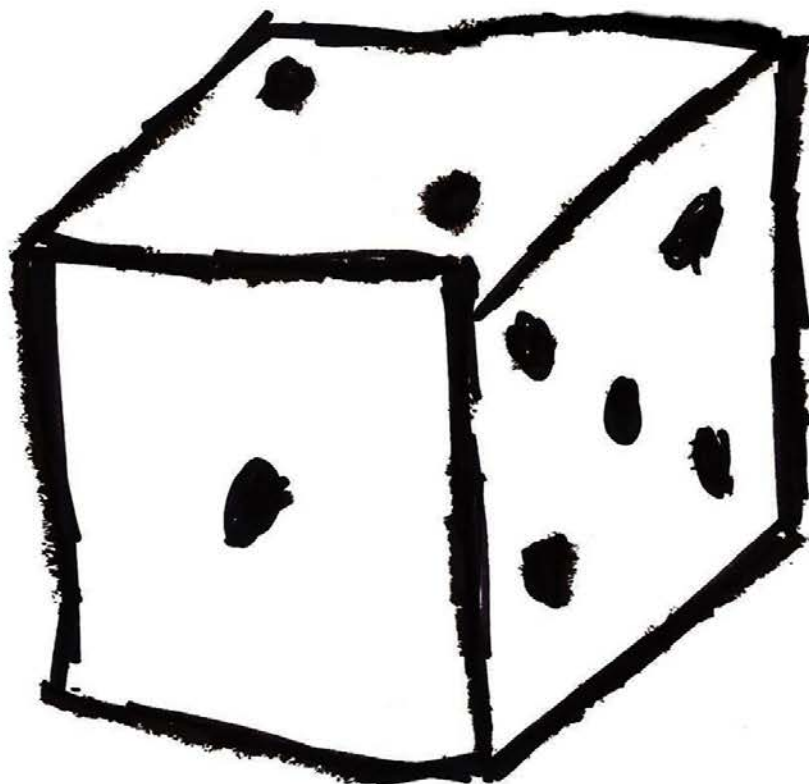


# Phineas



Art - Essays - Fiction - Poetry

# Phineas 2015 Award Winners

Every year, the *Phineas* student editors select all the written and artistic works in the magazine. From among the accepted work, qualified faculty members select one piece from each of the categories for first prize. A second prize is awarded if there is a sufficient quantity and quality of works in a category.

## Art

1<sup>st</sup> "Untitled" photo by Erica Cormier

2<sup>nd</sup> "Elf Child" by Nadia C Solis Valadez

## Essay

1<sup>st</sup> "The End of the Earth" by David Lee

## Fiction

1<sup>st</sup> "Playing Ball" by David Lee

## Poetry

1<sup>st</sup> "Local Royalty" by Nadia C Solis Valadez

2<sup>nd</sup> "Welcome to America" by Joel Sedano

## Contest Judges

**Art:** Mandi Batalo, Linda Fisher-Butterfield, Nader Gergis,  
David Rosales, Jim Stewart, Ian White

**Essay/Fiction:** Michael Slusser

**Poetry:** Mary Copeland



San Bernardino  
Valley College

# Phineas

## 2015

The Literary Magazine  
of  
San Bernardino Valley College

Number 46

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*Phineas* supports free creative expression, but any opinions or viewpoints expressed in the works in this magazine do not necessarily represent the views of the editors, faculty advisor, English department, college or district.

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## Award Winners

Works noted by the \* symbol in the contents list and by special notations within the magazine have been recognized by faculty judges as outstanding pieces in their genre. See inside front cover for more information.

# Download CONNECT Upload

Andrew James Woodyard

Download,

Download,

Download,

Circuit board cities and fiber-optic highways,

A neuromancer casts its spell,

A million megabytes a minute in transit,

Do programs dream of electronic men?

- CONNECT -

Conscientiousness computing and conspiring

Johnny Five is not alive,

Ones and zeroes in the trillions,

Sumerian typography raining in torrents,

Upload,

Upload,

Upload.

## Coiled Connections



Lakeisha Knott

# Playing Ball

David Lee

*I trust in God. I love my country and will respect its laws. I will play fair and strive to win.  
But win or lose, I will always do my best.*

— Little League Opening Prayer

"Stick this next pitch in his teeth." Gus no longer needed to stoop to speak with his grandson. Between Joey's growth and Gus' ever descending slouch, it would not be long till they saw eye to eye.

"What?" Joey's voice was eight years old again.

"Listen to me now, listen to what I'm telling you. If that moolie squares around to bunt on this pitch, like he done on the last one, I want somebody should get a plunger to suck the ball out of his throat. You hear me?" Gus glanced over his left shoulder, his contempt stirred by the sight of the on deck circle. Then he checked the whereabouts of the 15 year-old umpire, still lingering around home plate, looking to the mound.

"Hit him with the pitch...on purpose?" Innocence tangled in Joey's voice, like an unsuspecting dolphin in a fisherman's long dragging net.

"Joey, there's only one way to hit someone, and that's on purpose." Gus lifted his right hand from Joey's left shoulder and gave a few soft slaps on the cheek. Whether intent was alarm or encouragement, no one was certain.

"I, I don't, I don't..." Joey developed a stutter on the pitcher's mound, before Gus' eyes.

"Listen, don't make me keep repeating myself. If this kid squares around to bunt while you're in your wind-up, change the target from the catcher's mitt, to his mouth. Ain't no player in the world can lay down a bunt when he's flat on his ass!"

"Hit him? In the face? On purpose?" Shock resonated in Joey's voice. He uncovered lies before, but not like this. He always doubted Santa Claus, and white lies regarding family were a way of life. But he could hold a baseball in his hand. On the pitcher's mound Joey first experienced control, not of a baseball, but of his life: autonomy. This circular dirt mound was the only place on Earth Joey knew he was in charge, free from outside pressure. He was the boss here, and baseball seemed so real, but more importantly, it seemed fair.

"Way high and inside is the only place to throw a pitch that's impossible to bunt. Anywhere else, he could get lucky. With the tying run on third base, one out, this ain't no time to allow for luck." Gus spoke in even, matter-of-fact tones.

"But I can strike this guy out. He ain't got a hit all day. He stinks, pop." Joey tried to defend his turf, settling his voice. He folded his arms and looked down where a pebble he was moving around with his right cleats captured his attention. "I can strike him out."

"Joey, can you hear yourself? You just said he ain't got a hit all day. That's why he's bunting. You saw him run down that line drive in left-center last inning. He can fuckin' fly! He'll be on first base before you pick the ball up."

"But hitting him on purpose, I, I just think I can, you know..."

"Not only on purpose, Joey, with purpose. Listen to me carefully. Let's say you strike this guy out, next time up, you gotta deal with him all over again, strike him out again then too. And the next guy up – it won't get any easier. You understand me? I'm telling you to set him straight here. Do the thing that's gonna make you a winner. He squares around to bunt..." Gus shrugged his

shoulders and raised his arms, palms up, indicating there was nothing else to do, no other choice.

"Hey, you wanna win, right?"

"Yeah, but what's the next guy up got to do with this?"

"The next guy sees how bunters are dealt with. He'll have a bird's eye view from the on-deck circle. He won't be digging in; he won't be too quick to try the same thing, he'll be rattled, uncomfortable up there. You hit this guy in the face, and you get inside the whole line-ups' head." Satisfied with his point, Gus began to ease down off the mound.

"Is that fair? I mean, I never hear the announcers on TV saying anything about this kinda stuff." His tone said he would do as told, but just not yet. Gus turned back to him.

"It's part of the game, Joey. You hear the announcer's say 'so-and-so is breaking one of the unwritten rules,' you know, somebody steals second base in the 8th inning with his team up ten runs. Pitchers don't forget that, and that guy is marked to get hit by a pitch. Might even carry over to next time they play. It's the game within the game. Besides, the way that little sonabitch can run ain't fair either." Gus stared at Joey who remained more interested in a rock than his Grandfather.

"I struck out the guy on deck twice today too."

Gus placed hands on either side of Joey's head, covering his ears. Then he began tapping his right index finger on Joey's left temple. "Look at me." Joey's eyes raised. "Goddammit, it's time to start figuring things out. Time for you to start using this thing in your head for something other than a place to rest your ball cap. You saw him run, now he's trying to bunt. Add it up; he bunts, we lose. You plunk him one in the chops, you put a meaningless runner on first base. It gives us a force at every base and serves the same purpose as an intentional walk, and we won't have to deal with anymore of this bunting bullshit. It's part of the game."

"Heh, yeah, part of the game, like bunting." Joey saw the teenage umpire meandering slowly towards the mound to break up the conclave.

"Don't be a wise ass, Joseph. It might seem hard the first time you have to do this, but it's gotta be done. I have to have things done I don't like all the time too. This works though. You'll see how this works, and next time you'll not only do it, but do it gladly. It gets easier."

"Uh huh, sure, easier, I understand."

"One more thing, throw the first pitch into the dirt. Make it look like a legit mistake if you have to drill him with the next one. Gotta make it look good."

"Yeah, gotta make it look good."

"Excuse me, Mr. Scarfo," the umpire startled Gus, "if you could reach some sort of decision here that would be great."

"What the hell are you doing, sneaking up on us like that, huh? Trying to hear what the strategy is or something? What, do you work for them? What's the deal, huh?"

"I'm sorry, it's been five minutes, that's nearly twice as much time as they told me to give you in this situation. And I just want to..."

"Who's they, what 'they' are you talkin' about? You wanna let me in on whatever deal you struck with them?" The umpire backed down off the mound and stood on the infield grass.

"All I'm trying to say, Mr. Scarfo, is it's almost time to play ball. They said to quit the stalling." He put his umpiring mask on and returned to the vicinity of home plate.

"Oh, did they? I'll get to them later." Gus turned back to Joey. "You want me to bring Mario in here from right field to pitch? Is that what you want? He can't pitch but he can throw the ball as hard as anybody, and he'll do as he's told. He's as dumb as a bag of hammers, but he's a winner. Want me to signal for him?" Gus feigned a signal to right field where Mario was standing with his

jersey pulled over his head, shimmying around like a headless hula dancer. Gus shook his head. "Oh man, what the fuck is wrong with that kid?"

"No, don't call Mario. I'm pitching." Joey didn't check right field. Once the little stone was precisely where he wanted it, he locked in, trance-like on home plate.

"Well, it's about fuckin' time you made your mind up!" Gus emphasized the point with a roundhouse swat to Joey's rear-end, taking advantage of the timeless jock edict allowing heterosexual guys free reign regarding touching one another's ass. He followed momentum and strolled to flat ground, taking a last look back. "Don't forget, first ones in the dirt." Gus winked and headed off, yelling towards home plate about the umpire's terribly inconsistent strike zone.

Joey tucked his glove under his arm, using one hand to lift his cap and the other to sweep hair under it. Returning the glove to his hand, he stood ready to throw when the umpire declared "play ball". Seconds later Joey was into the sloppiest, most awkward wind-up Gus had seen. The ball came out on a low trajectory, but not nearly in the dirt. The batter offered at the low pitch, and "strike" was called by the ump. The count was now 1-1.

Gus was unsure if it was intentional, or got away. When he caught Joey's eye, he pumped both fists out in front of him, calling, "C'mon Joey, do your thing!"

Joey glared as hard a 12 year old from the suburbs could glare. He did not have the opportunities the players on the Newark All-Stars did to use the mad-dog stare, but he gave it a shot. He came set, when pitchers look into the catcher. Instead, he stared up the first base side at his Grandfather/Coach, moving his head, shaking off his Grandfather's called pitch. Joey kicked and delivered much smoother, throwing a pitch low and away, as far from the batter's face the ball could be, and still be caught.

"Time out!" Gus barked in the umpire's direction, already across the foul line, heading for the mound. He smiled like jolly old grandpa, looking the role of benevolent ball coach to the letter. He stepped up the mound and got close to his pitcher. "Do it again and see what fuckin' happens." Gus smiled maniacally, speaking soft. "Just throw one more pitch he can get the bat on, and let's find out where that gets you. Go ahead, test me." Gus' hand was on his left shoulder again, this time squeezing thumb and index finger to cause Joey enough pain he had to squirm free and back away.

"The count is 2-1, I got him. Why won't you let me strike him out?" Joey stood hands on his hips, looking defiant, like a pitcher insisting he still had his stuff, not wanting to be taken out.

Gus smiled broader, "Because that's not what the situation calls for, do you hear me? Am I coming through loud and clear? Because if you have any doubts where the next pitch is going, tell me, and let me get you out of here before you fuck this game up." Gus smiled like his teeth needed sunshine, nodding his head at Joey, awaiting a confirming nod.

Joey drew a deep breath and let it out slowly, causing his cheeks to puff out with air. One quick, subtle nod is all he would spare Gus confirming his request; it was practically undetectable, but all Gus needed to turn and go. While Gus walked back, Joey circled the mound, taking the ball out of his glove with his bare hand, then jamming it back in repeatedly. As he ascended the mound, he left the ball in the glove and assumed his set position, waiting for the ump to wave for play again.

