

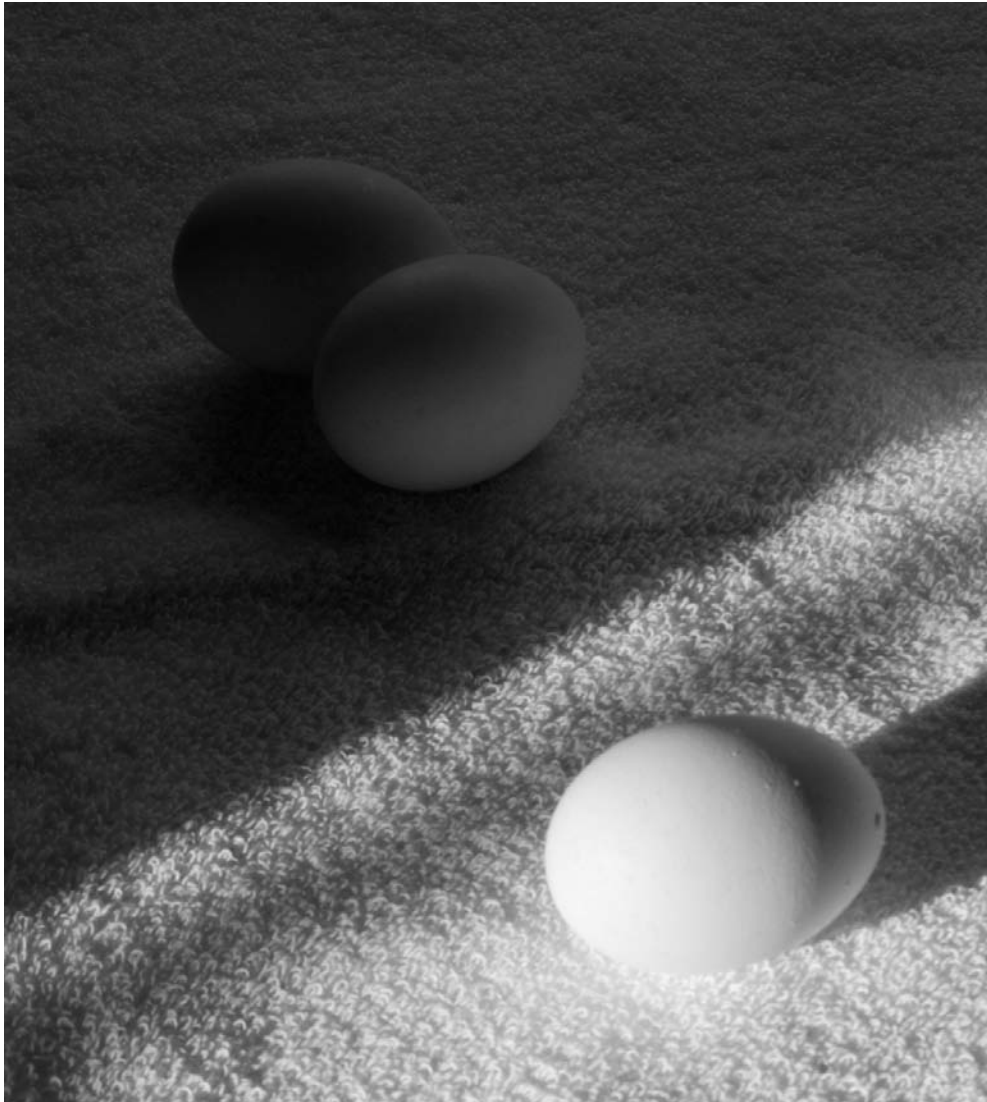


Henry Gomes  
*I'm ready*

# IMAGES *images*

Creative Writing and Photography by  
the students of  
Housatonic Community College

Matt Meunier  
eggs



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?answer?  
Joseph Correia

A child such a beautiful child.  
So pure and innocent  
my darling dear.  
The future is your so far and near.  
Go forth and touch the stars  
from Earth to Mars.

You bastard, you bastard,  
look at me now.  
The elastic stomach and the spare  
wheel abuser  
Slap, slam, slither across the room  
hit you here and hit you there,  
the head goes  
boom, boom, boom.  
My darling child  
Such a beautiful child.

The man next door has fruit for you.  
The paper boy and best friend too  
This will be our secret.  
Oh, your female sitter,  
she had honey dew.  
Such a beautiful child  
A child so sweet and innocent.

Sex, Drugs, Alcohol,  
what fucking fun  
Screw sports, screw life get high  
under the sun  
Get messed up. My darling child  
the world  
Is yours, my darling child.

Hey I'm clean, you are right,  
hey Your right,  
I'm grown up now, been married,  
attend school.  
And working for years  
Look at me.

## Au Revoir Les Enfants

Amy Nawrocki

The heat freezes in November, fickle  
as I stand in the doorway. Snow's best  
defense is to fall as sleet then melt  
before it becomes permanent.  
It's the same with words, same with memory.  
It has to do with the earth  
approaching aphelion. Not quite winter yet,  
but just cold enough to be wintry.  
The farther we get the less sense we make  
as if we were speaking in italics.

