



PERSONNEL & INFO

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MISSION STATEMENT

It is the mission of *Voices* to recognize and showcase the visual arts, musical, and literary talents of McHenry County College students.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Voices publishes work that reflects the literary, visual, and musical points-of-view of contemporary community college students. Although *Voices* does not organize content thematically, the work selected represents the contemporary zeitgeist of the McHenry County College community.

Submission of any musical composition, sculpture, writing, drawing, painting, et cetera, is open to all students of McHenry County College. Selections are made by student editors based on quality, and other objective criteria through a blind critique process.

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BEST OF MAGAZINE

Voices 2025 is proud to announce Awards for the Best of Magazine

LITERARY:

Rachel Maes
Corvus

VISUAL ART:

Patti Stricker
CONGELATION 28.1

MUSIC:

Kevin Randles
Won't Look Back

Voices wishes to acknowledge students for their excellence in literature, music and visual arts.

THE DAN RISCH MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Dan Risch Memorial Scholarship is awarded to outstanding and promising visual art students. This Scholarship is generously funded by Dan's family and friends in memory of former MCC art student Dan Risch.

The 2025 Dan Risch Memorial Scholarship winners are:

Delaney Lopez
Allison Downs

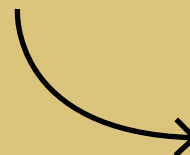
MUSIC

- 1 **NATE BINGIER (THE SWABS)**
Beau Zeau
- 2 **KEVIN RANGLES**
Won't Look Back
- 3 **NATE BINGIER**
Disregard of Music

To hear this year's selections go to soundcloud.com/mcc-voices/sets/voices2025 or simply scan the QR code below:



P.S. GIVE THE BOOK A FLIP THROUGH AND WATCH THIS CORNER.



RACHEL MAES

Fiction

CORVUS

High in the halls, silence becomes a yawning vacuum reaching to the very ceiling where I flit in anxious anticipation. I have no business in this house, and the beams make sure to tell me. Each groan under my claws breaks the restless dream and shatters the still air about me. The beams shift and creak, scattering plaster over the floorboards. Bits of the roof twirl and flutter, a lovely tableau of a world crumbling. All the while, the storm gathers its strength.

It was the sharp, quick clap of thunder that disturbed my repose. The land split open, and sparks gasped and died atop the wet grass. My gnarled oak, where I nested, shook in a frenzy. Branches scratched the window, building in force as the gales spun through the tree. Wild and wilder, the oak whipped about. Branches broke and fell, tumbling through the boughs. My nest was rattled and jumped from the reverberating thunder, tipping over the edge precariously. Bracing myself, I darted into the storm.

My body jerked about, unable to take wing. Up, up, then pulled down sharply, closer and closer to the ground. Sheer willpower propelled me up, tearing through the gale. My wings caught the air just so, helping me shoot to the roof of the close colonial manor. It almost was an extension of my oak, so near was it to my home.

My tree splintered under the storm, leaving only a jagged stump, smoking and black. Jumping from tile to tile, I searched for an entry. So much was damp and rotting. Over the halls was a small hole that had crumbled from time and mold. I struggled through, tearing a few feathers from my back. There, in the rafters, I could perch, rest, and take in the shadowy hall- still as a crypt.

The air is stale, and nothing disturbs the thick grime and dust that has gathered in the

corners and settled brazenly on the furniture. The grand, carved clock has expired- no muttering of sound as time has passed through. There are carved figures about the face and watch from the crowning. Winged humans, the little ones, seemingly floating in the air as they grasp the grains of wood. Peering closer, one might see pieces missing. A wing broken; a head that has been knocked free. It looks as though it had a deep, rumbling sound, but now it is as brittle as a branch.

The hall is dark, and there seem to be no safe corners to dwell in. All is too exposed. There are faces I don't trust, unmoving on the wall. Their features have disappeared, faded by the light that once must have lived here. Now, they are pale abominations, merely eyes staring through puddles of flesh. Out of several rooms, only two have open doors. I fly over broken floorboards and worn rugs.

Death, death. This is a house that is dying.

The first room is compressed with shadows of blue and black. Where there are flashes from the storm, there are only illuminations of silver outlining the small furniture in the room. Tiny chairs are piled in a closet with a missing door. A carriage has tipped onto the ground, motionless now, forever more.

The bed is bare, save for a bundle of brittle, crumbling lilies. I hop onto the bed and smell a spray of mold. I take a bite of the lingering petals but taste only stale plaster. All one needs to do is look up to see the hole above the corner. Rain drips, drips, drips, weathering away the floor beneath. Is it a greeting when a piece of wood croaks in the rafters before breaking and toppling into a freefall?

No, this is no place for living breath. I am confronted with a stinging, choking smell

as I flutter into the next room. It pushes against me aggressively. My eyes burn; whatever dwells against the walls, it countenances no visitors.

Even without the lightning, I spy the sickly yellow wallpaper. There was once a pattern, but it is conquered by sharp, scraggly streaks. Pieces curl on the ground. Large and wide, tatters and strips, all of it has been piled upon each other in frenzied need. There is a yellow powder beneath them- similar to the dusted walls- still ill with the color, even with the paper torn away.

Perched on the window, bars stand in a stately row. I have a recollection of a face in the window, stretched upon the bed, which I see now has straps that hang limply along the side. The eyes of the face were dark and sunken, but there was a smile gifted to me, even as I briefly passed. The woman offered no food as there was a barrier between us, so I never lingered. After a time, there were no looks, no smiles.

Something dwells, a malaise seemingly, and I will not bear the struggle to stay. There are stairs nearby leading downwards. I fly headlong, taking no heed of sense or direction. I want out. All at once, I collide with a door, feeling a bone push and sprain from the impact. Another barrier. My claws clack against the thick wood. It will not budge.

A voice calls out into the stillness just below. "Sir? Or madam?"

I did not tarry, racing against the sound, bound for the hole I entered from. There is a deluge of appeals for forgiveness. The fact is they were napping, so they nearly missed my tapping just beyond a thickened door. But scarce I am to wait for them to hear me.

The push toward freedom is harsher than before. My stabbing wing now screams

out across the vast meadow. The hurricane seems to have not tired, angrier, and more powerful. Bolts crack the fields so close to this structure. The danger still hovers over my shoulder. A quick dive and I glide against the wind, finding a sill, shuttered but leaking candlelight- dull, yet living.

Here, I tap with my beak aggressively and determinedly.

There is hardly a pause before the shutter crashes into my injured wing, weighted and forceful before I can even move back. The wind is enough to guide me into the chamber. I am pushed onto another carved being with softened features and a helmet upon her head. Not a word I spoke or paid heed. No, I perched and sat and nothing more.

The little man is sallow and thin. His frame is small, and he stares up at me in wonder through a pair of smudged and dirtied spectacles. He shivers under a worn and faded night jacket; his limbs are naught but bones; I can all but hear the sound of him rattling as he huddles beneath his clothes. His fingertips are a sickly yellow; the same color has smudged and smeared against the rich, sharp green wallpaper. A single lamp fills the room with dull light, the dying ember battered by the draft and weakened from the storm. His fingers, long and spindly, tap, tap, tap against his hand. The sound of it grew, beating off the walls, and feels as though it is the heartbeat of the house.

My breath comes sharp but is pushed by the burst of his sighs. I could feel the harshness of it, even from my perch. The chill of the room moves in, brushing through my feathers delicately. With no fire, the night has taken hold; shadows

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RACHEL MAES

Fiction

CORVUS (CONT.)

and figures dance against the walls, stretching out across the floor. My wing burns, enflamed by the cold. It hurts to hold my wing to my side, and it lifelessly droops downwards, near death and fading. It is only when I try to shift it that I feel that pain again, a warning to mind my business and leave my bones to suffer in silence.

I'm done. I have nowhere left to go.

"Grim and ancient raven," a soft but reedy voice comes from the man. His eyes are pale and drown against the whites, aided by his pallid complexion. His hair stands on end, much like a hedgehog, and it is only when I see his fingers absently brush through his hair that I understand. It seems brittle, more strands breaking off and falling from his hand as it pushes through. "Must have come from dark shores. Only this, only this."

When he looks back at me, he has hunched further forward. His weak body trembles, and his shadow dances behind his back. It is with reverence that he regards me. I am a noble visitor, freshly plucked from the Plutonian shores. Fear and elation fill his colorless eyes, and he bows timidly, sweeping low to the ground. "Tell me," he asks as he rises, "what you're called in dark Hell?"

That is...unexpected.

As he spoke, I mimicked him and squawked back.

All at once, he recoils, stumbling several steps back. The corner of his lip twitches, and his hands squeeze together.

I search for another perch, one more obscure. Briefly, I consider hopping onto his head and then taking my chances in a freefall. Perhaps I could even hit the floor before he might grab at me. If I could move, I could hide beneath a shelf in the darkness. His lamplight

does not reach that far, and the darkness might swallow me whole.

As though hearing my thoughts, he suddenly mutters beneath his harsh breath, "My friends have flown away. Tomorrow, he'll leave me, just as all my hopes have flown away before."

He wishes for sound, for an exchange, I imagine. I caw once more at him.

He brushes me off with a wave, turning his back to me. "He heard that word from his unhappy owner." What word?

There is a worn path on his rug. Instinctively, he returns to it and shuffles over it, back and forth, back and forth. There is sound from him, but it is obscured beneath his breath. He reacts to the black figures reaching from his wall, nodding in agreement or pushing back in argument. They are delicate companions who know him well. His finger waves as he hears something he approves of; his features are animated and alive. He walks back toward his chair, nodding and nodding once more.

