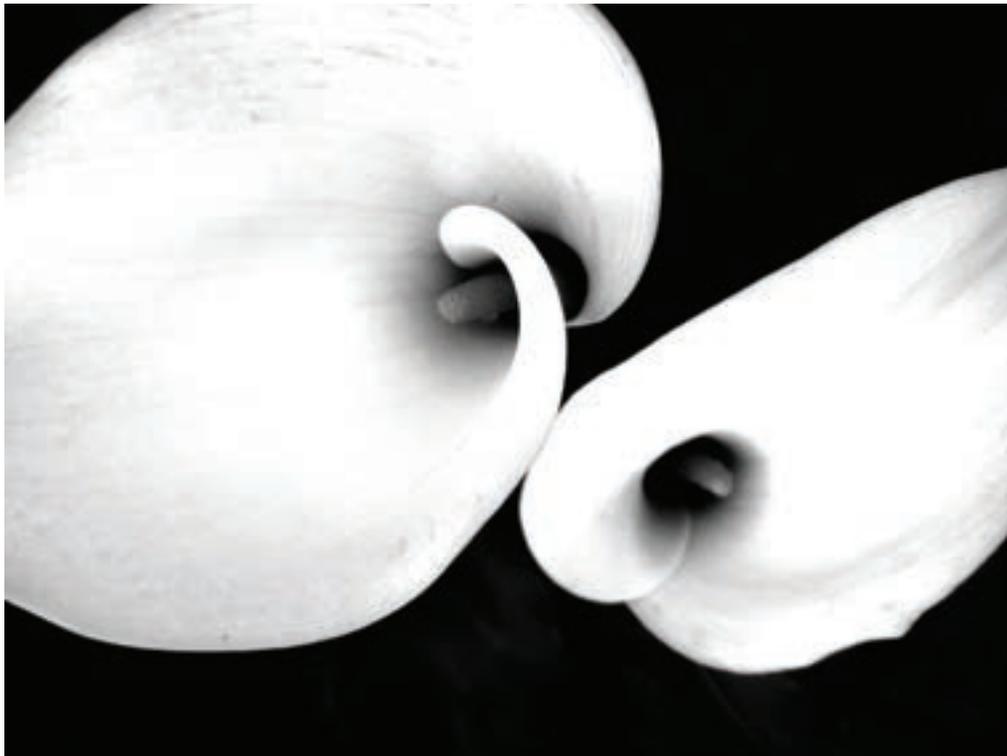
Perished by sunrise-  
The scarlet woman waits abandoned,  
Left with her enchanting potion,  
Spoiled, no longer an agent of seduction.

*Carlene Shultz*

## Her Turn

The subtle separation  
of a flower falling from her hair--  
Nearly unnoticed,  
but for an almost silent... oh...  
And her eyes, wide with wonder  
waiting for a sign...  
Should she insist  
that she had, or ever had  
the right to call it hers?

*Elizabeth Rhea*



## Flower Bed

Photography  
Kelley Schirmer

## The Chocolate Cake

*Cecily is sitting at the kitchen table, dabbing the corners of her mouth with a napkin. Her husband, Bob, joins her after retrieving a lava-licious chocolate cake from the fridge. Cecily lets out a groan which lasts from the time Bob puts the cake on the table until the time he comes back with a fork.*

CECILY. You know you're not supposed to eat sweets.

BOB. Who says I am going to eat it?

CECILY. I do.

BOB. Maybe I just want to smell it.

CECILY. You're holding a fork, Bob.

BOB. This is for protection. Against the dessert police.

CECILY. Put the cake back, Bob.

*Bob doesn't move. Cecily attempts to grab the plate, and Bob stabs her hand with the fork. Cecily shrieks.*

BOB. Protection.

CECILY. Fine. Eat it.

BOB. I will.

CECILY. Gorge yourself.

BOB. I plan to.

CECILY. But when you get type two diabetes—

BOB. Not this again.

CECILY. When you're too fat to wear sweatpants—

BOB. Please.

CECILY. Don't even think about crying to me.

*Bob moves his fork toward the plate. Cecily sniffs and brings a napkin to her eye.*

CECILY. It's just never good enough for you, is it?

BOB. Well, it's certainly never quiet enough.

CECILY. I can slave for hours over a hot stove—

BOB. You made a salad.

CECILY. And you'll never appreciate it.

BOB. That's because I'm hungry, Cecily. I need food in my body. And your spinach leaf, celery stick combo isn't cutting it.

CECILY. Oh no. Better to fill up on plaster.

BOB. For god's sake, it's a cake. It's made of flour, and eggs.

CECILY. I told you to eat it, didn't I?

BOB. Do you know what I think?

CECILY. Couldn't be much.

BOB. I think you want to eat this cake.

CECILY. Don't be absurd.

BOB. I think all this talk about diet and exercise is to distract yourself.

CECILY. From what?

BOB. I bet you can't even remember what chocolate tastes like.

*The doorbell rings.*

CECILY. Could you get that please?

*Bob gets up to answer the door. As soon as he clears the room, Cecily devours the chocolate cake. She hears him coming back, and panics. She takes a flower pot from the counter, removes the plants, and overturns it on the plate. The dirt, she hopes, resembles the cake. Bob returns to the table shortly afterward.*

CECILY. Who was that?

BOB. Girlscout. I told her we didn't eat cookies in this house.

CECILY. Good.

BOB. And then I told her she was going to hell.

CECILY. You did not.

BOB. I thought you'd be proud of me.