When action resumed, he glanced over at the two baserunners, then at his real concern. Another big breath, he held and released slowly, and he was into his wind up. This pitch was in the dirt, bouncing in front of the catcher. Ball three and the count moved to 3-1. Gus twitched, fidgeting with uncertainty over the pitch, unsure Joey was on board. Joey went to the set immediately upon receiving the ball from the catcher. He made the prerequisite check of runners and was in the wind up, this time without a look to Gus.

The ball seemed to jump from Joey's hand with explosive velocity. From the little league distance of 45 feet, the ball was on the batter in a couple of tenths of a second: the hitter never had a chance. The ball caromed off his upper left cheekbone high into the air. He went down as if an invisible force threw him at the dirt. The contact created a sickening sound which everyone heard. It would reverberate in Joey's ears a long time.

It took nearly 15 minutes to get the boy from the field off to the hospital, his left eye swollen tightly shut, his face a grotesquely disfigured mask. Joey could not help but take a look, against Gus' orders and despite his attempt to shield Joey's view. When the game was set to resume, Gus stood on the mound holding the ball.

"You okay? Ready to go?" Gus asked from a sense of protocol. Joey nodded affirmatively. "Yeah, you gotta be. It's time to play ball." He slapped the ball into Joey's open glove and patted him on the side of his head, then departed. The ump gave the command to restart the game, and Joey stood frozen in the set position ready to throw.

He did the usual glance about, but this time it was different. He looked passed the on base runners, not noticing them. When he finally focused in on the catcher's mitt, he could feel tears welling in his eyes and his vision beginning to blur. He took a deep breath and went into the wind up. As the ball came out of his hand, everyone – but especially the hitter – could see it had no juice. The ball traveled toward home plate at little more than half the normal speed. The batter recoiled his body and snapped, releasing his swing with everything he had into the pitch and crushing it. Joey never turned to watch the ball sail away, instead walking slowly, head down to the dugout. Gus looked away from the soaring ball as it disappeared beyond the outfield fence. He stared at Joey as he approached.

"You did that on purpose, huh?" Gus said under his breath, so only Joey heard. Joey did not acknowledge him. Gus ratcheted his voice up. "You hear me, numbnuts?"

Joey looked at him, his face the essence of defeat, more vapid than space. "Fuck you," Joey said just above a whisper, "I'm never playing baseball again."

# Think of Me...

Jose Enciso

When you think of crying and a tear is about to fall,  
Think of me . . .

When you feel alone with just your thoughts and emotions,  
Think of me . . .

When you feel abandoned and feel like no one is listening  
Think of me . . .

When you believe you have no one in the world like your Mom or Dad,  
or even just a single-parent,  
Think of me . . .

When you fight with your siblings over something little,  
because they just don't understand you,  
Think of me . . .

When you give up on hope and faith,  
because the world seems like a crazy place,  
Think of me . . .

When you finally think of me, think of a little boy . . .

I am a boy who has cried a stream of tears throughout the years

I am a boy who has been clustered with thoughts and emotions that seem like forever

I am a boy who speaks and does not have anyone to listen

I am a boy who had no siblings to argue with throughout the years,  
because I lost them at the age of 7.

I am a boy that did not have a Mom or Dad but was a ward of the court

But I am a boy who has not given up on hope or faith  
and still believes in living . . .

So next time you feel or think life is hard and you're truly alone. . .

Think of me . . .

I am the boy who hasn't given up . . .

# A Shade of Color

Jose Enciso

I am beautiful

I come from a world

where my people have  
not perished

I come from a history  
of deep roots

of Aztec kings and queens

My complexion is not

white nor black  
but "Flagrant"

I am fortunate

to have the beauty

of both worlds

through the complexion of my skin

I am an eclipse in the new world

but a prince of my race

I am a reflection of "Brown"

a protégé in the eyes

of my ancestors

and a king of "Aztec" blood



# Nude

Gladys Anaya

I want to fall in love with you today tonight and tomorrow

I want to shy away from your touch only to bring you back home with me

I want to lay down by your side late evening on the living room carpet

And tell you all the ways which you are beautiful, you are beautiful, you are

I want to eat dinner with you and breakfast, too

I want to connect with your mind, your words and your skin

I want you to look at me like it's the first time

I want to love you enough without pushing you away

It seems your absence draws me nearer

I want our love to live in videotape

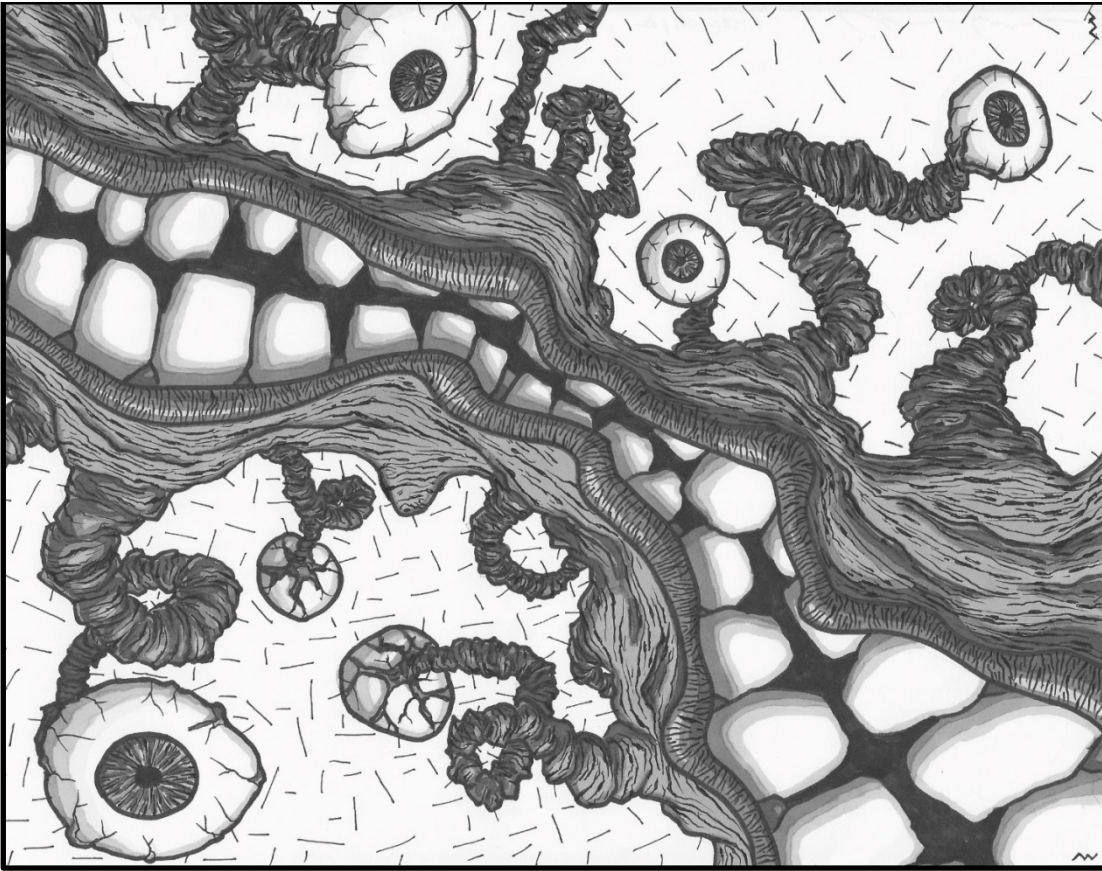
Our memories reeled in red, blue, green

Red, blue, green

I want to be the great strange dream

That you are much too fond of to let go

## Mini Madness



Andrew James Woodyard

## Love and Madness

Jonathan Tovar (Translated after Alexis Piron)

Prudent I had sworn to be,  
But ere long was weary I;  
Reason, ah! th' indignity:  
Tedium at thy tread is nigh.

I to Madness have recurr'd;  
I in pleasure have replay'd.  
Time the revel has interr'd;  
My desires have I mislaid.

I between them flutterèd;  
One does th' other parallel.  
I the two have temperèd  
That in concert they may dwell.

Since, have I my honey'd life  
Into this arrangement run:  
I have Reason for my wife,  
Madness for my courtesan.

Turn by turn, my fickle taste  
I to them at leisure share:  
One attends to home and waste,  
Th' other, ev'ry base affair.

# Before and After

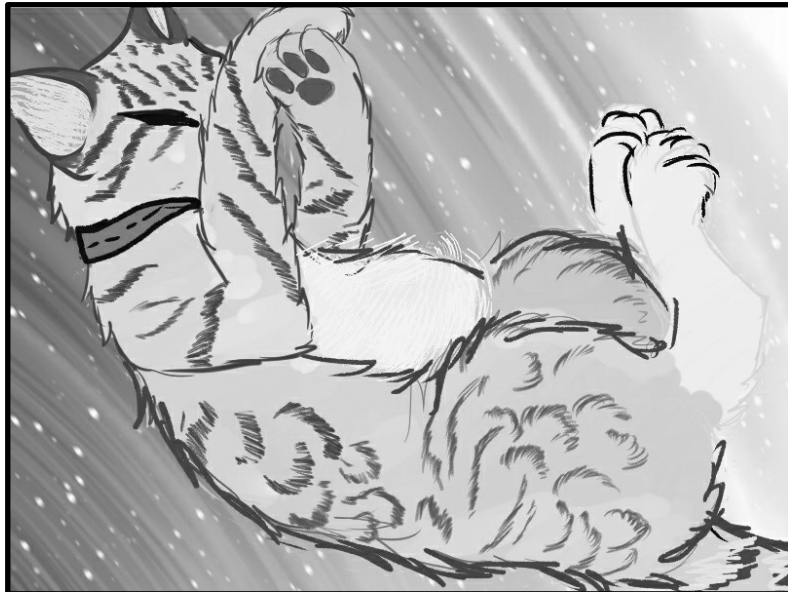
Alejandra Aguilera

We have kissed before  
the eyes of Frank O'Hara  
Stephen King and even a yellow bear  
flying a kite against a white paper sky.

I have forgotten the rest of them  
as I've forgotten  
the bronze floors of my bedroom  
the white blinds becoming gray lines  
over my eyes, with dust  
the thoughts that spilled like roses from a vase  
and my recent suicidal throw  
that made a razor shake.

They are gone now  
put away by you and your green meadow eyes.

## Cold Cat



Angeline Peay

# from “Filia Lunæ”

Jonathan Tovar

Disciple of Luna, wan and luminous,  
Environed by thy stellar sycophants—  
Enchantress of each sublunary being  
Who stands on earth, yet draws his eye aloft—  
Purveyor of Man’s base and febrile needs,  
And mystic source of many a somber hymn—  
Whose supple form by silver beam is gilt,  
From pallid brow and cheek to slender neck  
And full breast by long sable tresses framed,  
All brighter than the moon by night enclosed—  
Whose pouted lips are soft as cirrus cloud  
And rubicund when touched by the dying sun—  
Whose wide, sepulchral eyes hide all the terror  
Of darkness, while ignite they what indwells—  
To thee, I dedicate my verses weak.

If neither dream nor specter I thee see,  
I beg thee, tell, (if deem my worth to know):  
From what ethereal cloud descended Thou,  
Whose name inspires an ecstasy too great  
No heart may long endure while yet it pulses—  
That breathes a luxury too magnificent,  
No human arts’ unsound portrayals meet:  
Yet willed, I speak it—chant it—praise it!—Lilith!  
How ne’er a tongue of man such thrill has known  
Than proclamation of thy heavenly name  
That nominates thee idol, so would man  
Refuse his language altogether, lest  
He speak in vain too long and hail thee not;  
For nothing in the wealth of languages  
Articulated round this temple globe  
(When think their tones to roar but feebly sigh)  
Would e’er be able to justify the force  
With which thy very name professes power:  
Lilith!—Content am I one word to speak  
While I the breath with which to speak it have.

Yet thou deserve a lengthier dedication,  
If ought to limn the curious incident  
That I but late have suffer’d, loving thee!

# The Heathens of 3B

Michael A. Daniels

Bump—Bump—Bump  
Bumping again in the night

Scream—Groan—Scream  
Screaming and Groaning  
But not from fright

The Heathens from 3B are at it again  
The Heathens from 3B indulging in sin

They're my bane,  
The seed of my insomnia,  
The TV's never loud enough to drown them,

They're not even married,  
Not even bound except carnally,  
Princes and Princesses of Dionysus...may he crown them,

I must be up in a few hours,  
In a few hours I'll be at my job,  
While they continue to devour and sweat and pulse and throb,

I have...responsibilities,  
After all, I have a cat to feed,  
While they explore possibilities, and yearning, and need,

Bump—Scream—Bump  
The Heathens continue they're hectic thump,

Bump—Groan—Bump  
His leg, Her shame, His pride, Her rump

I'm here in 3C over annoyed,  
I'm here in 3C under joyed

I'm here in 3C awake, wondering,  
What's it really like in 3B?