"Yes, yes." He gives a throaty chortle, the sound shrill to my ears. "Likely, that owner was hounded by disaster. He must have lost his wife and had no children to bear his name. The pitiable man only had a bird at his side in those dark days. Yes. There were creditors and greedy relatives who waited for that final tragedy to take him. What to do, what to do? A shame, it is truly enviable- pitiable, I should say, that his life was a pesky matter. Those relatives, so impatient, burdened by the small string of life that carried on through him."

I say nothing during this and dare not move lest I disturb his fantasy. I lived once in a tree, but now it's gone. I was no pet or harbinger; I am but a raven.

Wild eyes shot up, his hand clutching his chest, wounded by his own story. "Is that it?"

My feathers rise in warning, sensing the shift in the air.

His face is ghastly and gaunt, horrified by me. His breath comes rapidly, and he struggles, wheezing a little as he gathers himself and stands straighter in response. He is not so small after all. At full height, he is as big as the doorway and could reach right up and knock this bust from its place. Instead, he pushes his chair from the light and brings it near flush against the door. Though his head falls back against the velvet cushion, his eyes lock on me, following each shift and ruffling from my feathers.

Had I made a sound in warning? I can't remember how I must have disturbed him. The timid creature is now frenzied and inflamed.

The window rattles but doesn't budge open. The sound of thunder now seems fainter, yet the house still quivers above us. His eyes rise and follow along the ceiling. Does he hear it as well? Something that crashes on the floor above us- no, they instead seem to fly over the rafters, following some unseen creature that spins and swirls lightly over his head. He catches the scent of something, and he cries out in anticipation, reaching up. A sob strains from his throat. I almost catch a name he murmurs, the words spilling until they are naught but sound. His mouth is slack open, the force of his whimpering racking through his chest and throat.

It apparently becomes too much for him, and he howls at me in rage. "Wretch! Who sent you?" He wheels around, jerking a poker from the long-forgotten fireplace. "Leave me alone. Leave me alone!" He clutches his weapon, shaking it at me in anticipation. "Take that memory of Lenore."

I make a move, ready to jump when he comes and looms over me. I keep my eyes on the poker, watching as it twitches in his hands. His figure has blocked all escape, leaving me nowhere to go. I caw at him, harsh and throaty, an appeal or threat, it becomes the same.

"You...you prophet." The walls shake against his rage. "You thing of evil!" His knuckles turn red and then purple.

No, no.

"Who sent you? Satan? That storm? Tell me! Tell me the truth. Let me...let me forget Lenore."

I strain and reach for whatever power he thinks I have, anything, anything, but only if he calms himself. Give him what he wants, but step back. Please step back. Walls or man, all that bears down on me, step back!

Having cornered me, he looms, his anger teetering towards craze or calm. One step out of place, and it will bury him. "Will I reach Heaven, prophet?"

How should I know?

"Did Lenore make it there?"

Go away, go away!

Within a breath, that rage builds, stoked to life. He swipes out, the poker veering close to my side. The sudden force of movement caught me off-guard, causing me to nearly lose my footing. The wallpaper tears, and a cloud of yellow sprays against his evening jacket. I can taste it on my tongue, and the flavor is harsh and malignant.

"You demon." He whimpers, the sound of betrayal creeping over his words. "Go back to Hell! Take that beak from my heart and get off my door." He lunges again, his poker swinging

(Continued on page 10)

RACHEL MAES

Fiction

CORVUS (CONT.)

close but still landing against the wall. I don't think he is even trying to hit me, yet my instinct is still to flee. The weight of the weapon and the level of power pierces the wood and breaks the beams within. The house groans in response, though it seems half-hearted and morose.

I am feeble and exhausted. The poker swings wildly but never comes close to my side. I simply hop and duck, and the danger passes. I think at first that he is a rabid creature in his corner, the blackened walls caging us in, but as a fragment of plaster topples, a wail cleaves through him. His knees rattle and give out, dragging him to the floor. He clutches his chest again, wheezing, howling, and racked by coughs.

The dust settles, and something else breaks above, but soon, the air stills and even the dust does not have the energy to continue its dance. All is still, save for the sounds of his lament.

What now?

When our eyes meet again, there is no demonic glint, only a sputter of some life, fragmented and weakened. The moment is long between us, an unbroken gaze and pitiable exchange. He staggers to his feet, hunched again and using the poker for support. I don't move, even as he comes closer and his large hands hover and cloud over me.

I cry out against his grip, my wing pulsating with pain. It feels in time with my heartbeat and makes me want to drop weightlessly into the air so I may hover above the pain and breathe a moment without it.

He draws me close to his face, his drooping eyes weighted with tears. "Nevermore?" He asks me softly. I don't fight him, trusting him to hold me carefully, even as he grips me thoughtlessly. He is a broken thing, diminutive and lost against the scattered light.

I think to caw at him, to attempt that word

he asked, but as my mouth opens, he squeezes me, crying out in protest. My body crushes easily, and all of my breath is stolen. I stare, penetrating his gaze until he seems to calm. He wheezes into my face more intensely than before. "You're right, I know."

His eyes go wide suddenly, and one hand lets go, reaching for his throat as his breath stops. He grips and tears at it, becoming more hurried and desperate as panic builds. Still, he holds me, looking desperately at me with a wide, fearful plea. He moans, trying to turn it into words, but instead, it sounds like an animal in distress. That is all he can manage before he collapses. He grips my back and side, and I don't fight for freedom. We both fall together and cry out in pain.

It's all over so quickly. A brief gasp of a storm that disappears with no hail or hoorah.

The man's fingers tenderly stroke my feathers, patting me with gentle regard. He does not let my eyes go as his dims and fades. He holds onto me and entreats me, seeking some answer to a prayer. The sounds of the house collapsing are almost faint, intruding upon us. He means to look up, but I caw at him, and his attention stays on me. His body shudders violently and then stills, now nothing but a shadow on the floor.

His hand grips me, death not easing his strength. I push and wiggle, but each attempt hurts worse and worse. I rest instead and wait, whether for collapse or rescue. However, the window is latched, and the door is closed.

What seemed a long room is instead small and compressed. The lamplight is dying, and even the shadows withdraw. Here I'll stay, still and floating on the floor.

Will I have salvation?

Nevermore.

BEST OF MAGAZINE

PATTI STRICKER

CONGELATION 28.1



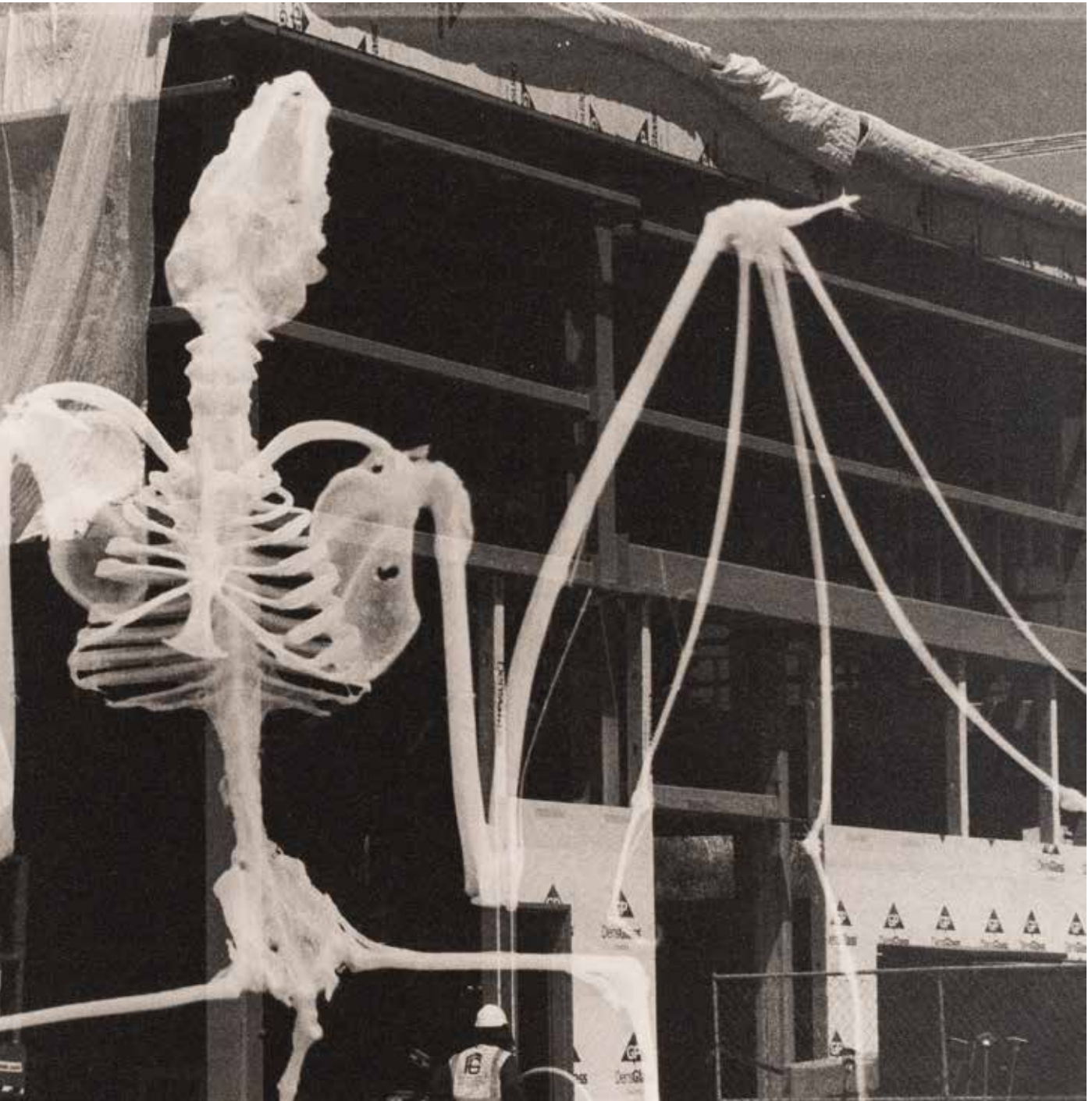
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 20" X 24"

GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 11" X 14"



NATE BINGIER

The Boy Flew Out the Window



WHISPERS IN PINE BARRENS

Deep in the Pine Barrens of Southern New Jersey, a woman stood alone at the edge of the tree line, peering out into the black night, expectant, as if she were waiting for something or someone. She wore a long, white dress whose skirt was stained with mud, as if she had fallen in her haste to reach this place, along with her bare feet that sunk in the ground beneath her- yet she didn't seem to mind. Her dark red hair stood out stark against her pale skin, as did the scarlet that was painted on her lips, which twisted down in a small frown.