CECILY. I'll be proud of you if you throw that cake in the trash.

BOB. Tell you what.

CECILY. What?

BOB. I'll throw the cake away if you take a bite first.

CECILY. Absolutely not.

BOB. Just one little bite and the rest gets the bin.

CECILY. I won't.

BOB. I can't believe this.

CECILY. Believe what?

BOB. My wife cares more about her own pride than my health.

CECILY. That is not true.

BOB. It's the only way to save me, Cece. Taste it and I chuck the whole thing out. Empty calories and all.

*Bob passes her the fork, and Cecily leans in to take a bite. After careful consideration, she pulls back away from the plate.*

CECILY. I can't.

BOB. Then keep your mouth shut and let me enjoy this.

*Bob snatches the fork back, and takes a bite. He winces.*

BOB. You know, you're right.

CECILY. You see? I told you.

*Bob takes another bite.*

BOB. Still better than your salad, though.

*Cecily puts her head down on the table while Bob keeps eating.*

*Ariel Castagna*



The Friendly Red Panda  
Watercolor  
Nicole Neisius



Dragon of Flames  
Digital Painting  
Katie Votapka



## Break Your Little Heart

Adobe Illustrator  
Megan Brunkhorst

## Insomnia

The window is open. I could walk out onto the fire escape if I wanted to. But I don't. It would be insane to walk out there right now. The street lights are shining through. Everything else is dark. The bed seems so much bigger. Maybe I just feel smaller.

Tires against the pavement outside; first slow, then they speed up, then they're gone. Footsteps and slurred conversations are getting louder. I bet they're drunk. It's 2:30 am. Why else would people be outside laughing and walking around? I bet that's where he went. Some grimy old bar. Seven dollar domestics on tap. Maybe I'll go out tomorrow. He'll probably be out. I can't be stuck here.

Alone.

I feel the warm air from outside make its way through the window. We love it. I mean, I. There is no *we*. It's not the first time *we* turns into just *me*. But it's the last time. I swear. This time I mean it.

Car alarm.

I bet it's someone's drunk, crazy ex-girlfriend trying to get revenge. Symbolically destroying something they shared together at one point in their lives. I would never do that. Well, if he had done something absolutely horrible. I might consider it. But that would be so mean! After everything we've been through. All the good times we had. It would be cruel. He would be so mad. He always took such good care of his things.

At least someone outside is having fun. Laughing. Full on gut-filled, pee-your-pants kind of laugh. I wonder if he's laughing right now. His laugh is so contagious. That perfect smile. I miss him. His smile. Not him. Okay, him. A little. Not hopelessly. I think.

It's feeling colder. Or maybe there's less body heat. This is how it's going to be. I can do it. I won't talk to him. Stay busy. Make an awesome girl power playlist to wake up to every morning instead of his stupid snoring. So soft and rhythmic and soothing. No! Mostly stupid. I won't miss it. Or his cooking either. No more crispy, yet doughy, french toast in the morning. None of that high-in-natural-sugar homemade syrup that attracted all of those ants when it he would leave it out on the counter. I hate ants.

He has to know that I'm staying busy. And not thinking about him. Because I'm not. He'll see how much better 'me' is. He can't do better than this. But what if he does?

Jerk.

Who's honking?

These sheets aren't as soft as they used to be. Or maybe I'm just remembering his skin. That stupid car needs to stop honking. Inconsiderate luses! Some people are trying to enjoy their restful sleep. And then they just honk like that? There it is again! They better hope they're gone by the time I get to the window.

The hot breeze feels great.

Who is that? It can't be. What is he doing? This can't be right.

I'm glad I'm wearing my cute pajamas—ones that actually match and fit. Not a big, old shirt he left here. That would mean that I thought about him before I got in bed, and even continually after I was lying down. And I absolutely did not. Why is he back here? Crap, I hope my hair looks alright. He's walking closer.

Would it be terribly cliché if he climbed up the fire escape, all *West Side Story* like? No, that's not his style. Oh, I love that jacket on him. I'm not saying anything first. He messed up. Egotistical ass—is that a wave or was he trying to get me to go down there? I love that cologne on him. This is so romantic. Nothing like the old him. This time it might be different.