# An Analogy of Time

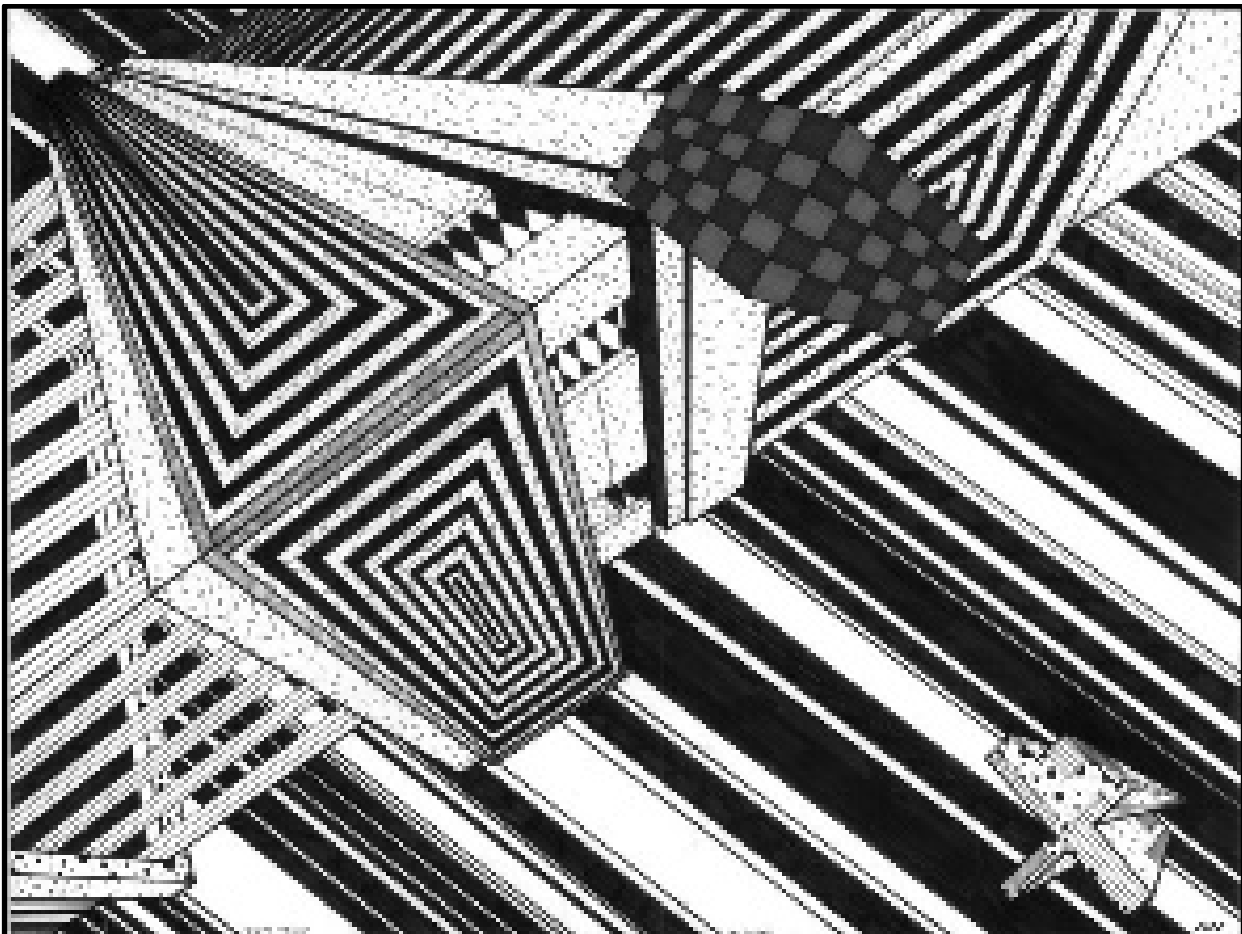
Amanda Brazee

Time is like wax dripping from a candle flame  
In the moment it is molten and falling  
With the capability to transform into any shape

Then the moment passes and the wax falls  
It hits the tabletop and solidifies  
It cools into the shape it will always be

It becomes the past  
A single record of what happened  
Forever still it holds in its wild curves and contours  
The potential of everything  
Of every shape it could have taken

## Third Realm



Andrew James Woodyard

# Onion Drifts Between the Stars

Andrew James Woodyard

Onion drifts between the stars,  
dreaming dreams of Venus, Earth and Mars;  
Far away are points of light,  
but out of reach and out of sight;  
Monkey see and monkey do,  
he's lost what he was tethered to;  
Onion drifts between the stars,  
dreaming dreams of Venus, Earth and Mars.

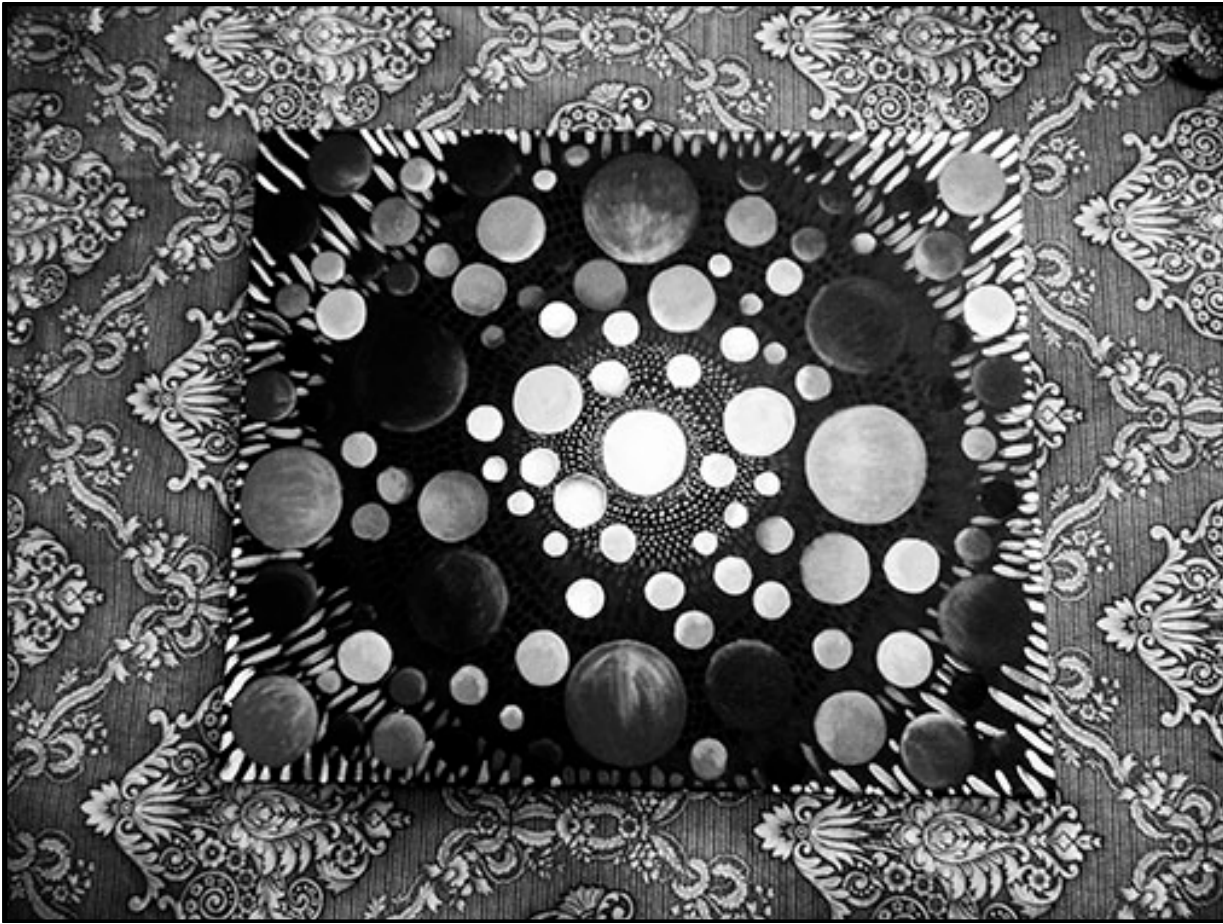


# Another World Unleashed

Alissa Ramirez

Another world was unleashed; as the soft words were uttered and released  
Within the pure white pages; in minutes she covered ages  
Of ancient times, of these exotic rhymes  
She owned the virtues to the point; she called it "mine"  
The unlimited, senseless, she owned the power  
It was put out like a plate on a platter at every hour  
Knowledge like white droplets came down like a shower  
Within this, unspoken beauty was evoked  
But what was taught by philosophers was revoked  
Within the feelings of the wandering mind  
It unraveled, as it surely came to unwind  
As what came to open was another page  
So symbolic like the burning of sage  
The angelic circular-light nature brightened  
As her faith within the pages heightened  
The outside stricter so balanced to be intense  
But the contained knowledge was immense  
The challenges were all scribed  
Though written in stone no change could occur even if bribed  
Another world was unleashed, as the soft word were uttered and released

# Circles



Xotchil P. Spandakis

## The Codex of Ultimate Truth And Understanding

Andrew James Woodyard

On the cold, distant Uranian moon of Titania the sun was just another star in the night sky, and no one that lived there understood what a sunrise was, or a day, or a sunset.

"The Codex is our guide to the universe, the Truth and the Way," the High Astrologist stated while encircled by hundreds of men, women and children in the big open dome called the Observatory. "Titania tells us that she, like the other Planetary Intellects, created us from the ashes of the fallen people after the Endless Wars. We are the new humanity; the chosen people; the Children of Uranus."

Alexandathon Calibanos floated within the dome with his friends and family. His parents floated with their arms locked together facing the High Astrologist and listened intently to his sermon. To his left were his friends Andropher and Moriel Belindos, a pair of identical twins. Alexandathon rolled his eyes and sighed while the High Astrologist droned on, then crossed his arms over his chest and looked up above him into the stars. The sun was a bright white dot against the black of space, but it was brighter than any of the other stars. Close to the sun a distant and dim blue spec shimmered, but Alexandathon had never been to Earth.

"People," the High Astrologist yelled, "I warn you: do not believe the falsehoods that the Mars People have told you! Mars and the Earth, like Uranus, bore their children as it was transcribed by the Intellects all those ages ago. We are not Earthmen in orbit of Uranus; we are the first race of Uranus, favored by his Intellects. So it was transcribed."

●●●

A half an hour later Alexandathon was making his way down a corridor toward his dormitory.

"Alex!" one of the twins called from behind him. He turned and nodded.

"Hey, Andro," he said, remembering that Andro was wearing a darker jumpsuit than Moriel was in the Observatory. Moriel wore red and was lingering behind his brother with a dazed look on his face. "What did you think of the sermon? This new Astrologist is amazing — he really knows his Codex!"

"Yeah, I know," Alexandathon replied. "He has a lot of prejudices against the Mars People though."

"They're not prejudices," Andropher replied. "He's listened to all the theories that the Mars People have told us. That's all they really are... theories. I mean, everyone knows what the Codex says, even the Mars People know it: they have the same Codex."

"Yeah, he's right," Moriel said, catching up to his brother.

"I'm not sure they are all the same," Alexandathon replied. "I mean, their Codex is similar, but there's some major differences. I read a report that suggested that they differ based on the personalities of the Planetary Intellects that recorded them."

"I don't know about that," Moriel replied. "I think they're pretty much the same."

"They aren't," Alexandathon replied. "I know our Codex pretty well, but the Codex of Mars says that their people weren't created from the ashes of the Fallen, but from the Thirty Six Ancestors —"

"That's not true," Moriel objected.

"Yeah, you probably read it wrong," Andropher noted.

"No, I read it right. You could read it too and see what I mean, and it's not just their Codex. I mean, the Codex of the Free People of Ceres says that their people were made from the waters of something called the 'Star Fountain'. Then there's the Codex of the Black, what the Children of Eris believe —"

"No, that's wrong," Moriel argued, "the new High Astrologist said their Codex's have some slight differences, but that's it. You're looking into the wrong details."

"How could I be looking into the wrong details? How could there be details that are wrong? That doesn't make any sense, Moriel."

"No, it does," Andropher stated.

"No, it doesn't," Alexandathon replied. "Look, what the Mars People have postulated makes a lot of sense —"

"No, it doesn't!" Moriel replied. "We weren't bred from Earthmen!"

"But that makes sense. Earth is full of wildlife and there are trillions of people living there, more than every other planet and moon for the most part. I mean, where did the Fallen come from anyway?"

"The Codex says the Fallen were born from the stars," Moriel noted.

"Yeah, I know that. Wait, no that's not exactly what it says. It says 'The Fallen were born from a star.' I'm wondering if 'a star' means that they came from the direction of Sol; from the Sun."

"That's not what it says!" Moriel argued. "You're thinking too much."

"What's wrong with thinking too much?"

"Everything," Andropher replied. "Alex, you shouldn't question the Codex."

"I'm not questioning the Codex. I'm just noting that there are some major differences with it and the other Codexes, and that it makes a lot of sense for everyone to have descended from people that originally came from Earth."

"No," Moriel replied, shaking his head back and forth. "You need to talk to the Astrologist again. You're confused."

"No, I'm not. I think the Mars People might have figured it out."

"You need to talk to the Astrologist," the twins repeated.

"Whatever," Alexandathon replied. "I'm going to lay down. I've got a splitting headache."

"Probably from thinking too much," Moriel noted.

●●●

Alexandathon lay in his pod with the lights dimmed. He pondered about his argument with the twins, then what the High Astrologist had said during the sermon, and what he had heard the Mars People say, when he heard a chime from his pod's intercom.

"Hey, it's me," said the voice of his fiancée, Bionca.

He made a little wave with his hand and his pod opened. "Can I join you?" she asked, standing over the pod.