It was quiet, save for her steady breathing- no animals moving around or insects chirping could be heard in this part of the Pine Barrens, which created a feeling of solitude. But on this night, isolation was exactly what the woman sought. Restless, she shifted back and forth on her heels; the sound of squelching could be heard as the movement repeatedly disturbed the muddy ground beneath her feet.

A soft, eerie voice cut through the silence, causing the young woman to cease her movements. "Elenora," The voice whispered, sounding as if it came from all around her. The young woman's lips parted, her eyes becoming unfocused as the whisper continued to say her name, slowly growing louder. Then, as quickly as it had started, it stopped, and silence filled the air.

Elenora's eyes cleared, and she seemed to catch her breath, realizing she had been holding it the entire time. Blinking, she looked around herself, taking in the way the pine trees towered over her and how the trees rustled against one another, allowing the faintest of glimpses of the full moon that rested in the sky. She moved towards the tree nearest her, reaching down to run a hand over the twisted roots that protruded out of the earth

at the tree's base, her finger catching on a spot stripped away in the shape of an S.

She tilted her head, her face scrunching in thought as she stood up, ignoring the wet ground that shifted between her toes. She muttered something under her breath as she turned back to face the direction of the water; she listened for the whispers, but everything had gone quiet. She sighed deeply and pursed her lips, her right hand picking at her fingers with her thumb; she closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

She forced her mind to be quiet and focused on the smell of the wet, salty marshland around her, taking note of the thick, slimy mud between her toes and the cold air that seemed to freeze her to the bone: all things she hadn't noticed before or had chosen to ignore in her haste. The minutes ticked by, and the silence hung heavy in the air- and Elenora almost gave up, but then she felt the telltale prickling on her skin like she was being watched. The wind began to whisper, but it was different than before. It spoke to her in a voice that was many, the words indiscernible and voices distorted, like a recording played out of sync. It grew in volume until the whispering turned to shouting: "Leave, leave while you still can!" The voices said.

But Elenora did not want to listen; they were not the voices she had come for, so she ignored them and their warnings. She started taking small, determined steps forward across the cold ground with her eyes squeezed shut.

Her mind was open, as was her heart. So, when more voices began to join the others, Elenora blocked them out, searching instead for the one she had come for. With each step closer to the water, the voices began to quiet, acting like white noise in the back of her mind.

"Elenora." Her name cut through her

mind like a dreamlike whisper, and Elenora opened her eyes, realizing that water was moving just at her feet; she hadn't noticed before that she now stood at the water's edge.

"Do not be afraid," the whisper continued, and Elenora blinked, looking out into the darkness. The voices in her head had all gone quiet, save for one. It sounded like a woman's voice, rough and raspy, and it seemed to be carried on the soft ripples of the murky water as if each syllable held power within it. Elenora knew that she should be frightened, especially as the marshland around her was full of shadows, which heightened her sense—yet all Elenora felt was anticipation.

The voice that remained was the same voice that had spoken to her, what felt like all her life, and it whispered promises. Promises that she would get all the answers she craved, if only she would get closer to the water. "Do not be afraid." It whispered again, and Elenora began to move forward as if in a trance.

The bottom of her dress clung to her ankles as her lower legs became submerged in the water. It was freezing, and her toes began to feel numb, yet she didn't stop until the water reached her waist and the entire bottom of her dress was soaked and weighed down her body.

Had she been thinking more clearly, she would've noted that it was strange to find such a deep body of water here since, normally, this part of the Pine Barrens had only shallow pools that wound throughout the marshland like cracks in the stone. Yet Elenora was not thinking clearly and seemed to be moving as if she were in a dream, sluggish and off balance.

It was brighter away from the tree canopy, and the light of the moon allowed her to see she was surrounded by moss that dropped off the soft land, disappearing below into the dark, reddish water. She stood on something too soft to hold her full weight, her ankles getting pricked by some sort of branch or other debris she couldn't see below the surface, and her

dress began to turn a brownish shade of red as the fabric soaked the water up.

Her mind was fuzzy, and she vaguely registered the cold and tiredness that gripped her, but a part of her mind was alert, and it was this part that was starting to question why she had been so determined to come here in the first place.

Dazed, she stared as the water in front of her rippled, and something started to break the surface. It grew in height as the water dripped off it, first revealing the top of a head and then a face until a woman was standing in the water, about four feet from Elenora, and bathed in the light of the full moon.

"Come closer," she urged, as if sensing the small part of Elenora's mind that was hesitant.

Elenora could not come closer; she couldn't move at all. Her body was too heavy and cold, and even the small part of Elenora's mind that objected had now fallen silent.

"Elenora," the woman whispered with a sense of urgency, her voice drifting on the very surface water. Yet it had lost the sharpness it had once held, and then it was like a spell had been broken. Elenora's mind seemed to wake from a fever dream, disoriented and panicked, yet unable to do anything but stare at the ethereal woman across from her, who had spoken without opening her mouth.

The woman's skin was pitch black and glistening from the water; her hair was long and equally dark, except for faint blue hues that framed her pretty, pointed face. She wore a thin, gauzy-looking dress torn in spots and splattered scarlet in others, with some sort of cord or rope tied around her waist.

Strings of fabric and rope were twisted together and tied around her neck, drawing attention to where a necklace hung down between her chest. A gold coin rested at the end of it, and there was some sort of engraving etched into it, glittering in the light with each breath.

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WHISPERS IN PINE BARRENS (CONT.)

Her eyes were bloodshot and dark, rimmed with silver and small jewels, and her stare was fixed piercingly on Elenora, who seemed to forget how to breathe with it fixed on her. She was beautiful and terrifying, and Elenora was absolutely bewitched by her.

Suddenly, Elenora fell into a coughing fit, her lungs feeling like a spring, and the force of it caused her to fall backward into the water.

“Elenora!” The woman shouted just before Elenora disappeared below the surface.

Water flooded into Elenora’s lungs, making them feel like cotton full of tiny blades. Each time she gasped for breath, water filled its place instead, adding to the pain and forcing her body to repeat the process in its quest for oxygen.

The woman meanwhile stood frozen, watching in horror as Elenora slipped beneath the surface. Which was odd, considering it was she who had brought Elenora to the Pine Barrens in the first place, and she should’ve expected the outcome.

When Cordelia had started her song days ago, she hadn’t expected that she would feel anything for this human, let alone worry and fear over her safety. For years, she had sung her songs to many people, though they were predominantly isolated men, but not one of their souls had ever answered hers the way Elenora’s did.

She expected her to just be another means to her survival, an unfortunate person who had the misfortune of hearing her song. But Elenora had taken her by surprise in more ways than one, for no human had ever broken through her spell before, and that in itself made Elenora special.

But there was something else that drew Cordelia in, something she couldn’t name. It was ancient and more powerful than anything Cordelia had ever felt before, and it wrapped itself around her heart and tightened painfully

until it hurt to breathe.

Wait... Cordelia paused, her mind catching up with what had just happened. That pain, the struggle to breathe, wasn’t Cordelia experiencing it...it was Elenora.

Cordelia’s eyes snapped to the place where Elenora had been moments before, her lips parting in surprise. Cordelia’s brain finally caught up with what had just happened, and she realized that while she was wrapped up in her thoughts, Elenora had been beneath the water’s murky surface, flirting with death. It had been less than two minutes, but Cordelia knew from experience that even that was more than enough.

Immediately, Cordelia dove into the water after Elenora, feeling the water enveloping her in its welcome embrace. Beneath the surface, Cordelia transformed: a thin transparent membrane, similar to an eyelid, slid into place over Cordelia’s eyes, her feet became webbed, and small gills appeared on her neck and face, allowing her to breathe in the water.

Large bubbles of air escaped her lips as she looked around, gulping down water nervously. Cordelia kicked her legs out behind her, propelling her further towards where the moss and algae were denser. Even with her advanced eyesight, the water was so murky that it was almost impossible to spot Elenora, whose clothes and skin blended right in, but there hid the floating form of Elenora. She had lost consciousness and was aimlessly bobbing in the water, tangled in moss and seaweed, and her face was deathly pale. And yet she looked so peaceful.

Cordelia’s hand was outstretched in front of her, and she gave a sharp tug as her webbed fingers encircled Elenora’s wrist. With an audible swoosh in the water, Cordelia pulled Elenora free of the moss that had held her captive, and with each movement upward, the thick,

heavy pressure of the water fought against her.

The dark depths of the water tried to hold them there in the dense seabed. The water was cold and salty, and no moss could be seen on the floor. This was not the Pine Barrens any longer; it was someplace else. Seaweed brushed against Cordelia's legs, and she kicked hard, and her head broke the surface. Water poured down her face as she twisted to pull Elenora up alongside her, and Cordelia shifted so she was half sitting, half floating in the water, pulling Elenora up so her back rested against her chest before she began to steer them towards the shore.

Cordelia had one hand resting against Elenora's sternum and could feel her faint, barely there heartbeat. She blinked her eyes, and the transparent membrane that covered them retracted, adjusting to the world above the water.