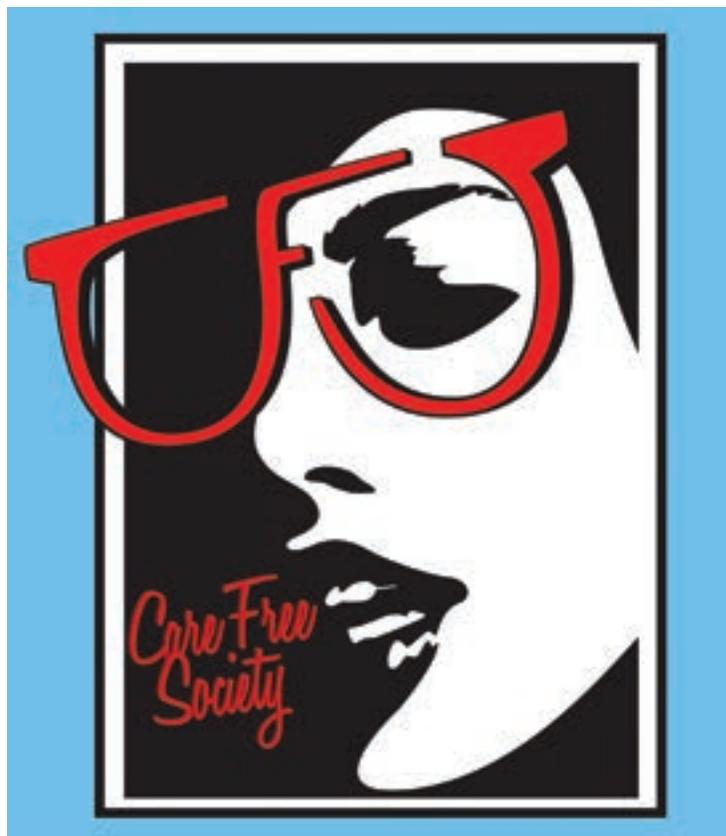
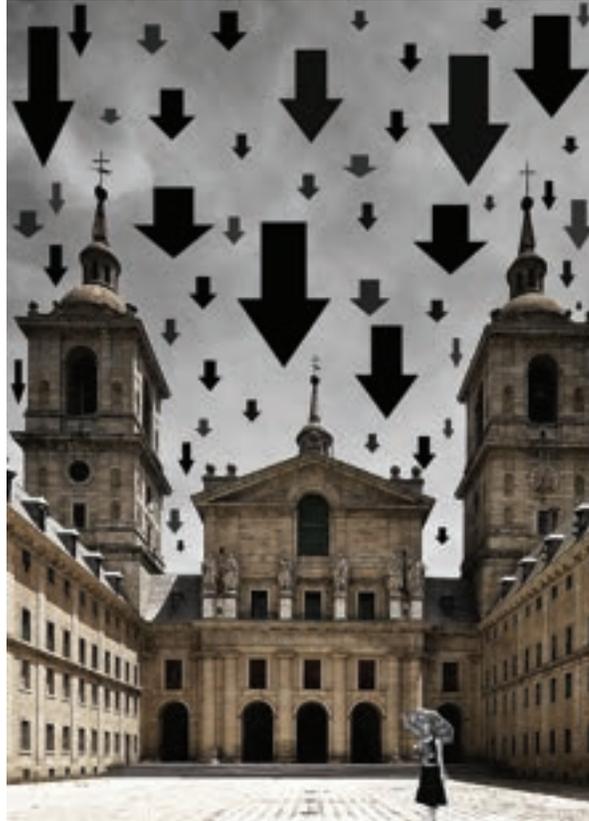
I believe in us.

We can work it out this time.

"I'll buzz you right up."

*Tatiana Toscano*

Rain  
Photo Manipulation  
Megan Brunkhorst



Care Free Society  
Adobe Illustrator  
Justin Hodges

## Beer in the Fridge

“and the posture of his knowledge”  
constructed a temple  
within him

religion absent from  
this holy place,  
he meditated on love  
and famine

a man such as this,  
a revolutionary and monk,  
diverted by nothing  
save purpose  
Om

his contemplations  
delivered him,  
while his throne  
betrayed him

the stained suede  
beneath him, warming,  
reminded him of the beer  
in the fridge, waiting,  
ice cold

and the momentarily  
silenced television  
suppressed ambitious dreams  
and grander illusions as  
he watched

his thoughts floated by as  
a ringing bell  
announced guests,  
recalling him from reverie of  
academia

*James Muñoz*

## Odessa

"I don't 'member much 'bout the war. But I do 'member growin' up without a pa and spendin' mos' my life without my ma."

I watch as he brings his whiskey up to his lips and takes a strong gulp. Johnny Cash's words ring out in the background. *Now, I don't care who tells me, salvation is not real.* The man clears his throat.

"I ain't complainin', though. I got some land and my dog. Named her Girl."

I nod, giving the white haired man some sort of affirmation that I had heard him, while still trying to convey to him that I am really not interested in whatever it is he has to say. "I named her Girl cause dat's what she is. Boy, she's meaner than a one of them rattlers you find out in the country. She stays right by my side all the day long. She don't ever leave." The man continues to ramble on while I take strong pulls from my glass. "I ain't never been remarried. I don't find much use in it. You been married?"

Without looking I raise my left hand, showing the silver band that rests below my knuckle.

"Town folk take pity on me. Say I ain't never caught a break in dis' life. With my ma and pa both goin' on up to see the Lord when I was boy, and Carla Jean passin'..." His dingy, white beard covers his weathered face. I can smell the day's sweat in his shirt. I can see every scar and bruise that his hands have endured.

"Let me tell you this—"

"I didn't ask." I cut him off. I had heard enough of the old man's rambling.

The man continues, "You don't know what you gets till it's gone." He motions to the bartender for another whiskey. I do the same.

"Boy, I loved her. Ain't 'nother girl like her in all of Texas, and I've been to just 'bout every corner of Texas. She had them blue eyes that make the sky jealous. She had that golden hair, remind me of my ma. I reckoned there never been 'nother girl like her, and I was right."

I take another long drink and ask, "When did she pass?"

Gazing toward the ceiling, digging deep into his memory, the man says, "I figure bout twelve year ago. I was still chasing cattle when the good Lord called her home."

"The good Lord?"

"The Lord still good," he nods his head in agreement to his own statement. "Sometimes we jus' don't understand."

"You lost you're mother, father, and wife?"

"You ain't never lost nobody?"

"I'm about to."

"That's damned shame. I pity you, son. But the good Lord will shine his light on you one day, you just wait 'n see."