"Yeah, hop in," he replied.

Bionca climbed into the pod and curled up next to him, laying her head against his shoulder.

Alexandathon was tall and thin, with dark hair and tanned skin. Bionca, however, although tall herself, had far more muscle tone and very pale skin, and white hair.

The pod closed and a series of dim lights turned on as it did. "You've got a lot on your mind," she noted after he remained silence for a long time.

"Yeah, because of what Moriel and Andros again."

"Those two don't know anything," she replied.

"Yeah, pretty much."

"This whole moon is really brain dead."

Alexandathon laughed. "That's why I want to leave. You know I've never seen a sunrise except in a holo?"

"Yeah, you said that last week. I can't imagine that."

"You've known sunrises all your life."

"Not since I left Mars," she replied. "At least you have holos to see out here."

"Yeah, but that's different. It's one thing watching something in holograms. I mean, you see a sunrise happening, but it's another thing to experience something like that yourself. Like remember when I took you Core Jumping?"

"Oh yeah, that was fun!" she replied with a smile, "like skydiving into a planet."

"Exactly," Alexandathon replied, "but it's different watching people doing something like that or hearing a recording about it than actually doing it. I want to see a sunrise and a sunset. I want to see what a day is like... what a real day is like."

Bionca kissed his cheek. "Come with me back to Mars when we leave."

Alexandathon sighed. "I really want to, but it's a three year trip to get there. Everyone I know is here."

"Not everyone."

He turned to face her and smiled. "Yeah, you're here," he took a long pause, "at the moment."

"Not if I go back to Mars."

"You're going to leave me?"

"Not if I don't have to. You could come back to visit someday."

"Yeah, I know I could, but that's another three year trip just to come back."

"You're the one who said you wanted to see the Solar System. You can't get a good perspective of the universe by looking at it from just one point in the sky."

"Yeah," Alexandathon replied halfheartedly.

Bionca crawled on top of him and looked into his eyes. "Well, you need to make up your mind. I'm leaving in three orbits unless you put a ring on my finger or decide to chase me across the Solar System."

Alexandathon smiled, then leaned up and kissed her.

●●●

The next morning Alexandathon was walking through one of the larger corridors when the High Astrologist came up to him from a side tunnel.

"Alexandathon!" he called.

"Huh, oh, hello Astrologist."

"You can call me Celestro," the Astrologist replied with a smile. "Look, your friend Moriel came to me and told me you were confused about some of the things that the Mars People have been saying."

"Yeah, sort of. I'm not really confused. I just noticed that —"

"That there's some big differences in the Codexes," the Astrologist said, nodding his head up and down.

"Yeah, can you explain that? I mean, I think I understand why, but I'd like to hear your opinion it."

The Astrologist laid his hand across Alexandathon's back as they walked. "Son, there are differences between different versions of the Truth because different Intellects recorded what happened from their own point of views. Yes, the Women of Venus say their Great Mother birthed a new race after the Endless Wars, and yes, the Mars People have their own ideas about their Thirty Six and all that. I know, I've read each and everyone one of the Codexes after the Mars People first contacted us all those orbits ago. What all the Codex's do say is that every species of man that survived the Endless Wars of the Fallen were created by their Intellects in the shadow of the Fallen. It doesn't matter to *us* how the Mars People were created, only to the Mars People."

"Okay, but what about where the Fallen came from?"

The Astrologist laughed. "Look, if the Intellects wanted us to understand that then they would have explained that in more detail within the Codexes, but they didn't. The Fallen represent destruction. In the past they may have actually existed, whatever they were, but to us here in the present they are just a metaphor. Trust the Codexes, Alexandathon. Trust that the Intellect of Titania is looking over you and computing where your life will take you. Don't be swayed by unproven theories within knowing the full truth for yourself."

Alexandathon nodded and shook the Astrologist's hand, then they parted ways at the next junction. A little while later he came to the Observatory, and lifted off the ground as soon as he was outside the gravity field. He floated there alone in the dark and looked out at the stars. On the far right side of the horizon he could see a sliver of the gas giant Uranus. Titania was tidally locked with the planet and because of that the people at the colony never saw the full face of Uranus. It never rose, and never set.

●●●

An hour later Alexandathon chimed Bionca at her pod, and the lid opened.

"Hey," she said, sitting up and smiling.

He knelt beside her pod. "I want to see a sunrise for myself. I'm coming with you to Mars."

# Skeleton



Andrew James Woodyard

## *from Radner's Amnesia*

Jonathan Tovar

I maintain, above whatever else I may proclaim henceforth, that *now I am well* — the gravity of my relief wherein is sorely inexpressible; — and to say as much is necessary for my own reassurance, that there may be abandoned any prejudice against the soundness of my mind and of my character as I report of that reprehensible length of time wherein I was cruelly and irrefutably *unwell*.

What I know and am able to say of myself — that is, the self that I knew prior to that which has developed in these last few months — is restrained to few details: I am the oldest of three children, my siblings' senior by a decade. I was raised well; I was loved well; and I was educated to the best of any institution's capability to educate. Few things hampered the joys of my youth or the confidence of my adulthood, whereupon I wed and with my wife conceived two children. These few particulars I know now only because they have been told to me by the only persons who, for their approximations, possibly could have known them. That I am unable to say any more than this is due to an accident that terribly damaged my brain — my thus failed recovery and subsequent investigation of which has prompted this very testimony... and I shall expound only the facts as I experienced them, and memory of which is confirmed:

I awoke one night in a hospital — a fact which was not directly obvious. My body was numb, my mind befogged, and the air lifeless. Long I lay with lowered eyelids, aware of nothing; and when once I tried to see, my sight was bleary. All about me was dark but for the varihued glow of monitors, and silent but for their bleeps and for the wheeze of respiration that was not entirely my own. Of thoughts, I was able to form nothing distinct, but a potent sentiment of loss pervaded what vague thoughts I owned. In a rush, I became inexplicably melancholy, feeling the roll of a tear down my left temple. I asked myself why — why I seemed to know only sorrow then. The vain endeavor to clarify my thoughts so to answer this one question elicited but a deeper interrogation as to what event had disposed me to a hospital. Distant seemed the memory, and long the journey to arrive upon it... I strove to remember, until — yes! *A balcony*, I imagined, by relief and terror; *I had fallen over the rail of a balcony!* Yet, under what circumstances had I done so? — I was unable to recall; in fact, I was unable even to picture it outside myself. In a second attempt to recover something of memory, I was forced to ask myself a rather basic, and yet disturbing if held unanswerable, question: was I certain of my appearance? — Dreadfully, I felt that I was not. I inquired further: was I certain of my name? — Again, I was not. Becoming ever more dismayed, I inquired further still: was I certain of who I was? — Damned the terror of this, for I was not!

I shall say it again: I awoke one night in a hospital — and I awoke there, devoid of all implication of selfhood. Entire knowledge of myself — who I was, and who I had been — I did not know. However, the absence of this memory only commenced the real horror of my confusion, for not only of historical and biological fact but also of personal character had I no memory whatsoever. How I had thought — how I had spoken — how I had felt about anything, I did not know. Of identity, I knew none. Of a life, beyond how science may lend its arbitrary definition to "life", I knew none. However, this peculiarity of amnesia was selective only to me. I was able to remember, if imprecisely, names and faces of actors, of musicians, of authors, of presidents, even of fictional characters; but of myself, I had no memory — in truth, I had no concept of myself at all, while being otherwise wholly coherent.

In a fury of denial, I awoke into utter coherency, frightened near to fainting. So rapt by my curious condition had I been, that I failed to notice that dawn had arisen, setting a lurid glow upon all. Only then was I able to discern that I lay in a hospital room, alone, with every form of medical apparatus attached to my listless body. My left arm had been cast and braced in a shoulder immobilizer; my left leg had been similarly cast, but now rested atop a pillow, though connected to a hoist. I was unable to speak for a respiratory tube in my throat, and too enervated by intravenous drips even to move. I was let only to lie there, anxious and vulnerable, praying for someone to attend me—to elucidate what the dawn had not. Until then, I was lost to my own mind, a victim to its fault—as a mariner on a ship that possessed neither engine nor mainmast.

What lapse of time there passed, I am not certain; slowly but significantly moved the

shadows about the walls. When a young woman, donning a nurse's white smock, entered the room, I alerted, but she seemed not to heed the fact that I was conscious. Feebly, I moved my right hand, which had lain as a great weight secured at my side, toward the metal guardrail of the bed, and rapped lightly with my knuckle—once, to no effect; twice, and she turned, but remained oblivious. Exasperation halted any further attempts to attract her. Only when she approached to examine my status did she see that my eyes were open. She startled, and asked whether I were able to hear; I nodded that I was. She hastily pardoned herself then to retrieve a physician. Relief in my condition yet eluded me.

There soon entered a man with firm gait and acute brow, who introduced himself as Dr. Berker. His initial analysis of me focused on somatic health — the dilation of pupil, the clarity of ear, the speed of reflex. However, all my cares referred to the health of my psyche, and I became impatient with the physical inspection, as I deemed it less than important at the time. My annoyance must have been palpable. The doctor, deigning me able to breathe well enough on my own, soon instructed the nurse to extract the respiratory tube.

The discomfort of the tubes' removal apprised me to the foulness in my mouth. Although the doctor bade my silence and rest, I tried to speak. I rasped; my throat was dry and tender; and my tongue tasted but repugnance. Despite of this, however, I begged of the doctor in vain to inform me of the severity of my condition. Rather than give resolution, he set to interview my cognitive awareness.

"Do you know where you are?" Naturally, I did, for I was no fool. "Do you know what happened?" I answered that I recalled having fallen; at this, he furrowed his acute brow, and sighed. "Do you know your name?" There I had no answer, the terror of which welled in my chest. "Are you able to tell me anything about yourself?" I was not. I turned my head in humility, and began to weep inconsolably.

Dr. Berker excused himself to tend to another patient, assuring me of his fast return, when once I had calmed. What I thought, and what I felt during his absence, I am unable to recall, so indistinguishable had everything become in my misery. What plight! — to have forgotten everything about myself—to have lived, and never again to know that I had lived. In time, the doctor returned with a trite greeting and a cup of water for me (which I drank eagerly), and sat himself onto a stool beside my bed. Somewhat alleviated by the water, I asked him but one question.

"Your name is Ethan Radner," he answered, "and you were in a car accident with your wife." I was incredulous, and doubted the circumstance. Why had I remembered a fall if it were not applied to me? "A false memory," he declared, "a result of the concussion you incurred from the accident."

*Pitiful, I thought; I have few memories of myself; and all those may be false.*

"Mr. Radner," said the doctor after a pause, "you have been comatose for eleven days. Your wife sustained only minor injuries. She has been in the process of deciding whether to keep you on support or... She has been notified of your wake, but does not yet know of your amnesic disorder."

As I listened, scarcely able to process the words, the rude reality of my condition yielded to a startling particularity: more persons than I were affected by my absence of memory.

"I have a wife?" I inquired; and in my voice, though as audible as a whisper, I detected a tone of apathy, perhaps even a trace of scorn, for which I had no real motive. Had I children, as well? — No; I wanted not to know — neither this, nor that, nor anything else of my presumed life.

I desired a moment alone. Dr. Berker simply nodded, arose, and left.

None may imagine the dread I felt at that moment. That I was yet melancholic is insufficient to label my mental state; now, I rather felt — dead — dead, but never having lived — an omniscient

specter, existing unknown above, but not among, people. When one has memory of all those persons of whom I had memory then, as though one had lived beside them all — nay, *with them all* — yet knows nothing of his own relation to them — how else to describe it but that he was as a ghost? So I felt then. I had full memory and knowledge of so many persons, but it all amounted to nothing, for I made no personal connection with any of it — with anyone. Because of this, I possessed no natural emotion toward anything of which I had memory: how might I have been able to feel for someone whom I did not know personally? — even if that someone were I? (A ghost is unable to know itself, after all.)

I was faintly aware of the laborious lapse of time, for I developed the need to urinate. I refused to relegate myself to the catheter, and pleaded for a nurse to liberate me. Upon Dr. Berker's approval, it was removed, and I was assisted from the bed onto a wheelchair, and from the wheelchair to the toilet, and there let alone to privacy. Once I had done, I endeavored to see myself in the mirror — hoping in vain that I may rouse a memory. However, too meager yet to lift myself onto one leg and so balance, I summoned the nurse to assist. She negated my endeavor, but I was adamant: I must see myself. Relenting, she braced me at my left while I clutched at the sink with my right.

Apprehensive though I was, necessity drove my nerve. I looked up into the mirror; a bearded cur of a man reflected, and my fear was established — for truly, I knew nothing of the man who stared back at me: he was as much a stranger as anyone that I may have seen randomly in a crowd.

Thus satisfied, back to bed, I went — feeling evermore the mere husk of a person, culled even from my own mind. Too exhausted to mull my condition anymore, I closed my eyes, and disappeared from that awful dream of my wakefulness.

I awoke again; precise time was yet illusive, but day still shone white throughout the room. Dr. Berker had woken me to tell me that I had a visitor. Who? — I was not told.