Her fingers thumped lightly against Elenora's chest in an effort to stimulate the younger woman's heart, careful not to let her sharp nails cut her. Cordelia hauled them up out of the water and onto the sticky terrain of a beach before she stood up and surveyed the scene. Elenora's breathing was weak, and Cordelia knew she had to work fast; it was strange to consider that this was the first time in her very long life that she would be saving a human instead of killing one.

Of course, there was a small hitch in this plan, as she had no idea how to do that since her experience with humans and their life force usually meant their death. Cordelia had no idea why she had a connection to this human; it was like an invisible string bound their souls together, and suddenly, her fate was intertwined with another's, which terrified and intrigued her in equal measure.

Kneeling down beside the younger woman, Cordelia placed her palm over Elenora's heart, focusing on her indent and the water that pooled in Elenora's lungs. Leaning down towards her face, Cordelia closed her eyes and tried not to dwell on what she was about to do.

Elenora wasn't sure how she ended up in the situation she currently found herself in. One second, she was standing upright in a shal-

low pool of water, shivering, and the next, she was gasping as the water invaded her lungs.

The water had suddenly appeared so much deeper than it should have been, and Elenora could do nothing to stop it as the waves pulled her under. Things became hazy after that. Through the haze, cut a voice laced with power and strength. "Elenora." It whispered in the back of her mind, acting like an anchor in an ocean of uncertainty.

It felt like Elenora's consciousness was being dragged up from a sinkhole until she felt aware of herself again. The first thing Elenora realized was that her body was lying on something hard, with a warm compress on her forehead, and something cold and wet rested against the skin of her chest. There was a weight to it that seemed to ground her and draw her back to her physical body.

Suddenly, Cordelia felt water thick in her throat, pooling into her lungs. Normally, Cordelia felt fine when she breathed water, but now she felt like she was choking, and the pain was excruciating. Elenora woke with a gasp, opening her eyes to see the woman from earlier leaning over her, her dark eyes wet and sad. Her lungs felt better with each second, and she couldn't understand why until she noticed that water seemed to be flowing into the woman's nose and mouth.

"What?" Elenora questioned, moving to sit up hurriedly. "What are you doing?" Her voice was frantic and panicked.

"I couldn't let you die," came the woman's voice, but Elenora didn't see her lips move.

"Why?" Elenora demanded, feeling tears fall down her face.

The woman smiled sadly, "Because I'm the reason you are here, and you deserve to live."

"Who are you? Why do I feel like I've known you my whole life? Please, don't do this!" Elenora was confused and upset.

She had many questions, but they would remain unanswered as the woman fell over suddenly, water slipping past her lips.

"Cordelia," the voice whispered, and the siren died.

ODE TO CICADAS

Before you stop singing, before your offspring
disappear into holes near mature tree roots,
before I can no longer gaze at your gauzy wings,
wings that convince me that a superior weaver
exists somewhere, a creator of beauty beyond human skill,
a master at plucking glimmer from the universe
and attaching it to your back, I must tell you what joy
you have brought to my summer.

When the sun appears each morning, your rhapsodies fill the air.
I know, I know, you are attracting a mate with your songs,
but I am courted, too. You decorate trees like Christmas ornaments,
red eyes or blue, tiny orange legs that inch or grip. In a few short days,
you will be gone again for 17 years, perhaps, and sadly,
it is unlikely that I will see your progeny emerge
or hear their calls.

But—thank you. Thank you for your presence, your murmurs,
your surprise perch on my collar or your walk on my cuff.
Thank you for sharing your space and limited time with me.
I will miss your community, my dear mysterious companions,
when you are gone.

SUZANNAH SIMPSON

Hangin' Around



ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 20" X 30"

DALE MORTON

It Takes a Village



CERAMIC, STONEWARE, 14" X 10" X 6"

DONNA BIESCHKE

London Fog



OIL ON CANVAS, 34" X 34"

YOU WILL FORGET THIS POEM

I'm sitting in the middle of the lunchroom-
Loud and lively as usual,
When suddenly, my mind starts to wander
And the noises of my peers fade away as I start to ponder.

I have thoughts that remind me
That I'll forget these faces as they will forget mine; this moment is already a fading memory
Just another day to be left behind.

It is an impossible thought that I'll be remembered after my own life and beyond,
So, I take my opportunities now to be seen and to stand out
So not all of my presence disappears when I am gone.

As I think and delve deeper into my brain,
I know it has always been one of my biggest fears.
These thoughts aren't pleasant, so I try to refrain-
And yet, I question if similar thoughts ever come upon my peers.

What an irrational thing to fear,
Because once I am dead, there is not a care I will find.
Still, I cannot say how many nights I spent contemplating this thought-
Losing sleep over something as trivial as existing in someone else's mind.

And although I do not want to be forgotten,
There are things I wish I could forget;

I wish I could forget how short this life is,
I wish I could forget how I will be erased by history,
I wish I did not have to fight with my mind every single day,

I wish,

I wish,

I wish.

But no matter how much I wish,
Whether it's the candle of a birthday cake or stars in the night sky,
They both just burn out and fade with time.
So what keeps my wishes, then?

I will forget and be forgotten;
I would like to say I am fine with that, but the truth is I'm not.
I have spent countless days thinking about this with caution-
I do not want to be a body left in the ground to rot.

I would like to say I will never forget my time with you,
But I cannot tell the future.
We will find other friends and start anew-
It can't be stopped, I know that for sure.

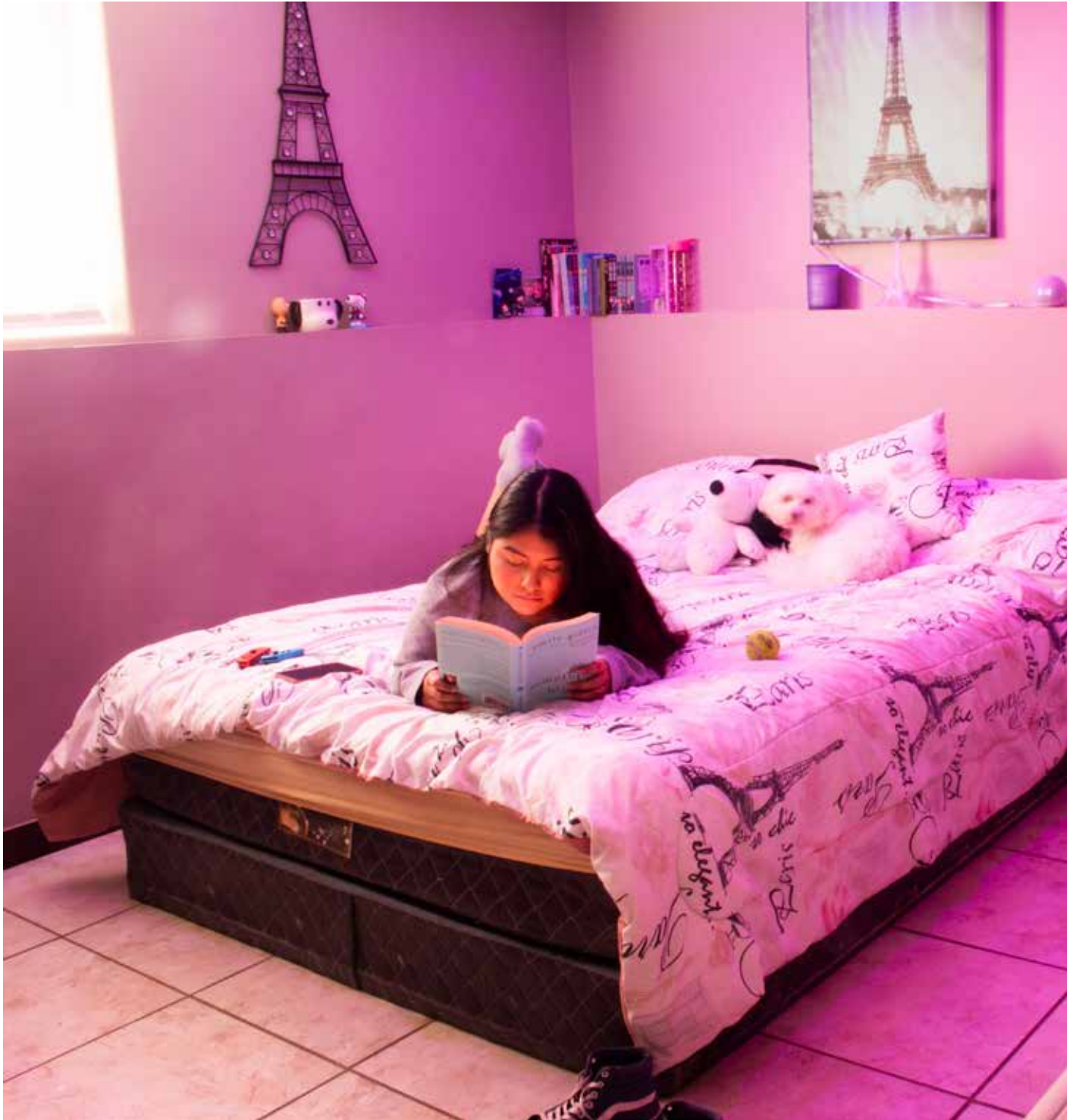
I do not want my life to amount to nothing, but I know it will-
Because of the billions of years that have already passed, what are my hundred worth?
Sometimes, I wish time would just stand still
Or hope for another chance at life, some sort of rebirth.

Time only remembers those who have accomplished great things, the ones who make a splash-
But what about the millions of people who didn't revolutionize the world- any predictions?
What about the everyday lives that were here but forgotten in a flash?
I am never going to do amazing things worth remembering; I am just another one in all the millions.