"Just like you're still waiting?" With that I abruptly get up from the green, leather barstool and make my way outside of the dive and into the frosty winter air. I breathe it in hard, trying to awaken my senses, my emotions. The last month I've been waiting. Waiting for the inevitable to happen. Impatiently waiting. I reach into my breast pocket and pull out the white and red pack of cigarettes. One left. I put it to my lips while fumbling for my lighter, buried deep in my pocket. The florescent light of the phone booth catches my eye, and I figure it is time. I punch in the phone number that is engraved in my mind.

A young, cheery voice answers the phone, "Thank you for calling Odessa Medical Center. How may I assist you?"

"Ah, yes, is there a Cynthia Walker there?"

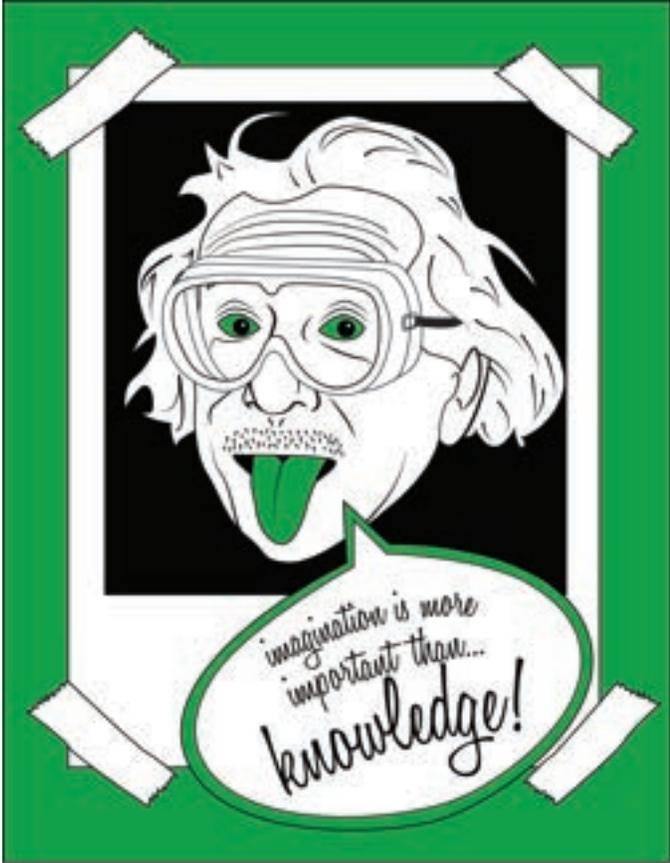
"One moment please." The time passes slowly, every second lasting longer than the last. "Sir?"

"Yeah."

"I regret to inform you that Ms. Walker passed away last night."

*Tyler May*





Summer Science Camp  
Adobe Illustrator  
Justin Hodges



Maui On My Mind  
Acrylic on Wood  
Jasmine Ferrer

## Revelation of Man

He stared at the shotgun. It was the only item to occupy the empty corner in the small living room. He let out a sigh and his gaze fell, body sinking further into the chair. He followed the grains in the weathered wood floor that had been scarred by children long since gone. He wondered where they were, wondered if they had found a way to live in the current state of the world, wondered what they looked like now. He continued to trace the grain lines in the wood until he reached his feet, covered in abused leather that had endured the labors of the fields.

He let out another sigh that was accompanied with a clearing of bloody phlegm in his throat. His eyes continued up his legs until they reached his emaciated thighs covered by soiled denim. He had withered away; his body was fading snow in the light of the soaring sun. Pushing the flannel shirttail into his pants, he attempted to fasten the bottom button only to find that there was no longer a button. Again, he gave out another labored sigh and painfully arose from the mustard-yellow chair. He walked to the window. Dust filled the air around him when he pulled the sun-stained curtain away. The grey light from the soot-filled sky crept into the room. The land outside the window had remained desolate. There were no signs of fresh footprints in the ashy snow. The barn that he and his grandfather built when he was a boy was now nothing more than charcoaled rubble. He began to shut the curtain when two birds playfully chasing each other caught his eye. He took great joy in the fact that some sort of life had remained unscathed, existing as nature intended. He wondered how much longer the pair would survive. Shutting the curtain, the reality of his solitary existence flooded back into his mind.

His eyes fell upon the shotgun again. It had become his only answer. He thought how easy it would be to point it at his head and pull the trigger. He would escape this hellish world he resided in. The flame inside him, the flame of life, was now at wick's end. After much thought, he concluded it was the only logical answer.

His thoughts shifted. He thought how odd it was that this object had such great power over man. It was power. Power to begin and end war. This power lay in his own hands, but what good was power in the world he now found himself in?

His thoughts shifted again. He thought of his wife's body that lay in the only bed in the house. He had become used to the stench that now filled every corner in every vacant room. He had refused to give her a proper burial. Mainly for the fear of the Collation's tyrant rule. The consequence of the Collation catching him was too great. He looked down the narrow hallway that led to the bedroom. Starting down the hallway, he stopped midway. He didn't want to see the decomposition of his bride's tissues; he didn't want to remember her in such a wretched state. This would be yet another horrible sight in the list of many he had seen since the Collation's take over. Brothers murdering each other. Mothers drowning their children. Husbands filling themselves with drugs, all in an attempt to escape their fate.

He returned to his yellow throne. He clenched the gun and turned it on himself. He positioned it so the open end of the metallic barrel was at his forehead, just above his brow. The butt of the gun was against the wooden floor, between his boots. He moved the open end into his mouth, ensuring an instantaneous escape. Finding the safety with his feeble fingers, he flipped it over. His eyelids fell shut. No tears were shed from the corners of his pale eyes. Neither of his hands tremored with fear or uncertainty. The flame of light began to flicker and dim.