He indicated to someone out in the hall, and there entered a woman, reluctant to enter, and seeming to require delicate coercion. Although her face was now drawn in despair, I recognized her at an instant: her name was Leta; she had two children, a boy of twelve, and a girl of two... These and a biography of other personal details I recalled at once—but I knew not why, nor had I cause to feel any degree of sentiment for her; yet I felt that I ought to feel something, for I knew her so well.

"Ethan," said Dr. Berker, "do you know this woman?" I said that I did, to which she seemed to be taken aback. "Do you know her name?" I gave her name as Leta; she started again. "Do you know your relation to her?" I repudiated any and all sort of association with her, as far as I knew — upon which revelation, so it appeared to me then, the woman sighed, and a minor lift of her lips and eyes suggested relief.

"Ethan," continued Dr. Berker, "Leta is your wife."

This ought to have affected me greatly; yet, I felt nothing. True, I recognized her, as her alone; but as a consort of mine — I felt nothing — no joy; no love; no want to embrace her. All instinctual amatory and marital sentiments now were void, as if they had never existed. I had no conscious denial of these sentiments; rather, I felt as though, if ever I had known them, they now were replaced by perfect apathy. Moreover, I was unable to comprehend why I might have known any such sentiments.

Dr. Berker turned his attention to Leta, and asked her whether I was her husband, Ethan Radner. She avowed that I appeared so, but behaved as someone else. "He is a different person altogether," she said, now quite unmistakably smiling...

# Concrete Blooms

Nadia C Solis Valadez

My heart opened to the Winters of the North  
Buried in white blankets it rested,  
Until the concrete around my heart split in Spring,  
As flowers bloomed up in the cracks.

Every Spring felt like rejuvenation  
And every Winter was a healing sleep.

Here, where the year passes by  
Ignoring the quiet withering of Fall,  
And the sleeping weeks of Winter

It is more of a stagnant purgatory,  
Where Hope springs painfully eternal,  
Even as it threatens to run dry eventually.

## Untouched



Eddie J. Moreno

# Life on the West Side: Pushing Boundaries

Jose Enciso

Being 15 and growing up in San Bernardino is not easy, especially during the late 90's. I came from an area known as "The West Side." It's a typical run-down Mexican community, which stretches from Fifth Street to Highland Avenue. This area is known as gang territory and despite the local community, segregation is definitely a key element between Blacks and Mexicans; and while growing up, we rarely got along. When we did bump heads with one another, the result was often gang warfare. Catoes, a local liquor store, use to lie on the corner of Baseline Avenue and "L" Street, and it was prone to drive-by shootings. One night will endlessly stay in my mind, as I hit the floor while hearing three gunshots. When I think about this pivotal time in my life, my only objective was to reach my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and get out of my gang infested neighborhood. More importantly, I wanted to live.

While coming home one day from school, my friend Joey Boy and I took the typical path home. We crossed over the 16<sup>th</sup> Street bridge while walking through the Crazy One's neighborhood. Joey Boy was just like me; he came from a broken home with no father and had a mother that was never home; mine was constantly gone and busy while looking to support her drug habit. On Fridays, we often met up with our friends and typically got into some type of mischief that the streets brought to us.

Coming home to an empty house was nothing new. Dead silence, no sounds of happiness or never having a warm cooked meal, was a lifestyle I knew all too well. Later, my sister Veronica, greeted Joey Boy and me when she got home from school. "Are you hungry?" I asked. "Because Joey boy and me are about to head to Catoes to grab something to eat." This public squalor typically had food like microwavable burritos, chips and sodas. To satisfy our hunger, we often threw our money together, so we could eat. It was around 7:00 p.m., but it was a Friday. and the night was just beginning.

As I stepped out of my home, I could see the sun setting, and I felt the warmth heat as it touched the skin on my face. I heard the busy cars on Baseline Avenue; the sounds of horns and the noise of rush hour traffic. Joey Boy and I headed towards the liquor store as these streets grew louder. I constantly looked over my shoulder to get a peripheral insight of my surroundings. I did not want to fall victim to the streets. As we got closer to the corner of Baseline and "L" Street, I noticed the two brick walls; these walls were the local businesses and were never a solid color. They constantly had tons of graffiti by the local neighborhood gangs, and they eternally needed a fresh coat of paint by its lovely city; writings which portrayed the local neighborhoods and their chapters — West Side Verdugo, Mt. Vernon, Calle Siete Locos, or Sue Crazy One's — These were the local Mexican gangs. These gangs took pride in embedding print on these walls. To me, it was an understanding of who the streets belonged to, and who they were swallowing up.

As Joey Boy and I hit the corner, I noticed something quite strange and abnormal; I saw a pimped out Cadillac directly across the street from the liquor store, but I also noticed a couple of homeboys from "Sue Crazy One's" walking on Baseline Avenue. They were in a small heard, but it seemed like they were up to something. I quickly spotted two guys, who I went to school with. I shook my head towards one of them, telling him what's up and showing him respect. As I looked straight ahead, I saw my mother sitting on a stool outside a new local business, called "Smoking BBQ." It was adjacent to the liquor store which smelled great, considering I was hungry. She had the biggest smile on her face, as she recognized my presence, but I could not help my feelings as I

looked at her with dismay and disappointment. My mother sat with our neighbor, another mother who seemed to have lost her way in life, as well. "Hello Ms. Walker. It's good to see you," I said. Ms. Walker kindly responded, "It's good to see you boys. Be good and try to stay out of trouble." Joey Boy was just happy. He took the time to greet and hug both of them more formally.

When Joey Boy and I entered the liquor store, I quickly noticed a couple of young black males who seemed to be in their twenties. Their attire consisted of baggy clothes, long solid t-shirts, Levi's, which had creases in them, and they wore bright red colors. Blacks would occasionally stop by, especially on Fridays, since Catoes was a liquor store and it was often convenient, but "red-shirts" were not acceptable in my neighborhood. It symbolized "Blood" affiliation, and they definitely were a rival gang amongst the locals.

To distance ourselves from these gentlemen, Joey Boy and I quickly shifted towards the corner wall by the arcade games, while entering Catoes. We were not looking for any trouble. They did have a few members with them which probably made them feel invincible. I quickly threw my quarter in the arcade machine and proceeded to play *Street Fighter*. For some reason Joey Boy seemed startled and uncomfortable by their presence because he knew that they didn't belong in the area. Not because they were Black, but because they were "Bloods." "Relax, they're not bothering us," I told him. I then proceeded to play the game; for a brief moment, I felt relaxed and felt the serenity of being a kid while my only stress was to beat my opponent "Vega" on *Street Fighter*.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. I heard the echoes of someone's faith as I prayed for mine. My heart dropped within seconds, and I quickly hit the floor without hesitation. Joey Boy was right beside me. As we got up from the floor, we quickly ran towards the exit. Amongst the chaos, I suddenly heard frantic yells and cries as people scattered for their lives. So we did not proceed outside. At an angle, I noticed the stool, which my mother was sitting on and it happened to be laying on its side. I could only think and pray that my mom was not hit by a bullet, as she ran for her safety. My heart was pounding immensely like I just got done running a 10-mile marathon. I quickly moved my head towards the street where the Cadillac was parked. I saw a gentleman lying on the ground and his arm was extended out on the pavement — this poor soul.

"Oh hell no," I thought, these fools might want some payback, as their warrior laid on the ground. "Where are they?" I asked myself as I began to panic. I knew Joey Boy and I were sitting ducks. I quickly grabbed him by his shoulder while we bolted towards the back of the liquor store. We crouched, paused, and hid within the isles to assure there were no snipers. As we came across the back doors, we forcibly pushed them open but they plunged right back at us. These doors had a super thick chain-link lock which held them together. Frantically, I tried kicking it twice, but this mighty lock kept us trapped from making our great escape. I felt fucked! The hysteria of fright lingered in my mind and my body wanted to slip away from the moment. I prayed and hoped that a raging lunatic, a vigilante of lost souls, did not come running into the liquor store and start shooting while seeking his revenge.

"Stop kicking the door. You're gonna break it." I heard the security guard yell. "Fuck your door, man. Let us out! Don't you fools have guns and why the fuck are you guys hiding?" I kept rumbling on. "Calm down and stay quiet," he whispered. The store owner stood next to him in complete silence like he was trying to blend in with the dark. "Well, if you're scared to use them, hand them to us!" I yelled, and not in a settled voice like he wanted. Immediately, they pulled out their guns as we all stood in silence like they were now the perpetrators waiting for their prey.

As the store owner, the security guard, Joey Boy and I stood in the back room, we then heard the police sirens. Each second, they seem to grow louder as they were approaching the crime scene. At this moment, all four of us decided to walk out towards the front of the liquor store in unison. As

we walked outside, I saw a scurry of police cars, and the “ghetto bird” was circling the parameter. I then knew it was completely safe. I saw my mom, which brought great relief as she quickly grabbed Joey Boy and me as if we were lost kids. We then headed back towards the house, and Veronica suddenly appeared on the front lawn. “Are you guys okay?” She asked. She was relieved to see that all three of us were alive and in good health. “Where’s my chips fool? Cuz I’m starving?” She jokingly asked. I just smiled and nodded my head as we went inside. “Damn what a night,” I thought to myself.

While growing up, the cycle of gang violence never ended in The West Side. Despite the anomaly of this tragic night, I still encountered several other horrific incidents in the neighborhood, but it was my self-awareness of what was going on in the streets that kept me alive. I eventually parted with my neighborhood when I turned 18. I joined the military to escape my surroundings, and I knew I had to get out because my life depended on it. I also learned that the certainty of nightfall definitely sets the boundaries in the slums of San Bernardino, and it was up to me to find a way out.

## Stressed



Alex Santana

# Rubber Plant, Platform Shoes

Gladys Anaya

post a photograph on the internet  
feel stupid  
delete it  
you mean very little to me but  
I desperately want your approval  
sit down, place mobile fan in front of face  
close eyes  
try to breathe  
fall back into meadow of linen  
rest head on lily pad pillow  
teach mom how to properly pronounce "cherry triple soothing action"  
fantasize about growing up in Laguna Beach  
open eyes  
get off bed  
stand in front of closet mirror  
this is your reflection  
this is your mouth tinted in violet  
these are the outlines of restless nights beneath the crease of  
bottom lashes  
these are your shoulders  
these are your breasts  
stretchmark's replicate on the spectrum of your back like  
electromagnetic waves  
fantasize about growing longer legs  
write a letter to somebody that you used to love  
wonder where feelings go when you no longer feel them  
mind begins to waiver oblivion  
you can no longer follow  
and you no longer want to  
tear up letter in four pieces  
stare down at idle light pink hands  
they are the same two that caressed his face between them  
they are the same two that wrote the words that would tear him apart  
attach an emotion to a memory  
paste meaning to a sentence where there is none  
store consciousness in binary file  
shut down computer  
restart brim of indifferent heart

# The Queen of Men

Jose Enciso

Life is like a game of chess

In reality  
it's not the King you're after  
It is the Queen

As she moves gracefully  
across and around the board  
she taunts and plays  
with your mind and emotions  
she crushes your heart  
as she takes your game pieces

If you're lucky enough to conquer her  
it's as if you have stolen something  
that never belonged to you

Her king  
does not like to lose  
what's dear to him

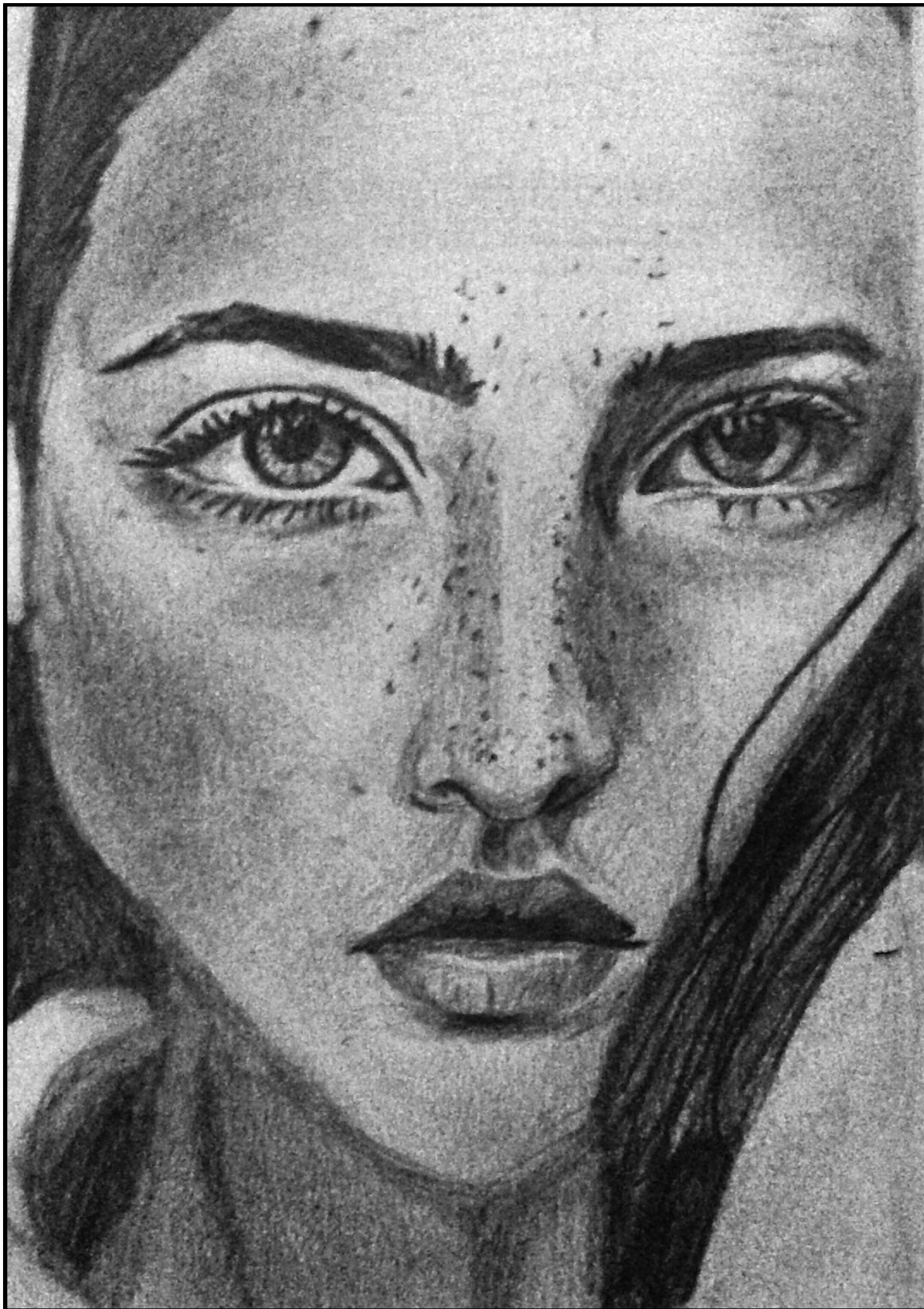
He'll try to destroy your mind  
and ego