Coming back to reality, I hear the shrill tone of the bell;
The end of lunch has stopped my thoughts, yet I know they will come back again.
When they will be back, I never can tell-
The next class, on the bus, or in my bed, I don't know when.

It all comes down to time and chance,
But I will keep repeating this same dance.
I will not be known forever, and neither will you.

Since, just as this poem, you'll soon forget;
Time, too, will forget all of you.



ACELYN GUADARRAMA

Tea Party



ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 11" X 17"

CLARK DISTRICT

I know where you're at right now-
3730 N Clark, wasted
Dressed out,
Eyeliner smeared,
Dancing in white light.

There was a point
Where I was on your mind;
It drifted away hours ago
And you're awaiting the sun.

WHEN THE TREES SEE ME, THEY DON'T JUDGE

When the trees see me,
They don't judge.
I'm all natural;
We are nature.

PATTY TRAINER

Augustine Tea



CERAMIC, 7.5" X 6" X 4"

THE RABBIT HOLE

She questions me about him,
asks me for advice
while she tries to sort him out.
For, you see, then
she can explain away
so many out-of-the-way things
that have happened lately:
his hot and cold emotions,
his focusing on their age difference,
his focusing on her maladies,
his proselytizing about religious principles.

During her last marriage
to a man who adored her—but died—
a man who posted his thoughts on paper
where she could find them
and float during her daily routine,
Alice had begun to think
that very few things indeed
were really impossible.
That is until she met Frank
and got stuck in his endlessly
winding rabbit hole.

NEIL UNVERZAGT

Prairie Home

OIL ON CANVAS, 36" X 48"



JIM CLOUSE
Floaters



OIL ON CANVAS, 26" X 26"

ABBIE WOOD

Arms & Legs



CERAMIC, 11" X 4" X 5"

INTO THE VOID AND BACK AGAIN

I'm a computer,
everything inside me works just fine
[this is not entirely true, but now is not the place or time]
except the monitor doesn't work
cursed to remain forever blank
Empty, black, a void
the empty, inky black void.

I try to see images in my mind's eye.
I've tried for as long as I can remember.
I've tried building an altar-
Leaving offerings,
Whispering prayers
[that sometimes turn to screams]
I've prayed to every god I can think of.

My prayers go unanswered.
The universe remains silent.

Whenever I close my eyes
The void greets me
my mind is empty.
I see nothing. Nothing at all
[no, they are not exaggerating; they see absolutely nothing.]

Nothing can exist,
Nothing cannot exist.
It is endless and obeys no laws.
It does what it wants
And wants what it does.

The void is familiar-
it's not the comfort I'm looking for,
it's not a comfort at all.

The void latches onto my heart;
The void's teeth are desperate,
it was born hungry,
its hunger will never be satiated.
The void latches onto me,
onto anything it can.
It was born hungry.

The void reminds me there is a price to pay
For memory,
For remembrance-
I will not be allowed to pass through unscathed
There will be a toll
I will eventually run out of payment.

Sleep is a way to cheat the void,
to see things
I do not when I am awake.
The dreams are unsettling *[sometimes unforgiving]*
Yet, I do not seem to be afraid,
Unless it is something to be afraid of.

I will always be chasing those images from my dreams-
they haunt me;
it's weird not to see them
when I wake,
But simply know that they were there.
I cannot escape them;
they cannot escape me.

The memories are fleeting.
I try to live in the moment.

[the moment passes by too quickly]
Gone before I even registered that it was there
That something happened,
I was there for it-
It feels real,
It doesn't feel real.

[how can you be so sure?]
I'm not sure what it feels like anymore.

To whoever took my imagination
And replaced it with the void,
The jury in my brain is still deliberating
Trying to decide the punishment for your crime.
They know I want my imagination,
The issue is: will I ever get it back?

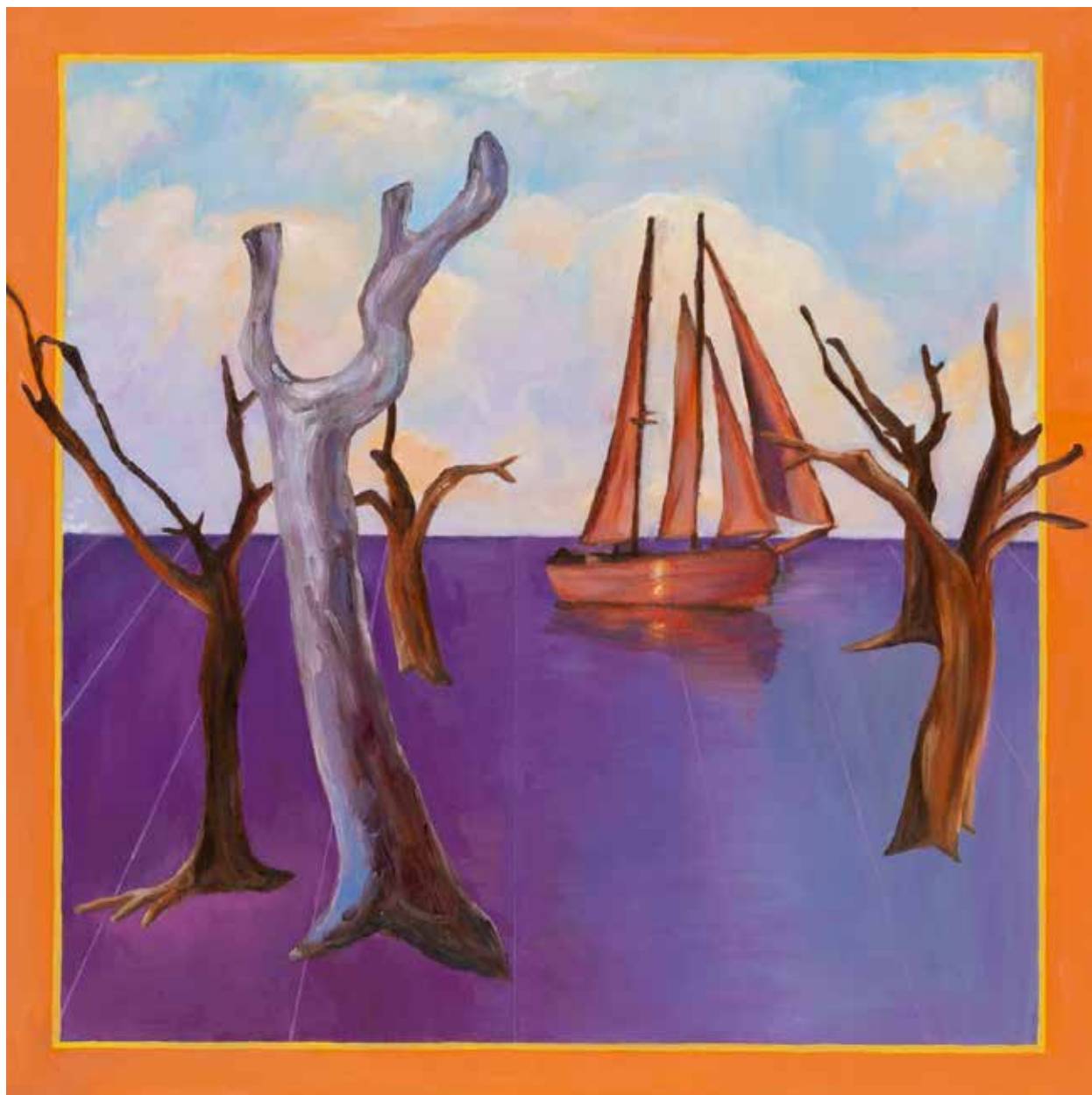
I don't know when the jury will deliver their verdict-
Perhaps they never will

[it won't matter, will it?]
The void will be there.
The void is hungry,
it is ready to consume
everything it touches,
unless someone does something
to stop it.

[The void yearns to feast.]

A SPACEFARER'S REVERIE

Lavender stretched across the sky,
And she couldn't help but wonder why.
Pink swirls dotted across the lilac backdrop,
A sight so odd she had to stop.
Unnatural, she swore.
Nothing like she'd seen before.
But wasn't that the point?
To see views that promised not to disappoint?
Hadn't she ached to see unknown wonders?
Sights that would make her forget her blunders?
She'd long since left behind the blue.
The white clouds, she'd bid adieu.
To see the universe, all so new.
However, she must admit,
That some days she missed it.
The abyss of blue, way up high.
A large blanket covering the sky.



OIL ON CANVAS, 20" X 20"

LEXI COX
Loosey Goosey



ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 30" X 22"

SNACK RUN

Eno sighs, a sucker stick twitching back and forth as he chews on the end of it, its metal tip changing flavors every minute or so. He hunches over slightly as he walks into the chilled grocery store, **Spaciato**, which is the most popular chain in this quadrant. Not that he could understand why, unlike **Stellar Puncheon**, his personal chain of choice, he's pretty sure **Spaciato** makes more money off of ad space than actual sales.

As if to prove his point, at least a dozen ads pop up in his vicinity as he walks no more than a foot or two into the building, obscuring most of his visibility. He pauses for a moment to regain his bearings, eyes scanning over the hovering holographic ads as he peers through them, trying to identify the aisle he is looking for.

"Galaxy Grams! Get your energy boost with honey-made Galaxy Grams! No sweeter taste in all of space!"

There is a rocket ship made out of crackers on the ad.

"Twist things up with the new cherry-flavored Tonsil Twisters! Find them in Aisle 3"

Red Tonsil Twisters are swirling around a cherry on the screen.

"Don't miss Domsday Destructor: The Demolisher! The 23'd installment of the Domsday franchise, now in theaters this Saturday."