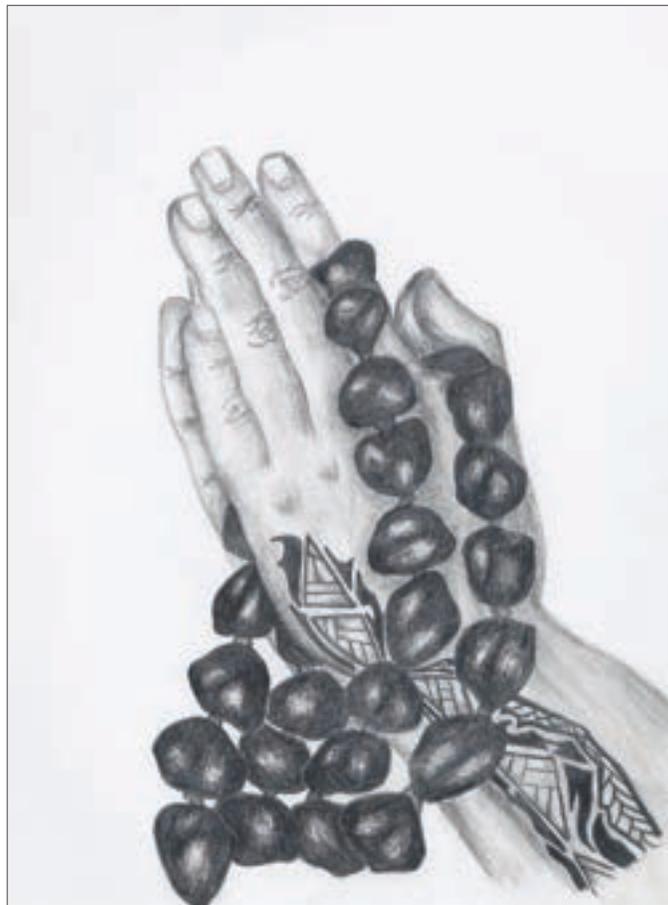
His thoughts were not of his chosen fate, or where he would awake after pulling the trigger, but of his decaying lover in the room down the hall. He thought of the times they shared in the loft of the barn, revealing themselves to one another, in the most intimate of ways as teenagers. He thought of how selflessly she had loved him throughout their days. He thought of the times he held her in his strong embrace, her lips on his chest kissing the flesh above his heart. He thought of the times they shared before the earth had turned.

His eyes blinked open. The light that raged inside of him at one point in time was now a blackened wick. He arose once again, this time with gun in hand. He continued down the hall, opening the bedroom door that had been shut

for weeks, perhaps months. The groans of their wooden bed frame echoed down the hall as he moved in beside her. There was a pause, a silence. Then an uttering of indistinguishable words, then a pause. Finally, a single gunshot. The shot filled the house, spilling out the window hidden behind the dusty curtain. The noise continued to travel out across the desolate landscape disturbing nothing except the two birds that had managed to survive thus far.

The birds leapt up from the cold earth and into the sky. Surviving only because the other was still fighting. Perhaps there was hope for them, perhaps they would continue together. Perhaps they would survive this tormenting land and live to see its restoration.

*Tyler May*

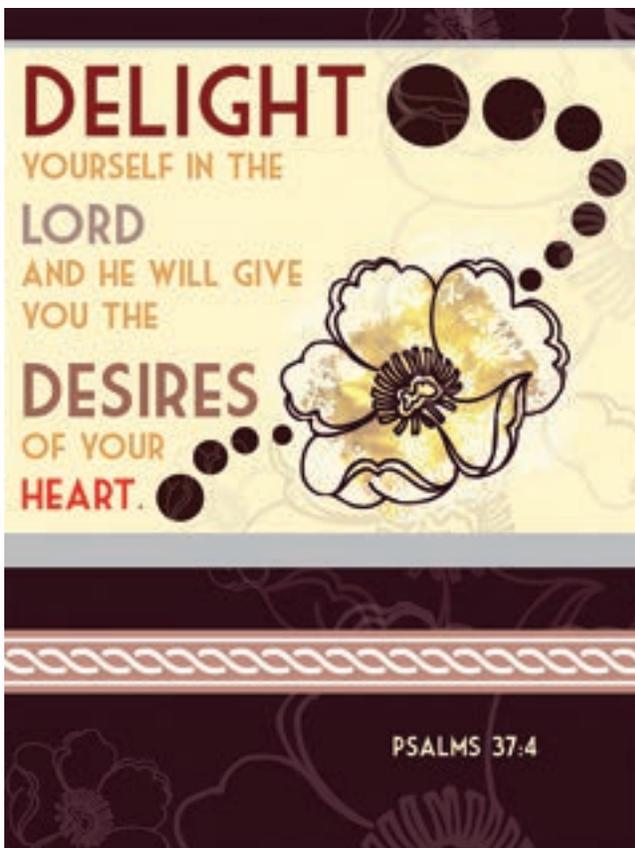
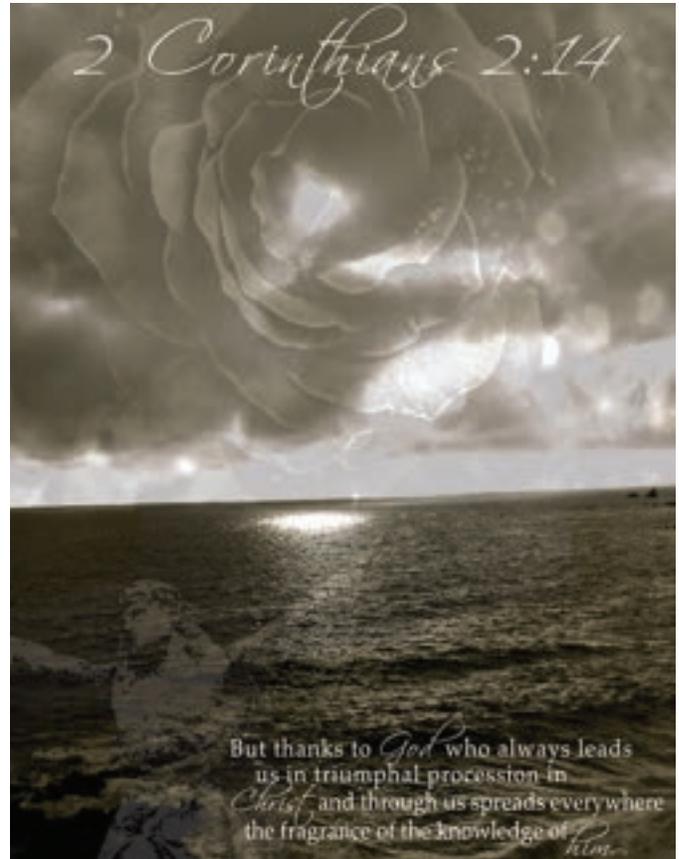