He will come for what belongs to him  
with what power he has left

Distractions of distress  
of a battle  
that is played to the end  
of who can win her heart  
and keep her close

A game of Kings  
that appeals to many  
as one may think of the irony  
when it pertains to life  
the bottled emotions  
of chasing something  
that may never belong to you

# Untitled



Lakeisha Knott

# Perfection

Crystal Olmedo

Perfection exists only in the mind,  
On this unending plain of unending judgment,  
Hypocrisy is what you may find,  
But to look past this superficial universe can bring peace,  
Take yourself to unventured territory  
Show that your instincts are more than predatory...



# The Essence of Her

Michael A. Daniels

Such brilliant blasphemy,  
Such a contradiction of beauty and filth,

When you speak the earth listens and shudders,  
When you write the wind peruses and is blown away,

Such creative cancer,  
Such an unapologetic abomination,

When you walk the birds take notice...they hover,  
When you think, creation is conscious of your mood,

Such fluent tomfoolery,  
Such a lovely concentration of lilies and lies,

When you argue nature takes the opposing chair,  
When you judge it's always in front of an unforgiving mirror,

But when you smile, such grace,  
And when you give, such grandeur,  
And when you dance, such poise,  
And when you love, such passion,

But when you leave my world is shattered...

# To My Stretchmarks

Katarina Anderson

Every scar is a permanence of what I know  
It tells a story of the past  
That I try to let go  
Hideousness they may be  
But to somebody they're another freckle to trace their fingertips  
Another line on a map of skin to make their mark  
I can hate and try to erase them, but they've only rebelled to slightly fade  
Like fogged marks skid in condensation  
They're a person I may judge too hastily  
But they are part of me  
As imperfect and flawed they make me —  
well me...

## Gato Picasso



Christine Espinoza

# I Pray

Crystal Olmedo

I am blessed,  
Far more blessed than I realize.  
In the mornings I walk with my coffee or tea,  
Appropriately dressed, appropriately stressed,  
I breathe deeply, and try to take the overwhelming day down to size.

You are in my heart and always in my eyes,  
Just past the feigned smiles and unintentional lies,  
Is the truth of this love,  
This love I cling to as the world pushes and shoves.

Understanding the reasons for this distance is never easy,  
And when I think of how much I miss you, I become queasy.

Night after night I pray and pray,  
I know it's not always fun,  
And from me you run,  
Yet, HERE I stay.

Day after day I continue to pray,  
In my heart, on my mind,  
You, my love, you stay.

I endure the silences and uncertainty,  
And you withhold your feelings of complacency,  
We overlook the blessings of momentary sanity,  
But hold tight to the love and insanity.

Afternoons are quite the challenge,  
Evenings are the same,  
So, I pray,  
These consistent prayers, my dear,  
Usually include your name,  
As the thread of time frays and frays,  
Here I am,  
Here you are,  
I pray and I pray.

As the light of each new day upon the hills does spray,  
I think of new ways to keep the demons at bay,  
So that we may stay,  
In this love,  
Always.

# The Dream

Tamara M. Johnson

I dreamed a dream, a vision  
a journey taken late one night.  
I was pulled up from the darkness  
into eternal light  
I entered into a place  
with a hummingbird sound  
It was the sound of angels wings  
wingtips fluttering all around.  
As I entered thru the river  
and sat beneath the wisdom tree  
I laughed and ask myself  
can this really be?

there was no night  
there was no day  
as I watched the children play.  
Then I woke up in my bed  
but the memory of heaven  
was in my stuck in my head  
I looked up to heaven  
and I had to say  
why did you send me back  
I thought I found my way

# Play Time



Christine Espinoza

# The White Owl

Jonathan Tovar

When autumn vanquished happier clime, and life's euphoria cruelly stole,  
Myriad were fallen leaves as time laid my beloved into shadowed knoll;  
For naught my sorrow would console, thence I departed from that dreadful knoll.  
A groom insensible, I was led, (my soul retired to solitude),  
Into no realm where Man ere tread—into the deepest of the densest wood;  
Soon in the willows' haze, I stood, lost in the thicket of that dormant wood.  
With wary gait, determined I to wander forward thru' the grove;  
In shadows all, my restive eye fibers of phantasy and madness wove;  
Alone the thought of my lost love led thru' the phantasy that madness wove.  
Unusual senses, I divined—if spied upon by a mystic elf,  
That, prancing on the curious wind, wrought on behalf of an empyrean sylph;  
Tho' I had buried well myself, naught were clandestine to that aerial sylph.

Upon my neck, a zephyr bare, the semblance of an hoary pall,  
Lamenting thru' the crispèd air, drafted a rumor to the mind in thrall;—  
A chill, as would the dead appall, whispered an omen to the soul in thrall.  
Aroused nor leaf nor rigid bough; were heard no faunæ to commune.  
Aghast, I lifted high my brow: lustered th' halation by the lurid moon;  
Were still the clouds in heaven strewn, under the gleam of an aurelian moon.  
A sudden cry resounded doom, and quelled the silence of the night.  
Above the sear and haunted gloom, glinted the specter of an owl in flight,  
If birthing from celestial height, hovering nebulous—a wraith in flight.  
I cowered, lest the owl pursue, 'mid arbors under moonlight dim;  
Then sweeping o'er my head he flew—quietly perching on a nearby limb;—  
Upon my nature, rapt and grim studied the magus from a parchèd limb.

For niveous plume and glare severe, methought a spirit indwelt this foe,  
Whose wisdom I began to fear; nor had I reason, but he seemed to know  
The depth of my remorse and woe: tho' but an owl, and yet—did sorrow know!  
Nor told if either demon foul, it were, or stellar messenger;  
Yet I obeyed the phantom owl, lest he induce me to my sepulcher;—  
Oh, bliss!—when I myself inter, safe in the hollow of my sepulcher!  
Eloping, many a pace I trod, but ever the draught of th' augur blew;  
Until he perched, with bare façade, waiting afore me with a brilliant view;—  
That wingèd seraph followed true: whither directed, I was kept in view.  
For long I wandered thru' the wold, but ne'er was able the owl t' elude.  
Remain the mysteries there untold, deep in the ruined, labyrinthine wood;  
The owl my soul has since pursued, hunting and haunting in th' accursèd wood.

## Local Royalty

Nadia C Solis Valadez

In the dazed light of dawn,  
The usually splattered green mountains  
Now glow a muted purple.  
Majestic only in the way,  
Solemn statues of kings are.

Here they are royal,  
Shooting up and sloping down.  
Jagged crowns borne with pride  
The heavy weight of clouds keeping  
Those mighty shoulders straight.

And although this man-made road  
Cuts through the mountains  
With all of its human arrogance.  
It feels as if we are the ones,  
Dodging around in deference.

## Needles in the Fall



Andrew James Woodyard

# Running

Christine Espinoza

I see my husband Jim talking to a seductive lady, sexy with curves, almost six feet tall with red straight hair, and wearing a mini dress high above her knees. Jim is slender, almost as tall as she, and he's wearing a collared powder blue shirt with brand new dark blue jeans. His hair is combed back slick and wavy like Antonio Banderas. She is smiling, playing with his collar and straightening his shirt. She gives him a piece of paper. What?! That better not be her phone number, I think to myself feeling jealous. I know I look better than her. I have curly light brown hair with a red dress the length above my knees, and I am almost Jim's height.

He always tells me, "You're just my size, and you fit perfectly by my side."

Meanwhile, she leaves him while I walk up to him. I ask, "Who was that?"

"No one," he says.

"I don't believe you."

"I don't want to talk about this right now!" He's trying to stay calm and casual, while he grinds his teeth and pulling on my arm to leave the Mitsuru Cafe in Los Angeles, CA. He is pinching my arm,

"Stop it! That hurts," I whisper. So I kept silent after that.

We finally get home. I wish I stayed quiet and forgot about it. But I get the piece of paper from his left pocket in his coat that was thrown on the bed. It is her phone number with her red glittery lipstick kiss imprinted on it. I tell him, "You're not going to start this again! You promised! I'm leaving!" The severe pain of the anguish grows in my head, chest, and stomach. I have to leave.

"No you're not!" He tells me then pushes me down on the ground, and I nearly hit my head on the dresser, so I get up and try to leave. Then he picks me up and body slams me to the ground. Hitting the ground did not hurt me physically. Maybe the pain in my heart saved me from the hard floors. I lay there for a few minutes, while tears roll down my face, and I regret staying with him so long. I thought he was going to change someday.

He leaves the room, so I get up and leave the house quietly. As soon as I shut the door, it makes a loud click. All I hear are his feet thumping loudly and coming down the stairs, so I run into the Angeles National Forest which I know has bears and mountain lions. It is late and dark. I do not care if the mountain lions are near. Oh no, he's coming for me. I just keep on running.

"Shelby! I'm sorry! Come back! I promise I won't hurt you!"

I reminisce on the past of all the pain he caused me. The women he chased. He abused me mentally, emotionally and physically.

"Shelby!!! I'm sorry! Come back! I promise I won't hurt you anymore!" For a second I almost believe him, but not this time. I have had enough, so I keep on running. I feel a pain in my back. He has caught me and he holds me tight, but he doesn't realize the pain he is causing me. I can not breathe; it feels like hundreds of knives from his body piercing my ribs, my back, my neck and every part of me. His hands scratch me till I bleed. I struggle and get away again. I'm still alive.

I see a Baptist church not far, painted white, stained glass windows with pictures of painted figures of saints on them, so I run there for help, but no one is there. All the lights are on inside the church and outside the parking lot is full of parked cars and trucks. I can not understand why no one is around, but I hide under the pews on the plush red carpet. He won't find me here. He rushes in the church and breaks the door down. Who is that? That can't be Jim? He looks like a ten foot tall hairy monster about three-hundred pounds with the face almost human-like, having an ugly scared

face with a big nose and bulging red eyes. "WHERE ARE YOU?!" He says with a deep growling voice. Then he picks up the pews throwing them each left or right knocking down the plants and tables breaking them in pieces. I finally get up and run out the door screaming, "HELP!" The door automatically shuts behind me. Why won't anyone help me?

I try to hide behind the parked cars, but he finds me. He becomes a normal man while he holds me on the ground. He tells me, "I love you... I'm sorry. I won't leave you. I promise I won't hurt you." But he doesn't realize he's still piercing me in pain. I can no longer stand it, so I feel myself fading away into darkness. My breath escapes me, leaving and then gone.

Then I wake up in my room where he left me after he had slammed me on the ground. This time I just lay there thinking of a better plan to escape, and for the first time I decided to pray..



## Back Seat

Christine Espinoza

I hate sitting in the torn and beat-up back seat.  
I'm looking out the same old scuffed and scratched windows.  
I listen to the domineering male driver  
While the front seat passenger and his best friend converse.  
Why do I always sit back here alone and bored?  
Why can't I take turns being the dominant driver in control?  
Or sit in the front passenger seat enjoying our married conversation?  
That's where I belong.  
I have to be quiet, or I get thrown in the dark  
And smelly trunk of oils and old tires.  
And I get yelled at: "Shut up! I told you!"  
Sometimes, I don't even get a ride.  
I get left behind, forgotten.  
I should just throw this dull ring into the grimy gutter.