There it was. Eno runs a hand through his ginger hair, finally spotting his destination and extremely relieved not to have to squint through twelve glowing screens any longer than he needs to. He shoves his hands into his pockets, shouldering through the hovering ads as they flicker and reform behind him in his wake. He really needed to find some time to download one of those semi-illegal ad blockers into his glasses if he was going to stay in this area any longer than he'd prefer. More ads pop up around him as he walks, hovering after him slightly as he heads for the aisle he is looking for. He's gotten used to tuning them out, sure,

but it's harder to ignore the ones with animations or the occasional ad with music or a jingle attached; they keep startling him.

"Chocolate Chip Cookie Bites! Now sold in vacuum tins! Safe for snacking whether relaxing or spacewalking!"

It read Betty Crocker on the corner of the jiggling red cookie package.

"Orion-O's! Your favorite Eidion-6 Cookies with Cream!"

Which had a small spaceship on it flying across the frame with a quiet flying ship sound effect

"Happy Farms Cows Milk! For a taste of the countryside with your breakfast."

A bouncing cow on a farm.

"Human Milk! Just like mother used to make. Now in both half and single gallons."

It's trying to direct him to the refrigerated aisle with a happy looking mother and baby.

"Don't just walk! Stride, with Nike's new Space Striders, for a sleek and comfortable fit that will have you gliding down the street!"

A happy Edonian is running down a spacewalk, shoes on full display.

He turns down the aisle he was looking for, keeping his eyes trained on the shelves as best he could with hovering pop-ups spawning over every product he scans over, displaying their names and prices bigger along with more advertisements for each product, occasionally even a popup along the lines of ***'Our product is better than that one.'*** as they insult their neighbors. Eno has no idea how anybody can stand shopping here, already he is praying for it to either explode or catch fire, whether or not he is still inside.

(Continued on page 38)

SNACK RUN (CONT.)

Eno pauses, hand outstretched to grab the drink he had been looking for, **Fizzle Fiasco Fruity Blast**, as a drop-down notification appears at the top of his glasses. Typical. It's just like Ebony to leave him waiting all day, and for that matter, that equals two days on S/2048 E3, or as the locals call it, Scryax, which is the moon Eno is currently standing on; for an email, only to send it when he finally leaves his ship. With another annoyed sigh, he opens the email, scanning through it on his glasses as he blindly grabs another two bottles.

"That's just great." He mumbles, the email automatically minimizing as he waves away another annoying ad, heading down the aisle again. "All that, and the repairs are still going to take at least another day." Eno thinks over how to reply to the email for a moment as he picks up a few other snacks.

Stopping as he picks up a **Bubble Chew Chocolate Bar** and a box of **Cliff's Hearty Meal Bars** he lets another email window drop down on his glasses, replying to Ebony's previous email. When he decides he's satisfied with it, he closes the window and blinks at the store around him again, scanning the ads and space around him, ignoring the usual tiny popups and data on the edges of his glasses screens.

"Grab an ALIENS magazine at the register on the way out! Keep up to date on all the latest gossip and trends!"

"Don't just rest, relax with a Ruarling Roax Bar. Keep those feet high and those sugar levels higher with both milk and dark chocolate Roax Bars." There were a few different types of Roax bars fanned across the image. "Keep up with the latest fashions with a copy of Brilliance. Sexy Hair? 413 styles for all types of hair. Long, short, cephalopods, coarse, fine, and fanned. Find it at the magazine rack next to the checkout."

"Vote for Jötummer, a change you can trust."

He pauses, gaze fixed on one of the smaller ads. "They're really just selling ad space to anyone these days, huh." Eno mutters as he eyes what is clearly a scam dating site and has no business being on a grocery store ad screen. He absently rubs the chip on his neck; it must have read the age on his ID before popping up. He'll have to look into blocking that when he gets back to his ship. "Whatever." He waves his hand through it, causing it to dematerialize briefly as he continues back towards the checkout.

He doesn't make it five steps before hundreds of tiny holographic screens start appearing around him and even directly on his glasses screen.

"Stellover~ Find your dream humanoid! Over 24 billion successfully matched~ find your soulmate today. CLICK HERE"

"B'lodierian Boudoir~ find the B'lodierian girl of your dreams on boudoirxxxblodierian.com

"Galexia Glammors, the girl of your dreams can be found right HERE"

"Are you looking for something different and exciting? Visit fantastiquexxxplay.com for an experience that will make your head spin."

"CLICK HERE. CLICK. SINGLE EDONIAN GIRLS NEAR YOU."

Eno's eyes widen as his eyes rapidly flick between the ads as more pop up. "Oh, you've got to be kidding me." It must have been bugged to trigger a virus as soon as anybody interacts with it, including trying to close it. Dealing with this will completely ruin his evening. Unfortunately, there isn't much he can do in the middle of a grocery store, so to prevent further damage, he shuts down his glasses and phone for good measure and slashes his card through the cash register's reader. Whoever set that ad up would regret messing with him as soon as he gets back to his ship.

REAGAN JOHNSON

By the Bushel



CHALK PASTEL ON PAPER, 19" X 25"

UNTITLED

There are pieces of me everywhere-
All over my bathroom floor,
All over my kitchen counter,
No matter where I am,
I can see the pieces I've lost.

Spread throughout my school's halls,
Empty parking lots we'd go to;
Even the night sky,
The tanning of my skin, the shortness of my hair,
The fullness of my breath.



ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 24" X 12"

6034 W MELROSE STREET

I have always associated roses with my grandmother. I helped her tend to the rose bushes below 6034 W Melrose Street's front windows. I've always associated those windows with my grandmother, who could sit by them watching the time and her neighbors pass by. She was jokingly given a pair of binoculars one Christmas, but she used them unironically. Eventually, the time came when she could no longer physically tend to her roses. The roses went on, oblivious to this. They somehow survived every Chicago winter and came back fuller every year. Just when you thought that surely, they wouldn't be able to withstand what they went through, they came back as vibrant pink as ever, wild and intense. They were the physical embodiment of my grandmother, who, looking back, was my friend above all else. She took me to every park on the North Side of Chicago. At home, we fit together in her oversized recliner, always coming up with a new game to play. She loved to play pretend more than I did. A decade later, she challenged me to a game of Scrabble. After all those years with her, just us, I had no idea she even owned Scrabble. I may have won the game score-wise, but she spent the entire game spelling out life's truths. It was the last time I saw her. The last conversation I ever had with my grandmother was hearing her tease that I could never be domesticated and oh have times changed. I am grateful that I got to see into my grandmother's world because of her ability to see everyone else so clearly.

With time, I've been able to reflect on what I watched my grandparents go through. I saw a pattern in which no one truly believes that their

body is a temple until that temple is crumbling. I saw the reality that we're able to take advantage of our bodies' ability to bounce back while we are young until the day the young dread most when signs start to point towards the realization that our temple is starting to crack. In his 40s, my grandfather quit smoking cigarettes. By the time he passed, he owned eleven vehicles, and as legend has it, all bought with the money he was saving on cigarettes. Most of them sat in storage during my years with him. He was a collector of many things, but I could never understand why he let brand-new cars sit idle in storage. Growing up as poor as I did, I had a limited understanding of their value. 6034 W Melrose had a two-car garage, three including the half-assembled 1930s Ford. With the garage filled, we were constantly fighting for parking spots on Chicago's North Side. In the winter months, street parking becomes so scarce that many place household objects in their empty parking space, a claim most respect. However, my grandparents had an official claim once the city installed a sign for a reserved, handicapped parking space outside 6034 W Melrose Street. Given my grandmother's bull-headed nature, it was a fight to get her to give up her driver's license. Unlike my grandfather, she would not give up her smoking habit, constantly holding a cigarette to her lips as if she were unaware of the oxygen nasal cannula sitting just above them. My grandfather's stubbornness was the one rivaling force. After all, he was the type of man to leave the car running while pumping gas to keep my grandmother warm while waiting for him. To my grandfather, the driver's license was a fight he could win. The final car he

purchased was a wheelchair-accessible van. I despised the thing, accordingly nicknamed “the big red bus.” It stood out like a sore thumb on W Melrose Street. Looking back on my grandfather, it’s only fitting that the once avid car collector sought out the \$40,000 vehicle to go out in style.

My grandmother’s death sucked the life out of my grandfather and her roses. He immortalized her by placing their wedding portrait beside his oxygen tank. The large photograph had been turned into a one-of-a-kind work of art by being enhanced with hand-painted details, including a bouquet of roses. At the time, I didn’t recognize the couple in the portrait. I needed to tend to the machine. Now, I see the detail of the young woman’s facial features and the young man’s strawberry-blond curls every time I look in the mirror. It captures my grandparents at the start of their lives together, while I only saw them at the end. I would give anything for one adult conversation with the two of them to learn what truly drove them. My grandfather was always pointing to the bigger picture against my perfectionist tendencies. While it was the final chapter of their lives, it was the first of mine. Years later, I realized my mortality when my mind woke up to my body’s constant warning signs that I had been constantly ignoring. Ironically, I did not realize that some physical conditions are bothersome in one’s old age but alarming in one’s youth. By the time I realized that not everyone had learned how to ignore constant hip pain, my hips were already riddled with severe osteoarthritis and bone marrow edema. Everything I took for granted when I was healthy, like when you get a cold and struggle to remember what it felt like to breathe through your nose. For the first time, I experienced the fear they must have felt and processed it. I learned to disregard things like my grandfather’s oxygen machine and learned to protect things as special as

that portrait. I’ve learned how to see the bigger picture that my grandfather always saw, even when his health had taken so much from him. In a world where the one condition is that you must leave it at some point, you learn to stand your ground to hold onto what and who you can. From watching my grandparents struggle with their health, I accepted my own and the physical conditions that come with it.