## With These Hands

Graphite

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Sea of Faith  
Adobe Photoshop  
Kelley Schirmer



Delight  
Adobe Illustrator  
Nikki Berry

## The White Room

Everything in the white room serves a purpose but the glass marble. Its clear outer shell forms a perfect sphere. As I focus deeper, looking further into the outer core, I notice small air bubbles—little imperfections in the glass that probably occurred during its manufacturing. The center is composed of three shades of blue. It's as if the cold murky waters of the Pacific, the translucent light blue waters of Caribbean, and the rich blue waters of melting glaciers off the Alaskan coast converged to form a single wave, stretching the diameter of the small toy. It's a wave that doesn't break. It's locked in time, never building up, never cresting to a peak and toppling over into a violent rush of white water. Yet, all that energy seems to be there, just waiting.

I'm so affixed to the marble that every so often my body reacts violently to its basic needs. I'm suddenly forced to gasp for air. My lungs burn as fresh oxygen spreads throughout the organs. I feel my eyelids close. The cleansing irritates and lubricates my corneas. Sporadically, I feel fingernails soothe an itch in my hair. A shoulder lifts to stretch a muscle in my back. I'm aggravated by my body's needs because with each new need I'm pulled from my thoughts, thoughts that are driving to form a conclusion of why. Why is this glass marble here in this white room?

The little marble sits in a semicircular groove in the middle of a small table, which is really more of a nightstand. The nightstand is a simple design made of unfinished balsa wood that looks to be held together using only wooden dowels. It seems as though the groove was made later and not part of the original design. The stand is perfectly placed in the middle of the white room.

It was long ago that I stopped thinking about how I came to be in the white room. All my theories and postulations had melted upon one another over time, forming twisted questions that contorted themselves into endless loops with no return. One question formed another question that formed a thought conspiring to be an answer but only turning back into another question, until I arrived back at the beginning, no further along then from where I started. I had remembered reading something about prisoners counting their days of incarceration as a form of order. The article had mentioned some therapeutic value to this, but what that value was escaped me. So I concluded that it was futile to try and make sense of time, futile to try and make sense of why, when I had already lost track of the start. My reason stopped trying to form an answer to my beginning in the white room and had moved towards strategizing a way out. In my case, the beginning has no bearing on figuring out the end.

Every thought twists its way back to the small marble. Everything else in the white room is here out of necessity and thus I have associated its reason for being here. There are no outlets in the white room, therefore the maroon blow up mattress I sleep on was inflated somewhere else, then dragged in. The white porcelain sink and white porcelain toilet, while not top of the line, are too nice to be found in a penitentiary type establishment, therefore the white room had been built for someone of my kind. Though what my kind is I cannot conclude.

The walls in the white room are freshly painted and someone even went so far as to texture them using a palm technique. The room has electricity as indicated by the two fluorescent tubes above me. The lighting is recessed. A steel grate with chipped white paint covers the opening. However, the chipping paint seems to be from a sloppy installation, rather than the fatigue of time. The grate casts soft shadows on the white floor so that while sitting underneath it I am never fully immersed in light nor ever fully covered by the shadows. The white floor is a high gloss linoleum with no pattern. It reflects my smudged image, an image framed in the white boxes of fluorescent light and surrounded by the shadows of the grate.

The white room has a steel door with a white powder coat. Next to the steel door is a smaller steel tray. It, too, has a white powder coat. Every so often the door slams open. This is my indication that it is time to eat. I never see anyone when the door opens because the top of the tray has a metal lid, also coated in white powder. Each time I lift the lid there is a meal on a white plate and a cup of water in a white saucer. The meals are always finger foods. One time it was a corndog and tater tots. Another time it was pizza. Once there was a hamburger and fries. I tried for some time to keep track of how

many meals I got a day, thereby tracking my time in this white room, or at least a form of my time here. But early on, my captor must have caught wind of this plan. Often times I wake up and the white tray is already open. The meals give no indication of time. I never get eggs or anything resembling a breakfast. It's always finger foods and always a food that would fall under the category of lunch or dinner.