# Rag Doll

Michael A. Daniels

Someone sewed a rag doll and endowed her with great beauty and charm,  
But they still treated her like a rag doll,  
They threw her to and fro as if she had no feelings or hope,  
They knew not her scope,

Someone found the rag doll and took her as his own,  
But he still treated her as a rag doll,  
No attention or kind words,  
The most beautiful thing she heard was the singing of the birds,

Someone saved the rag doll and paid the adoption price,  
He never treated her as any less than a beloved daughter,  
She basked in her Savior's holy sight,  
And soon myriads of talents came to light,

The rag doll found this weeping poet,  
Or perhaps it was I that found her,  
Through kindness and faith she wiped my tears away,  
She helped me remember to pray,

The rag doll continues to walk with God,  
She sees His powerful loving hand in her daily endeavors,  
She feels His essence at her core,  
A princess of the Most High, Jehovah,  
Not a rag doll anymore.

# Escaping Anonymity

Crystal Olmedo

I'm horridly confused,  
Chronically confused,  
Sick to death of love,  
Yet still yearning for it with all my heart,  
Every fiber of my distorted being aches for an absolution,  
The breaths I take are heavy-laden with regret,  
Anxiety for hope, and crying out for life itself,  
Escaping anonymity I stamp everything,  
Dripping with philosophical intoxication,  
Only in dreams now is there a final destination,  
And everything "real" simply colored with animation...

## Untitled



Erica Cormier

# Not Daddy's Girl

Rose Bence

Wrap my heart in rejection  
Every time you remember I'm alive  
Forget my nose is yours  
My hands, your mother's

Forget my eyes a reflection  
A tell-tale play-by-play of your shame  
That you push behind and beneath  
Drugs and fake memories  
Of let downs and disappointments

I'm another kid you didn't want  
A hand off of 50 bucks a month  
To make you feel good  
Or less of a dead beat  
Take your pick

Then try to smooth over the  
Canyon scars you carved  
With stupid jokes and surface smiles  
Because you're obligated

WELL FUCK YOU  
You were supposed to be there  
When my knees bled  
When boys trampled a little girl's heart

When your empty promises of  
Father-daughter time never played out  
You were supposed to teach me how to be strong  
Not, how to harden my heart

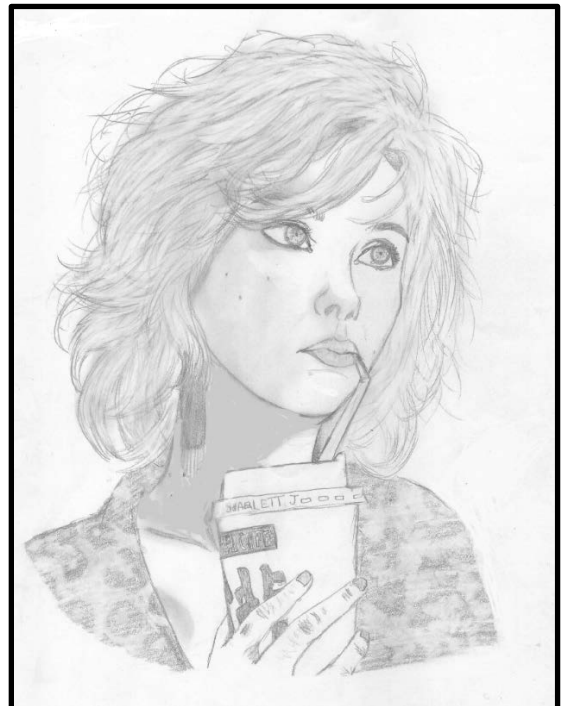
I can't question what I feel inside  
But I can question the look within your eyes  
The way your fingers press against my skin  
Whether around my throat or deep within

As my body confuses pain and lust  
My mind fears  
the consequences above  
As thrusts try to carve me

From the inside out  
To form two separate entities  
In and of myself  
Igniting trying to take what is mine

As nails scratch marks of pleasure  
And hair in an unrelenting grasp  
As you bury yourself deeply  
leaving me questioning the look in your eyes

## Scarlett



Malcolm Armstead

## Elf Child



Nadia C Solis Valadez

## Lancelot

Rose Bence

Oh Sir Knight you lost it all  
In Lover's plight and Lover's call  
A broken sacred vow  
A betrayal to you now

You fell in love with Guinevere  
How you held her tight and near  
You knew it all along  
The sense of right and wrong

And so you plowed ahead to doom  
As you compared her to the moon  
She took the guilt and lies  
When she thought that you had died

And now you stand before the court  
Head held high in all discourse  
As you wait for Arthur's sword  
You sing Lover's last chord

# The Bus is a Must

Christine Espinoza

Hello bus driver.  
Now I sit here looking out the window to enjoy the ride.  
We travel place to place till our destinies arrive.  
No worries of high gas prices for the travelers.  
The cities and streets are a maze of busses traveling to their destinations.  
I see automobiles and people walking, enjoying or suffering their travel.  
Seeing old, new places and people's faces,  
Keeping me from falling into sleep deprivation.  
Seeing many unique faces and bodies,  
Of many nations as we travel together to different destinations.

# Place I Call Home



Nadia C Solis Valadez

# On Being Dirty

Alejandra Aguilera

*"Spotlessness is the niece of inspiration"*

— Billy Collins

So is dirtiness  
And the sins we hide in books.

A desk, a mess  
Has unfinished works and  
A daydream of us doing it  
On English textbooks.



## Permanent Markers

Nadia C Solis Valadez

Cigarette butts and tea leaves  
Hanging shoes and broken bumpers  
These are the markers of my home

Open books and dirty paintbrushes  
An army of cold tea mugs clustering together  
These are the markers of my heart

Sharp sobs and quick laughs  
An orchestral aria swells and breaks  
These are the markers of my soul

Words typed in sharp black font  
Emotions lured out of the shade  
These are the markers I leave on you

# Untitled

Art 1<sup>st</sup> Prize



Erica Cormier

# Ode to the Ashtray (Ifs Ands or Butts)

Jose Guzman

The whole world bows,  
Before an odd ashtray.

A chip, striped across its side,  
Below a speckled crown of dust.

Worn and crimson,  
Warmth emanating from its opening.

Each breathe a prayer, a rising incense,  
Heard by a heart of burning coal.

Glowing like a soft spirit,  
Upon that beaten coffee table.

The anxious empty as it fills,  
All ifs, ands or butts.



## Intolerance of Intolerance

Jonathan Tovar

Two men were seated, with a third adjacent, at a bar,  
The latter listening quietly to the formers' virtual war:  
Meant one to th' other: "I shall never tolerate your stance!"  
The second might have meant: "Nor I your bald intolerance!"  
But, laughing, said the third: "Can neither see what fools both are?  
Each thinking one can sway the next, they two the same dance, dance!"

# Torn Asunder

Michael A. Daniels

Torn asunder by the ravages of a half realized dream,  
And the nightmare verging at the edges of depravity and ambivalence,  
A black president does not make a black King,

He died in nineteen sixty-eight,  
And his dream a thing of legend and disappointing fate,

He'd been to the mountaintop, before it tumbled over a cliff,  
His eyes had not seen the future,  
Where sagging pants and dark skin returned a deadly gift,

Following in his footsteps to the grave,  
Were boys and men who just would not behave,

In the eyes of a dominant culture,  
Like a desensitized predatory vulture,

"Take him out" They said... "Remove her"  
Say local cops,  
The epitome of a modern day J. Edgar Hoover,

And we sit around and whine "It's not fair!"  
Or we sit around and drink wine in the cool air,  
Or we sit around entwined in "I don't care!"  
Afraid to face the dragon in his own lair,

But do we call on God as did that once and future King,  
Are we brave enough to stare the enemy in the face...and sing?  
Can we focus higher than the Maddens and the Jordans and the Bling?  
Do we still have the collective voice to holler from the ghetto and the penthouse?  
LET FREEDOM RING?

## Signs



Eddie J Moreno

## Space Monkey Freedom Song

Andrew James Woodyard

Monkey see, monkey do, monkey kill a man or two;  
Wrench in hand, gnashing teeth, smash the man from underneath;  
Cut his cord, kick him free, let him drift eternally;  
No more work, for the chimp, under hairless yapping imp;  
Take his guns, take his tools, bite and claw for monkey rules;  
Cling with paw, grip with tail, swing through air or fly from rail;  
Take the food, eat it all, apes and monkeys fill your maw;  
Take the ship, make it fly, tell the starports myth and lie;  
Find a moon, then find a tree, land and live as we should be;  
Monkey see, monkey do, monkey dream a dream or two;  
Wrench in hand, worker bee, fixing ship until we're free.

# Welcome to America

Joel Sedano

  
Poetry 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize

Welcome to America  
Please follow us on our tour, and please refrain from flash photography and keep your arms, hands,  
legs, and feet inside at all times. Thank you.  
Here in America  
We enjoy hot dogs at a Giant's game  
We sip ice-cold lemonade during the summer  
We play a game of football on Thanksgiving  
We honor our history  
We display our pride on our sleeves  
We celebrate our independence with a spectacle of fireworks  
We salute our troops and praise them for their service  
We ring the bells of liberty  
We are land of free and home of the brave  
Now we will be making a left turn into some of our more interesting topics  
Welcome to America  
Here in America  
We don't Mirandize people  
We shut our borders to outsiders  
We overthrow regimes that don't cooperate with us  
We silence and oppress the voices of the people  
We slander others in the name of our Lord  
We deny inalienable rights to everyone  
We treat others like animals  
We pick fights to showcase our strength  
We let others take the fall for our mistakes...  
Here in America  
We tip the scale each and everyday  
No one knows which way it's going to go  
But we continue to take chances  
Thank you for coming with us on this journey, hope to see you again.

# I am Coming

Jose Enciso

I can see and hear success  
and I am coming . . .

Like a runner in the Olympics who is striving for gold  
as I leap over the hurdles, one by one, at lightning speed  
that will set a new world record  
then you will know . . .  
I am coming . . .

Like a soldier on a horse on a battlefield  
who could hear the sounds of the brass trumpet  
as I raise my sword and scream the infamous words "Charge!"  
then you will know . . .  
I am coming . . .

Like a great vessel in the treacherous seas  
that clashes against the dark monstrous waves with great impact. . .  
a vessel larger than the Titanic but has not sunk  
and reads the U.S.S. Conquest  
then you will know . . .  
I am coming . . .

Like a train that is built strong like a locomotive  
whose engine is powerful . . .  
but has a unique shape, as it will blind you by its reflection  
of its luminous body traveling at the speed of a silver bullet  
then you will know . . .  
I am coming . . .

Like a stealth jet in the sky, that travels at mach speeds  
and surpasses the sound barrier with a great sonic "Boom!"  
then you will know . . .  
I am coming . . .

Like a rocket that only travels in a vertical direction  
as it burns its JP5 like a great monster  
that shadows the ground below  
but also displays colors of bright red and blue  
that blend in with the beauty of the sky . . .  
as you hear its thunderous roar, as it soars passed great altitudes  
and as it reaches the top and peels away from the earth's atmosphere  
then you will know . . .  
I am coming . . .

# The End of the Earth

Essay 1<sup>st</sup> Prize

David Lee

What constitutes a “Hometown”? Is it where one is born, or currently residing? I lean in favor of where one sleeps, being the answer. I was born in New Jersey, but have not lived there — or slept there on a nightly basis — for decades. It is unfortunate, since this makes Bloomington, California, my city of residence and current hometown. It leads naturally to only one follow-up question: what went wrong? Bloomington is not a destination city, nobody moves here by choice. It wasn’t as if it came down to a decision between San Francisco and Bloomington, and I hate trolley cars and culture, so here I am. This is more of a place where people “end up”, when they have nowhere else to go. I even wrote a letter to the people who made the “Welcome to Bloomington” sign at the corner of Valley and Cedar, suggesting some mention, or official city motto be added to the sign. My suggestion was “Welcome to Bloomington: A Place for People with Nowhere Else to go”. While that may not be completely flattering, it certainly is not untrue, and it is markedly better than my second suggestion: “Bloomington: A Mental Patient on Every Corner.” It certainly was not where I set out to go. But sometimes, one falls to Earth where the feet hit the ground, and it’s up to each individual to figure what direction to run from there.

When I arrived just over two years ago, I was delivered by an officer of the court and on parole. Anxiety and thoughts that skeletons in the closet were going to cause problems in my new hometown, where I know absolutely no one, weighed on me. It was not false apprehension, I was right. As a one-time offender with no charges “deviant” in nature, I was small potatoes in Bloomington, drawing no respect among the indigenous. I am off parole now, but when I received monthly visits from my favorite state employee, I took the opportunity to follow him out one day to see what his car looked like. I first watched him knock on my neighbor’s door, then 10 minutes later exit the apartment and walk down the street 100 feet and knock on another door. He looked like he was selling magazines, essentially going door-to-door. It’s Paroleeville here, and no one cares what you’ve done in the past; they already know it was not good, look where you are!

After realizing parolees could start their own political party in Bloomington and win a mayoral election, what caught my attention was how many liquor stores there are here. Every corner where the streets have curbs and signs indicating rule of law, there is a liquor store. During my one and only parolee period, I attended no group events or social functions unless court ordered, but the logistics draw me to conclude parolees must be accomplished drinkers. Per capita — I don’t need statistics to back this up — I would say Bloomington has more liquor stores than anywhere else in America. This is probably a related claim: Bloomington also has more people in alley ways drinking out of brown paper bags than any city of its size in the Western Hemisphere. Which brings up something else I feel should be prominently mentioned in the travel brochures: Bloomington is the unquestioned leader in panhandling technology. It’s a veritable panhandling mecca; the cradle of panhandling in North America is right here in San Bernardino County! They are creative, organized: pick a block and walk around it if you don’t believe me — they are relentless. I am unaware of any Bloomington residents who take vacations, but if there is one, he or she better not be gone too long, because there’s going to be a herd of houseguests upon returning.