My fear of death ended with the death of my grandparents. They spent the last six years of their lives shut in at 6034 W Melrose. The 2000s overran the house, taking with them the couple that built the once lavish, stylized home recorded in Polaroid photographs. There are no photographs from the home when I knew it, yet the images, sounds, and smells are stained into my being. The conditions I saw there but could not change as a child still remind me of the quality of a person’s life, not the quantity of their years. After they were gone, 6034 W Melrose was gutted for sale. I do not recognize the interior of the house that is there now from current photographs, and I am glad. It had become a place that could take and drain the energy out of anyone trying to repair it. I am glad the house has a second chance to be a home. Our bodies are our homes, too, but there are no do-overs there. Perhaps their energy lingers there as much as it does in me. I do not think that my grandparents would choose to do anything differently if given the option. I do think that my life is still meant to have options simply because I am still here living it. Because of them, the value of the mundane comforts of a routine matters just as much as any milestone moment. Do I think I may be looking back through rose-colored glasses, or perhaps rose-colored binoculars in my grandmother’s case? Absolutely. In that, is one of the most beautiful gifts of protection our humanity grants us because no matter how dark things get, we learn to embrace the ideas like those of those roses in front of 6034 W Melrose that will still grow back whether you want them to or not.

ETHAN LUKAS

Bleach



ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 20" X 30"



HD DIGITAL VIDEO RT 2:06

Use QR code to view video or visit <https://youtu.be/DZaUcVKIHAK>

KATHERINE GODFREY-MIKKELSON

Shoe Painting



OIL ON CANVAS, 22" X 16"

LIFE IS ABOUT THE MATH

Lately, I have been comparing life to a mathematical problem—just a bunch of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing. I have been reflecting on how my balance sheet will look when the ledger is closed.

When we are born, we add to the population. We add to our parents' financial responsibilities; we add to their concerns. We subtract from their recreational time; we subtract from their time together as a couple. As we grow, each of us adds new words to our vocabulary and new experiences to our days.

Early on, I added skill in riding horses and showing animals at the 4-H fair. I added the tastes of Norwegian foods, like lutefisk and lefse, to my palate from the community in which my family and I lived. To shoulder a bit of the load that my parents faced each day, I added outdoor chores as part of my daily routine: gathering eggs and carrying foaming milk pails.

While I lived on the family farm, I added learning to drive the car: a brand-new Hudson, John Deere tractors, and an old Ford truck. While I attended a one-room school, I added a love for poetry and reading of all kinds, especially when the traveling library showed up with *Black Stallion* books by Walter Farley. In high school, I added an attraction to young men with cars and money to spend. The first 16 years of my life were primarily adding, adding, adding.

Then, I moved to the University of Wisconsin in Madison for further education. There, I learned about multiplying—multiplying by thousands of the number of students in my environment. From my high school of 125, I found myself on a campus with 26,000 other people from all over the world. My life experiences multiplied exponentially.

After college graduation, I added again: a husband and then two children. I added the expenses and responsibilities of a house. I added concerns for students who came into my life at three different high schools. I subtracted free time for grading papers and preparing lesson plans. My husband often quipped, "She'll die rocking in a chair, saying, 'Just one more paper, Bob.'"

Now, fully retired and widowed, I spend some time subtracting from and sorting through the clutter that has accumulated in the same house in Woodstock that my husband and I purchased 52 years ago. I have been advised that if I rid the rooms of 26 pieces of accumulated "stuff" per day—mainly kept records—and if I live long enough, my house will be clutter-free for my children when the river calls my name. That is my goal.

My days contain fulfilling activities—writing, watching Badgers, Bears, and Cubs on T.V., playing Euchre, chairing a book club, exercising, and supporting my loved ones. I understand that time on this planet is finite, and I work to ensure that my life's ledger has a debit balance at the end.

THE LAST TREE

– MY FIRST SWORD

I stand tall and proud,
Overlooking anything and everything surrounds me,
Noticing the beauty of the sunlight,
Same as the moon.
The rivers, the valleys, the wide expanse of sky- they're always a different color each time
I land my eyes on them.
I take care of critters, let them house themselves in my shelter, share my space
And give them food, as any other would hopefully do;
I wave to my neighbors, and they wave back,
Because it doesn't do to feel lonely.

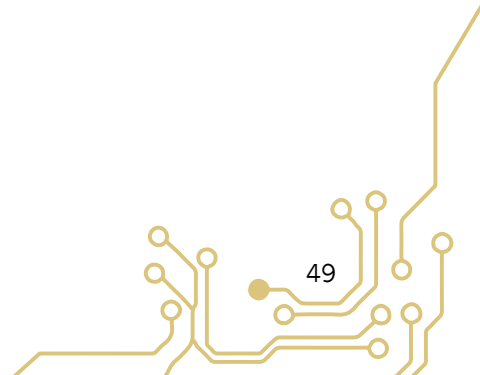
I sometimes support other beings; I carry them when they were previously low
And let them use me to stand on higher ground, to feel better, to see more, to grow more-
Grow as I have done,
And now I return the favor to them.
And then it's rare that I'll see them again.
They may forget about me.
But if I do see them, they sometimes come back and thank me for helping them climb
To a higher point of their life.
Or sometimes they'll come back to pluck my leaves or saw at my limbs because they believe
they'll need them more than me.
They'll go, and I'll regrow, but lately, I haven't been able to house critters-
Because they're afraid, the others will come back and take more of me.
My neighbors have left; they, too, had their limbs taken from them.
I haven't seen any more sky,
For steely things that stand taller than I
Block my view.

And they have been coming more and more to take my branches,
Taking a part of me.

I may wilt, but I know that lightning has struck me before.
There's no rhyme or reason,
And it happens so quickly and so painfully, I don't know what to do-
It's not like I can cry for help or run away from where I am.
Because I'm too proud, and my roots hold the ground, hanging tight for the ride of life,
So here I will stand.
And in times like these,
When I have been exhausted from my limbs when I can't support any being,
House critters, speak to my neighbors, see the rolling valleys or the sky sickened with smoke-
When I am nothing more than a stump, standing not so tall-
And definitely not as proud-
I will remember where I came from and who I still am despite what I am now.

I will remember that I reach deeper into the earth,
Into myself, more than anybody who isn't me ever could.
And when they have all left long from this world, I will still be here, regrowing.
Regrowing like the grass from the hard grey slabs,
Revisiting like the critters who had to move away,
And looking back up at a sky that is no longer in a clouded daze.
We will help each other; we will not fall.
Because we are too proud. And together, we will stand tall.

This is where I'll plant my first sword- only three more to go.



THE MOULD

– MY SECOND SWORD

This is how I imagine life to sometimes be:

You are a piece of clay, not shaped or formed.
They see your potential,
But sometimes it's okay
Not to be anything they'd envisioned.
Oh, but if someone should want to change you,
You risk being tossed around, beaten into a ball,
Stretched and stressed until you're unrecognizable,
Or liquified and shoved through a compacted vessel until you come out
An entirely different shape;
It may be a shape that is just like the others, to be sold as a collectible matched set,
Painted and dressed up with bright and joyful designs-
Because life forbids you to be anything other than joyful or beautiful to everyone else-
Because that's the only way someone would want to see you, to cherish you.

Congratulations, you fit in the mould.

Sometimes, it is more desired to be this way, to feel this way,
But what about before?
Or what else might have you become?
If not to be sold as an inanimate object-
To risk being dropped and shattered,
Or stowed away in darkness, collecting dust?

You could have been with the earth, comfortable and taking any shape you want,
Being protected from the influence of others or preserving proof of what once was.

You still can, though it'll take some time for you to be swallowed into the ground, to be away from
this undefined chaos- but you'll never truly go back to being the way you were before.

Congratulations, you don't fit anywhere.

Despite this, it is a lesson that is well taught-
Well thought.

This is where I'll plant my second sword- only two more to go.

KELSI GILLESPIE

Trinity

CERAMIC, STONEWARE, 20" X 5" X 4"



COLOR ME PINK (OR MAYBE GREEN) – MY THIRD SWORD

Color me pink,
Or maybe green
With jealousy-
That somehow life is fair for those who cause chaos,
And not for those who do not.
Yet when theirs is chaos for good,
It is shut out
Because why would anyone want to invite such a thing into their life?

Though, what even is defined as good or what is defined as bad?
The rules are blurred, and that's how it's always been, though what choice could be bad
For any of us,
Is that someone would choose to not be kind.
History is fascinating, though it's a bit of a lie;
Because what it all comes down to is what people will believe- what is good or bad?
Which side of the story will survive?
There is no such thing-
Only where you find yourself amidst this chaos-
Chaos that no one should want in their life,
But it's not up to them,
For how can chaos be controlled?

So color me pink, for I sometimes wear rose-colored glasses
Until I turn green with sickness
When I realize how dismayed we are.
Oh, but maybe pink again, for I am grateful for the life I've been given-
Or should it be green when I switch colors so fast that I become dizzy?

I suppose it's okay to be both;
Because good or bad, it doesn't matter.
But what does is what choices we make with it.

With this in mind,
This is where I'll plant my third sword- only one more to go.

MICHAEL GULLOTTO
The Kitchen

ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 24" X 30"



FOUR OF SWORDS

– MY LAST SWORD

I'm lying down to rest
For I am tired and defeated;
My problems suffocate me,
Lying on top of me
Like a hefty soil, like a clay
That is thick and won't budge-
Cementing me to the ground,
Or like a sand that shifts and clings tight over
my eyes.
It's impossible for me
To see,
To look up-
Up at the sky past my gravesite
For I am buried into the bedrock-
Rock bottom,
Bottom of the barrel,
The barrel pointed at my chest,
A sign of betrayal.
It hovers over my heart
And then pierces deep like three double-edged
swords,
because that is life.

Life is pain, and pain is beauty
And beauty is a beast, or sometimes,
A work of art.

But life also cheats, also can deal me rotten
cards-
So, for now, I will lie down to rest.
Perhaps someone will come
With a shovel to loosen the thick clay that is
Mucking up my mind, that
Is all within my head.
I don't need them to take my hand, to pull me out;
Not to awaken the dead.
But if they could just take a little dirt off, it may
be a little easier for me to move,
To crawl my way out,
To help myself see the light in the end.