Above the steel tray is a sign. It's been stamped onto the wall using red paint and reads *TRASH*. I supposed this to mean that when I'm done eating, I put my white dish and white saucer back into the tray and close it. A couple of times, I have tried to keep my plate and saucer, but in doing so I went for what felt like an eternity without food or water. After that experiment, I tried putting the white dish and white saucer back into the tray, but left the tray open on my end. I had convinced myself that if the tray closed, this would be some form of human contact. There would be a person shutting that tray on the other side. The tray shutting would be our sign, a sign that we were together even if on opposite sides. The tray never closed and eventually hunger got the best of me.

The toy marble is the way out. My long oily brown hair, the coarse length of my growing beard; these are the only indications of time. It's running out. I notice gray hairs entangled in my brown beard, gray hairs I've never had before. How old am I? When I came to the white room I was 33. My time here is locked up like the violent blue waves deep within the marble, and this toy is my freedom. The marble is the only thing that signifies fate and destiny. It's the only bit of spirituality in the white room. The bed, the sink, the toilet, the tray housing my food—they are all metaphors for the things I can't control. I have to sleep. I have to eat. I have to defecate. Yet I can choose to pick up the marble. I can choose to roll it on the table and watch it fall. But in doing so, what does that fate entail? What is the right combination? What is the right path for the marble to roll?

I'm overcome with fear. I can't touch the marble. I don't know what to do with it. I chew my fingernails. I peel the nails on my toes. In the silence of the white room I hear the white tip ends rip from my nail plates. It's gruesome and soothing. I pace the room and throw away the white little pieces of myself into the metal tray. I read the red sign, *TRASH*. The only thing left to do is roll the glass marble.

The marble glistens in the groove. It's still, but that wave is waiting to break. It's waiting to tumble over and release its energy. I just have to pick it up and decide my fate. I will pick a path for the marble and that path will render its consequences. I think about what little control I have left here. I'm told when to eat in the white room, which dictates when I use the toilet, dictating me to wash my hands after, dictating me to sleep and start over again. But there is no starting over again because such a thing would represent time, and I am without that measurement in this place. The only hope I have is the marble.

I give meaning to each choice of possible paths for the marble to travel. If I roll the marble towards me I'm longing for the past. I'd want to become what I once was before the white room. I can never be who I was before, so I cannot roll the marble towards me. If I roll the marble to either side of me, it's caught in vacillation. I would only stay in the white room. Rolling the marble diagonally would only cause confusion, wavering between what would be the past and what is the present or what is the present and what could be the future. I have to roll the marble away from me.

My fists clench, knuckles turning white. I release my grip and let the flesh regain its color, repeating the process over and over. My hands look older, distinguished in a way except for the uneven edges along my fingernails, which have been bitten, chewed on, and then thrown away in the metal tray below the red sign that reads *TRASH*. My body twitches and shakes, convulsing as if it were cold, but the white room is always at a comfortable temperature. There is no measurement of time, but still I feel that it is running out. I pick up the glass marble.

The marble rolls away from me. Its initial departure is slow, but it begins to pick up speed. I think for a moment that the white room must not be level or the small nightstand isn't level. It doesn't matter though because the marble has left its groove. The waves in the middle remain still. As the marble gains momentum they start tumbling over onto themselves. The blue waves start their centrifuge, imploding and forming a cylinder of frothy white with an inner blue core. The cylinder stretches the diameter of the glass toy. The marble makes its way towards the opposite edge of the table. Even if I tried to grab it now, I wouldn't make it. The marble is going to fall. As it falls I see the shades of deep blue within the

frothy white cylinder. There's the Alaskan Coast tumbling into the Pacific rolling into Caribbean, repeating the process over and over.

Just before the glass marble meets the white linoleum floor I have one thought. It's a thought that is both instantaneous and yet refined. The split second I conjure it up is the exact moment I know it to be true. The end has no end. Even when the marble impacts the high gloss linoleum, releasing its energy, and I hear something behind the steel door, even now I know this end has no end.

*James Pickel*



*DecOmposed*

Graphite and Adobe Photoshop

Josh Busch



Portrait  
Adobe Photoshop  
Kaitlyn Platt



Pink  
Ink and Marker  
Kelly Johnson

## I Wish I Could Remember

The porch lit up just as the sun began to go down. The smell of pine and wet grass swam through the cool breeze. It was Sunday. There was no mail, there were no visitors – it was just a couple of old men and their dog. Hank and Jim rocked back and forth in their respective chairs. The silent pluck of a banjo was coming from inside and Rose has a pie in the oven. The single tree out front was just enough to cover the cottage on the hill. Shag, the dog, was lying down as Hank turned to look at Jim.

“Do you remember that story about the wishes?” he asked.

“What story? The one with the monkey paw?” Jim replied.

“No. Not that one, the one about the kid in love.”

“Snow White? Why would you think about that?”

“No you old coot! Why would I think about some silly fairy tale with dwarves?”

“That’s what I’m saying,” Jim was restless. The yells escalated quickly and progress was slow as Hank struggled to tell his story.

“Would you stay quiet for one dag-blasted second?” Hank asked.

“Maybe if you knew what you were talking about.”

“I do know what I’m talking about. You’re the one who doesn’t know what I’m talking about – stop distracting me and don’t get too excited, you’ll knock over the lamp again.”