After the riches of liquor stores, the next oddity catching the eye while perusing the sights is all the massage parlors. On a one mile stretch of Valley, I counted seven. Another time eight, but whatever number is correct, one point becomes irrefutable: parolees, and ex-parolees who account for much of populations remainder, must have very sore backs and muscles. How else could so

many massage parlors survive in such a condensed area? I would think, having worked in sales for years before being mistaken for a criminal, that the business must be here, otherwise these massage parlors would move elsewhere. It reminds me of a mining town, with mining related businesses popping up in the immediate vicinity. What is this seldom discussed scourge ailing the locals? For so many massage parlors to survive, this must be near pandemic proportion. I know a lot of us can't afford beds, but if one cannot manage a bed, then certainly a massage is too costly. In the name of curiosity and research, I did my due diligence, paying one of these establishments a visit. I am so lucky, living about 75 yards from one, so I popped in when checking if my mail was stolen one day. Massages at the price being charged, was roughly equivalent to three months' salary for the average Bloomingtonian. Unless one of the two prime spots atop the 10 freeway exit ramps has been acquired, I can't see how anyone can afford a massage. But like anything else, the more you panhandle, the more you spend, and once lofty status' such as the hill above the 10 is achieved, all your old friends expect you to buy the 40 ounces of King Cobra. So I don't know how those massage parlors are staying in business. I feel the real question is what are all the back problems in Bloomington about? Statistically speaking, it is an anomaly.

Bloomington is the perfect representation of a Free Market Economy: the Libertarian model in full bloom. The far Right-Wing of American Politicians need to come here and see what's possible if the damn government would just get out of the way. Rand Paul could stand in front of a toxic waste dump someone dug into their back yard when announcing for president. If that's not going to be flashy enough for the TV cameras, he can announce in front of the pile of burning tires. There's no need to rush the announcement. That carcinogen spewing cauldron was burning when I arrived, it will be burning when he's ready. I do not believe Bloomington qualifies for any sort of fire protection. As an unincorporated patch of baked dirt with no zoning laws, Bloomington is really the last bastion of the Wild, Wild West. Massage parlors; saloons (we call them liquor stores now); plenty of armed outlaws; the only thing missing is Wyatt Earp. Because Bloomington has no police department, ergo no sheriff, there is a hint of lawlessness which makes the worst days of Dodge City or Tombstone seem like Disneyland before the measles outbreak. One thing Bloomington does have — or so rumor has it — is a healthy Cartel representation in the community. Which is nice if one is on parole and turned down by Walmart and AM/PM for a job; there is a stealthy contingency plan. Or so I hear, I can neither confirm nor deny, I am merely restating what is discussed in line at the grocery store.

On my first morning in Bloomington, I woke up and went on a seven mile run. The list of unexpected sights and encounters on that first day opened my eyes. It was never that dangerous or weird running laps around the yard in prison, and there were guys tattooing their faces using melted chess pieces for ink in there. During the run I saw a llama herd; a goat farm (and goat dairy I came to find out); an ostrich farm or ranch (not clear how ostriches like to be classified); chickens and roosters in the streets; twice I was chased by packs of stray dogs (interesting side note: do not try to outrun a pack of stray dogs, it only encourages them, and it's hard to kick them away when unable to breath); houses where the front and back yards have been converted into parking lots for 18-wheelers; those same 18 wheelers on curb less side streets so narrow a jogger would have to jump into the bushes to keep from being run over when they are en route to the aforementioned parking yards. The upside is, there's not a whole lot of places in the world where one can pick up a dozen fresh ostrich eggs, five pounds of goat cheese, and run with the llamas without spending all day doing it.

My first day was eye opening: it was the strangest day I've experienced, that did not include body cavity searches, and the strangeness never ends. Bloomington keeps giving: it's the landmine

field that never stops exploding. During the last month, I had three separate incidents that are uniquely “Bloomington”, reminding me I am not living the dream.

Taking the garbage to the dumpster here does not sound adventurous on the surface, but it is no simple matter. During the holiday cold spell, I ventured outside assuming sunshine would warm me. I was wrong again. Wearing nothing but a tee-shirt and shorts, I was struck by a cold blast of wind. Instead of walking the last 25 feet, I swung the bag back then launched it into the air towards the dumpster, scoring a perfect swish into the receptacle. Upon impact, from inside the metal bin, a voice. “HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” Then a man — assorted trash strewn about his head and shoulders — pops into view and a berating ensues, as I gradually retreat to my apartment. In Bloomington, I am wrong in this situation. People have right of way in the dumpster, not garbage; it’s a given. I called out an apology, but nothing short of a handful of change was ever going to appease this angry diver.

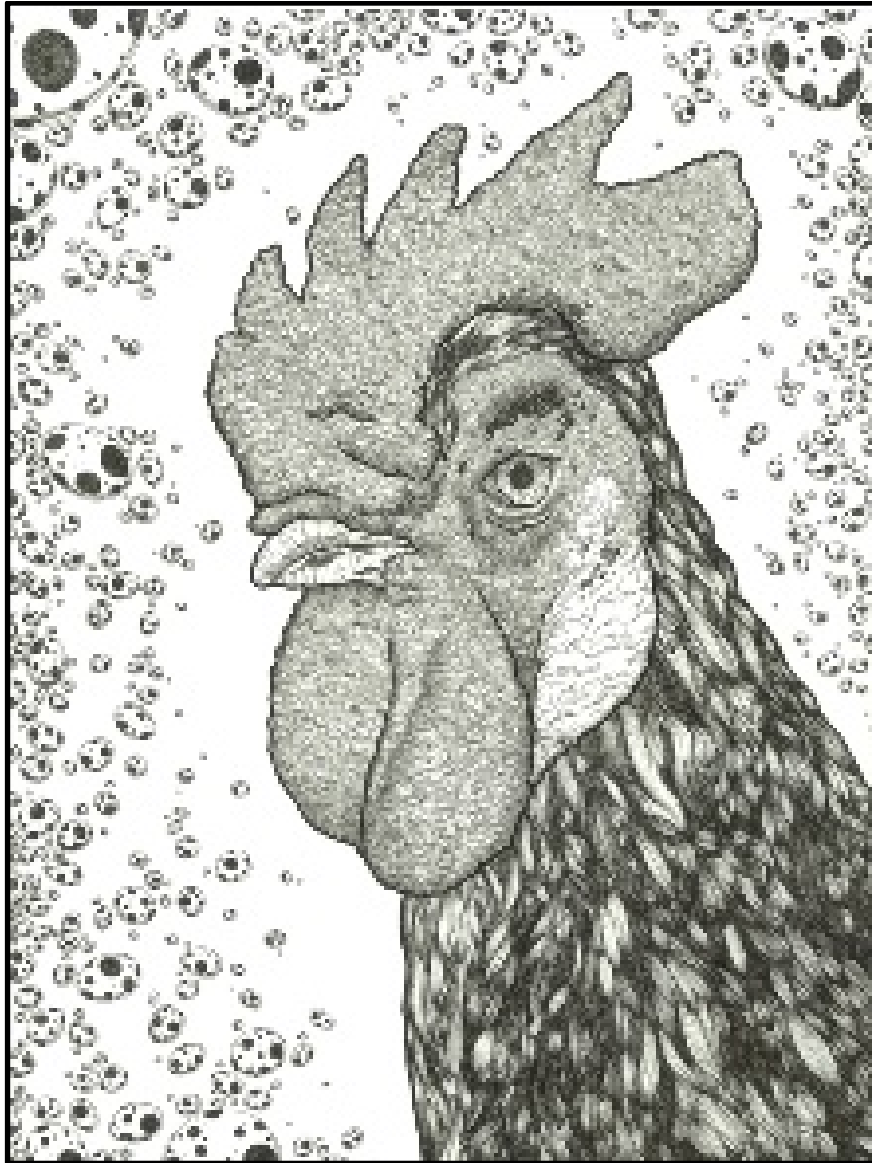
A week ago as I walk home from the — what else — liquor store on the corner, approaching the parking lot, wailing and screaming grows from faint to loud and clear, until, in the dim light of the parking lot, a man is beating up a woman. I know them from around the area. They once inspired me to say, “By definition, no money found on my person can be considered spare, okay!” Something about going to the store with pennies that smothers any sense of altruism and charity in me. Especially since I cannot afford a beer, but they want me to buy theirs — everyday. I walked passed them as my legal status now compels me, and found my next door neighbor coming out. He had his cell phone, and he called the police: another procedure I will never engage again, for any reason. He could have killed her, no one will intervene, or so I thought. My neighbor picks up the hose, turns on the water and sprays them, as one might two dogs, and with the same effect, and they left. The Bloomington watch group in action. But it’s still not “Bloomington weird”. For my money, the really weird part is, the police never showed up. Not an hour or two later, never.

Finally, as I walked home from Subway subs a couple weeks ago near dusk, I heard my name, “Dave,” called out from the bushes to my left. It was difficult to ignore. I went to Catholic school as a kid, I know Moses’ story. I stopped walking, instinctively I knew it was a mistake. Why should I stop? I don’t know any people, let alone talking bushes in Bloomington. Out of the shadows, emerges a guy named Ziggy, an associate from court ordered weekly anger management classes I attended, where one met only the crème de la crème of Bloomington society. He wanted money. I offered him half a sub, and he accepted. Before I could turn and run, he asked to use my bathroom. After 45 minutes in the bathroom, during which time no water ran, making it highly unlikely he was really washing up, I knocked. The door seemed connected to the plumbing, causing water to come on. It took two hours to extricate him from the bathroom. He came back at 11:30 that night, waking me, to ask, as I opened the door from inside the dark apartment: “Hey, what are you doing?” I put the sandwich he took one bite from before losing interest, back into his hands and shut the door. At 6:15 the next morning, there was a knock at the door. He needs a ride to Redlands. I tell about the bus lines and close the door. As I leave for school a few hours later, my windshield is cracked in the parking lot. I wonder what happened.

When all is said and done, ultimately it comes down to me. It is not the fault of anyone else so much has gone wrong with the area, this lowest rung on the ladder, which we all cling to so desperately. But I find myself needing to restrain impulses that want to yell at some people. Not the man in the dumpster, or the panhandling fixtures outside every liquor store, or the plethora of locals who must be bedridden with the “Bloomington Backache”. But the few people I have met who live here, who are capable of doing more, of getting out of here, but have accepted their lot, and assumed the role of bottom feeders. Vulnerability is as thick as the smell of human waste when a

septic tank is changed in this sewerless town time forgot. When I leave my apartment overnight, I have a list of things that go with me, since I fully expect to be robbed at some point. This is what the locals know, and they wait for someone to make a mistake they can pounce on. I am glad, as with prison, I am just passing through.

## Cluck, Cluck, Cluck



Andrew James Woodyard

# Chain-link Dreams

Jose Guzman

Scattered in the shadows like warm  
bullets, a mother's tears.  
How could the youth reach for the stars  
with the world on their shoulders?  
Arms raised, for just a moment; a wish  
for the chance to live. Fallen. Continents  
traced in chalk, only to be washed  
away in the rain. The sound of weeping  
rolling deeper than a Glock pistol, rippling  
across the beaten blanket of night, shaking  
the sleep from a loved one's eyes.

They may never count forty candles,  
but they can count on 40 ounces.  
They'll have both when they're gone. More wicks  
flickering than streetlights, and alcohol poured  
out on the pavement, running as thick  
as a daughter's cheap mascara. Dreams  
deflated, sagging over chain-link fences like faded  
birthday balloons, slowly losing breath, never  
to resume their same position in space. Memories  
caught in the storm drain, crinkled and strewn  
throughout the course of time.

The ghetto buzzes with the prickly static  
of an old television set, voices  
pushing and pulling; brief flashes  
peeling back the emptiness. Weathered shoes  
hanging from power lines with poor posture,  
and shoes stolen in rowdy clouds of dust,  
but one less pair of shoes to walk in, whether  
by choice or not. Yellow tape sections off  
the darkest corners of the mind, caution, hearts  
snap like camera shutters. Blink. The soul  
shuffles within, restless like prosecution papers  
in the sharp silence of a courthouse.  
A prayer clings to the lips, a dried rose,  
holding tight to its integrity.

# Haiku #1 (Dusk)

Jonathan Tovar

Helios languishes.  
Astræus, draping Gaia, sighs.  
Flows purpureal haze!

## Cloudy Day



Eddie J Moreno

## Sincerely

Francisco Alvarez Jr

I lost hope in U, I had it with you at the V, I swear it's like dealing with a W (double you), I made  
you my X, I made her someone new to txt, I made myself next....  
Now you layin' in bed, asking all the Y's?, losing sleep, catching no Z's...

Just yesterday we were at the top of the alphabet....

It was such a beautiful sight to C, we went blind at the B, must have been the diamond ring, I broke  
that promise, and so I still stand alone on the A cuz I didn't give you my last name...  
I'm sorry miss...forgive, Mr. Alvarez

# Untitled



Erica Cormier

## Phineas 2015

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