Until then, I will lay down to rest, with all
three previous swords now wedged in my
heart-
And this one right here that I will defend, hold-
ing it close to my chest.

Until we meet again.

ISAK MAYER

Torn Beef Hash



OIL ON CANVAS, 60" X 48"

JESSICA SPEARS

Wither



JEWELRY/METALS, 9" X 8" X 2.5"

A HONEST ANSWER BETWEEN POLITE SMILES

How are you?

has become a question that is asked so often

it has lost all meaning

For once, I want someone to ask it and wait for an answer

and stop me when they can tell I'm about to lie to them and tell me:

I want a real answer. *How are you?*

You don't want me to smile that fake smile

and say, "oh, I'm good!"

for you to respond with "that's good. I'm doing good, too,"

and then we continue on with our lives,

knowing we're both lying

I want to have an authentic interaction with a stranger for once

After all, we have nothing to lose

we'll likely never see each other again

but at least we have been honest with each other.

Honesty is a rarity in today's world.

MOTHER

You're cutting mother's hair,
Clear-cutting it to the surface,
Paving her polished head,
Spilling gasoline into her lungs,
Pushing spears through her skin,
Breaking her bones.

RENO

If I'm being honest,
I don't want to leave.
My car is in drive; I put in the key,
My foot is locked in place,
My arms frozen-
I want you.
I smiled and said, "Goodbye."

I'll go where the trees
Coat the dead grass
Hidden beneath the leaves.
I'll stare into Orion's belt-
Wonder what it will be like in a hundred or so years
When Vega marks the north,
And all of these feelings I have cease to exist.

JENNIFER ZELINSKE

Fading Out

OIL ON CANVAS, 46" X 36"



SAMUEL VANDENBERGH

The Same Old Terrible Fiend



GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 19.5" X 25.5"

THE BLIZZARD OF 1947

“What we call miracles is just what’s supposed to happen.”

The snow began, as snow sometimes does, like a relationship with a new lover—an embrace, a whisper in the ear with no hint of problems to follow. As the early flakes dusted down Monday night, January 27, Dad finished the evening milking and bedded the cows for the night. The full steel milk cans bobbed in an ice-cold tank in the milk house adjacent to the barn, waiting for Elmer Zahn in his truck to pick them up the following morning.

That was the ritual each day: The driver, wearing a leather brace on his back for support, would lift and carry the 10-gallon cans to his milk truck and return with empty ones. The milk truck driver and the farmer were partners. The driver depended upon the production from the farmer’s herd for his livelihood. The farmer depended upon the driver for pick up and delivery because the milk house could store no more than a three-day supply of milk before the quality was compromised and his stash of cans was depleted.

Nineteen forty-seven wasn’t a time of televised Doppler radar weather reports. Neither was it a time of cell phones with weather apps. It fell within an era when the weather just happened, and farmers, mostly Norwegian and German Lutherans in our neck of the woods, depended upon God to be merciful. Perhaps, the Farmer’s Almanac had predicted, by the

coats of wooly caterpillars, what the winter of 1947 would be like— but no one knew that the gentle snow that began about 7 p.m. on that Monday night would turn into a full-blown blizzard, dumping between 10 and 27 inches of snow in Southern and Central Wisconsin over a three-day period. Even broadcasters on our Philco radio provided little information to prepare my dad and his neighbors for the drifts of up to 15 feet, reaching nearly to the tops of some telephone poles.

My sister and I, nine and seven years old at the time, did not notice any panic in our parents’ behavior that first night. Mother and Dad kept the coal furnaces burning, and our family ate a hearty meal together in the kitchen as usual. We knew we had plenty of food on the basement shelves from my mother’s canning efforts the fall before, and the beef my dad had butchered was cut up and stored in a freezer in the basement.

My sister and I anticipated walking the next day to the one-room school about a quarter of a mile from our house. It occupied a half-acre of land that Mr. Inman, a former owner of our farm and the man for whom the school was named, had donated many years before. To pass the time after supper that night, Joyce and I either read some pages from a Walter Farley black stallion book or several chapters from an Albert Payson Terhune dog book. Our

(Continued on page 62)

THE BLIZZARD OF 1947 (CONT.)

parents didn't own a television set in 1947, so we sisters lost ourselves in books with animals as the main characters.

All through the night, the snow fell, and the wind gradually grew noisier. Any restless sleeper could hear it whipping around the corners of our newly sided farmhouse and whining through the apple trees in the orchard. Early Tuesday morning, Dad said, "You kids won't be having school today, and I doubt if Zahn will be coming by with the milk truck." Dad saw that the road had not been plowed, and the snow that blew freely across the dormant corn and hay fields was beginning to drift.

The cows, of course, had to be milked as they were twice per day, every day. So, Dad ate his breakfast of fried eggs, bacon, and white toast, smoked a Camel, and headed for the barn—shoveling a path past the granary and chicken coop as he went. When he checked the gray sky and felt the sharp snow hit his face, he wondered how many days he could store the milk from his Holstein herd. Although winter was a time when some of the cows were dry, and milk production was at a low point, after ten cans were full, he would have to find a way to get the milk to the highway for pick up or begin dumping it. Since his family's welfare depended solely on the milk checks in the winter, dumping was not an option he would readily accept.

As soon as the milking and other chores were finished Tuesday morning, Dad began formulating a plan. The accumulating milk cans and drifted roads created a problem to

be solved. Our farm was about two miles from Highway 13, so getting that far through drifts would be impossible for a motor vehicle. Dad did own a team of horses, although they had been used sparingly after he purchased his used Farmall tractor. He also owned a wooden sled he had purchased at a farm sale for a bargain price. He knew that he couldn't risk his team while the blizzard was raging, but he wanted to act as soon as there was a break in the weather.

He told our anxious mother, "We'll give the horses a go if we have to. We need to try something. I just can't throw out the milk. I'll see if I can get the neighbors to pitch in." My dad was a well-respected doer in the community. He could borrow money on his word and often did custom baling or combining in exchange for a pig or calf when his customer was low on cash. And he knew that his neighbors and friends would be pondering their alternatives just as he was.

Quickly, he rang up his nearest neighbors on the party line to see if they would help him. The idea was to get the milk to a crossroad that had been plowed or to Highway 13 and, somehow, meet the milk truck there. At this time, during the blizzard in Rock County, a limited number of huge V-shaped snowplows worked over many miles of gravel roads, some of which would be more accessible because of the wind direction. The neighbors agreed to give Dad's plan a try as soon as the blizzard showed signs of easing.

Next, Dad removed a tarp from the weathered sled that he stored in a corncrib

near the barn. Some farmers used their sleds to haul manure from their cow lots during the winter, but Dad never had. After a thorough check, he found the runners relatively sharp and the sled sturdy.

Finally, he inspected the harnesses for the two workhorses that were safely sheltered in the barn. What he didn't need was a broken rein or a splintered doubletree once the project began. When he felt that the sled and harness were ready to go, he took a break from his planning and chipped the ice, covering the wooden stock tank in the lot so that the cows could get out of the barn for a drink while he mucked out the gutters. When he had finished all his chores, he returned to the house, where he watched out a window for hours while the snow continued to fall and the wind showed no mercy.

Tuesday night, the milking took on an anxious note. The usual normal atmosphere in the barn, with the sounds of clanking stanchions and feeding cows, was overshadowed by concern because Dad was running out of usable cans. In bed later that night, my sister and I heard Mother and him talking. We could sense their unease and knew the next day was going to present a touch-and-go venture.

Mercifully, on Wednesday morning, the snow began to subside, and the planners knew it was time to move. The plow still hadn't made a single run down Newark Road that linked the farms. Shortly after lunch, my dad harnessed and hitched the team, loaded his milk cans, and set out for a neighbor's driveway about an eighth of a mile north. Dressed in brown coveralls over long underwear, an ear-flapped hat, and a scarf pulled across his face, Dad found both drifted and clear patches on the road, formed at the whim of the wind. When he arrived at the Almond farm, the three brothers

stood, ready to add their load to the sled and walk along to help shovel if the drifts prevented the horses from moving ahead.

When this small caravan had trudged about a quarter of a mile, the men heard a growl in the distance. The crisp air carried the sound of a struggling vehicle. The horses raised their heads and blew through their frost-dusted nostrils. The men stopped and listened again. Soon, a yellow snow plow crested Olson's hill about a half mile from where the group was inching forward. The men watched it move and stop, back up, and try again to plow one lane through the heavy snow. Behind the snowplow, they caught a faint glimpse of a milk truck.

The horses snorted and fidgeted, frightened by the sound of the yellow giant. When the men confirmed that the plow was, indeed, on its way, smiles broke out on their chapped faces. Then, with Herculean effort, they pivoted the team and sled and headed back the way they had come. They calculated that they had enough time to outdistance the struggling plow and unload their stash before the two vehicles reached their farms.

The first stop was the Almond driveway, where Wilfred, Hank, and Bud deposited their load several feet back from the road and waited. They knew there was no need to return to the milk house with the full cans.

My mother, sister, and I watched Dad drive the team and sled home through the gate and straight to the barn. He quickly unhitched and rubbed down the horses. Then he unloaded the ten cans of milk. In about half an hour, the snowplow forced its way by each farm on Newark Road, followed by the milk truck with Elmer Zahn behind the wheel. At every farm that day, Zahn played the part of the Savior, wearing a leather brace to protect his back.

ALLISON DOWNS

The Yellow Wallpaper



BOOK DESIGN, 9" X 6" X .5"

DOMINIQUE SANDERS

Spatial Climax



OIL ON CANVAS, 24" X 30"



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Voices