“What lamp?” Jim threw his arms wildly. The lamp fell. Shag jumped and ran off into the kitchen.

Hank began again, “That’s it! It’s about a kid and a lamp!”

“Oh yeah...how did that go again?” Jim asked.

“Well, it all started with some kid’s uncle—“

“Wasn’t he a magician?”

“Just let me finish the story.” Hank gathered his thoughts again, “So, there’s a kid who doesn’t do anything and a magician who wants to rule the world.”

“There’s no way that was ever a good story – go back to the monkey one.” Jim mumbled.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“So anyway, this magician pretended to be the kid’s uncle and said he’d give him an inheritance of some sort.”

“Alright, now we’re getting somewhere.”

“But it wasn’t an inheritance; it was a lie. What the magician really wanted was a lamp. And he needed the boy to get it for him.”

“Did they go into a magical cave?” Jim asked in a mocking tone.

“No, you old – wait – yes they did. And in this cave there was everything you could ever want, but nothing you could ever touch.”

“That pie smells good.”

“Would it kill you to pay attention for once you selfish dog?” Shag ran back to the porch. “Where was I?”

“The cave.”

“The cave! So this kid is in the cave. He’s looking for some lamp, finds it and comes back to the uncle—“

“Magician.”

“Magician – just to learn that nothing was going how he thought it would.”

Jim interjected, “How is it you remember all of this?”

“Not the point. So the unc – magician does some things, closes the cave, and leaves the kid for dead. So the kid’s sitting there for a while, waiting for something to happen and the genie comes out of nowhere!”

“Like your memories?”

“Exactly!” Hank says with a smug look on his face before realizing what had just happened.

“Rose! Is that pie ready yet?” Jim yelled.

“Keep your pants on! I’ll call you in a bit.”

“So what were you saying, Hank?”

“Pie – I mean, the kid wishes himself out, or something, then gets back home eventually. Then there’s something about living happily with his mom making wishes and getting richer until the day he sees a princess.”

“Oh because that’s not predictable—“

“Quiet, fool. This story’s older than you.” There’s more that followed after that, but it’s distracting to the story we’re trying to uncover – let’s skip ahead a bit. “So this kid sees the princess, makes some more wishes and manages to get really close to marrying her, but there’s this other bad guy – some advisor type – who wants her for his own son.”

“This kid’s probably a schmuck.”

“Aah – maybe. But now, the ‘schmuck’ doesn’t like his future wife being taken away from him. He makes some more wishes, scares some people and gets richer all for some silly girl.”

“Sounds kind of familiar—“

“That was a different story,” Hank clarified.

“If you say so.”

“Do you remember this story at all yet?”

“I was supposed to remember something?” Jim asked.

“Yes! I was trying to get you to remember the name of the story.”

“Oh well yea– it’s the story about the kid and some wishes – Rumpelstiltskin!”

“You old jack-wagon, don’t you know anything?”

“I know that I want some pie, our dog’s name is Shag, I knocked over a lamp. I know that I wish you would stop reminiscing about your childhood stories and wait for the pie like the rest of us.”

Hank looked at the tree. “You’re right, it probably wasn’t even a good story.”

“What fairy tale is?”

“Good point.” The sun had almost fully set and the only sound was the creaking from the crickets and from the chairs along with Shag snoring on the side. The day was just about over when all of a sudden there rose such a clat—

“PIE’S READY!” Rose waited inside.

“Welp, just about that time, ay?” Jim quietly asked.

“Yessir,” Hank replied. “I’ve been waiting for this pie since I can remember.” They both got up, Jim whistled at Shag and the three slowly made their way inside.

“It was Aladdin.”

“What?” Jim and Hank said in unison.

“The story, the one you were trying to remember outside.”

“What – oh.” Hank remembered. “That one. Thanks Rose.”

“That was a good story,” Jim said.

“What kind of pie is it today?” The four sat in silence. And that night was the same as any other.

*Paul Mendez*



## You've Got Mail

Photography  
Derrick MacGregor



# Concordia University at a Glance

## Why CUI?

Concordia University Irvine is a US News Top Tier Regional University that prepares students for their vocations—their calling in life. CUI offers undergraduate, graduate, and adult degree programs in a beautiful Southern California location, with online and regional cohort options. Concordia's undergraduate program is distinctive among Christian universities in the region because of the University's innovative and engaging Core Curriculum (see [www.cui.edu/core](http://www.cui.edu/core)), and its Lutheran heritage that provides a thoughtful and caring Christian community that lives out "Grace Alone. Faith Alone." (see [www.cui.edu/gracealone](http://www.cui.edu/gracealone)).

## Location

Just 40 miles south of Los Angeles, Concordia University Irvine is located in the heart of Orange County, minutes from beaches, jobs, internships, world-class shopping, and a diversity of cultural experiences. Yet, with all of this so close, Concordia's campus is secluded and tucked away in rolling green hillsides overlooking the city of Irvine and Orange County.

## Accreditation

- Western Association of Schools and Colleges
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education

## Schools

- School of Arts and Sciences
- School of Business and Professional Studies
- School of Education
- Christ College

## Faculty

- Full Time Faculty: 100 (Percentage of Faculty with Ph.D. or other terminal degree: 76%)
- Student to faculty ratio: 17:1

The opinions expressed in this edition of *The Aerie* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the administration, faculty, staff, or student body of Concordia University, Irvine.

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The Aerie



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