For Thanksgiving I remember  
that we are getting old. We are approaching  
our farthest point from the sun.  
Mike and Dad share a beer. Now  
they are men, the two of them. My sister's absence  
only makes me more conspicuous. The dog  
barks long at his reflection  
in a pane of glass. We laugh at this,  
it's like that in my house.

As autumn plays its lazy guitar  
it searches out the end of things.

The big oak loses its charm because death  
had no vanity. Things like this

go unnoticed, crazy as it seems.  
It's like collecting fog in the cup  
of your hands - nothing more than  
recycled water droplets. In the same way  
dead leaves smothered to the bottom  
of the ground will exist again, decades later  
as top soil. It's all a trick,

though, same as leaving childhood,  
same as thinking November  
is cello music, played with a bow,  
and not a pick



4/2/2007 KUSOMA

HESABU

a e l o u  
ba be bi bo bu  
ma me mi mo mu  
ka ke ki ko ku  
sa se si so su  
da de di do du  
ta te ti to tu  
pa pe pi po pu  
na ne ni no nu

One  
Two  
Three  
four  
five  
Six  
Seven  
Eight  
nine  
Ten

1  
2  
3  
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50

## Blessing Nicholas

Nidal Ali

It was late in the year 1911 (I am aware of the date that all this happens; I'm very good at keeping track). We traveled in very bad weather for seven days and nights; the sky was gloomy; dark clouds hugged the earth with relentless wind and rain. The earth had a great flood. The following morning at dawn, everything became quiet, as a door in the heaven had been opened by an angel. The sun illuminated the earth and blue skies could be seen everywhere. This was the day Nicholas was born.

Nicholas was an only child. His mother chose his name a month before he was born; she had a dream that Saint Nicholas had blessed her baby. After he was born, the family prospered. The people who knew him had been attracted to him with the hope that the blessing he received from Saint Nicholas would also befall them by being near him (he is still called a blessed boy).

When his father died suddenly, he left behind a modestly wealthy widow and a handicapped son and of gentle disposition. He grieved for his father who had treated him with kindness and love when alive. Nicholas' mother, now a widow, was well respected for her gentleness and beauty; she was tall and fair, and many a man wanted her for a wife. All her friends advised her to marry again, so she married a man that came to rent one of their stores. Nicholas couldn't accept any man to replace his late father and left home after his mother re-married.

Nicholas became homeless, but didn't go so far from the home. His mother had to watch after him through my eyes, and she tracked his bills in order to pay them. He preferred, for his dinner, just to drink a bottle of milk, (and I had to wipe his dripping mouth and treat him as my son). Nicholas refused to go to anybody's house, so I suggested to him to use my store that I had rented from his father.

One early morning, the neighbors woke up to the milkman's screaming; they found out that Nicholas' stepfather had been killed. The police were unable to charge the milkman or anybody else, because there was no evidence.

Months later, his mother married again, this time to an old religious man. Nicholas was called him by a goose, "The goose will kill you" said Nicholas, but he ignored him as a mentally handicapped boy not worth the time of day. Nicholas' feeling came true; the religious man was killed one early morning in his church. When the police came to make enquires, and asked Nicholas if he had any information about the subject, his response was that "The goose killed him."

Nicholas' mother became enveloped in love of a young man that came to rent one of their stores. The young man had never been previously married, but he had a big family waiting for him. He married her, not for love, but to support his family. He brought his family to live together, and they became as the owners of the house while Nicholas' mother was like a guest. They treated her like a slave. Nicholas suffered for his mother and went to the young stepfather in hopes to changing the stepfather's way with his mother. The young man attacked and beat him. Nicholas left after first telling him that Saint Nicholas will get revenge.

Next day, early morning, the stepfather had been killed. As Nicholas was the last person to see his stepfather alive, the police tried to ask him about it, hoping to gain some information to find the killer. Nicholas told him, "The murdered man beat me, and Saint Nicholas got revenge." I asked Nicholas "Are you the Saint Nicholas?" And he gave me a smile.

## Book a Life

Remi Abdu

Tom sits restfully on his seat at the back of the class. He straightens the blazer of his uniform and adjusts his tie. He arranges the books he has to the top left corner of his desk and aligns his pens and pencils vertically right beside them. He is ready for class. He is ready to learn today's lesson.

Brandon patiently watches as Tom goes through his rituals. He eagerly scratches the sore skin he has under his untucked shirt. He carefully loosens his already crooked tie and sighs.

"Let's go, Tom," Brandon says, playing with the misplaced thread on his blazer.

"Go where? Class is about to start."

"Let's skip. Let's skip this one," Brandon continues. He scratches his head and stares outside, his eyes focused and nonchalant.

"What if we miss something?" Tom replies. "What if today we actually learn something - something really important?"

Brandon keeps his gaze lingering out the window. He waits a while before rising from his seat. His empty bag on his back, he makes his way towards the door.

"You could miss something really important!" Tom calls again, but Brandon keeps making his way out of the room.

No one hears the door closing over the noise of the chattering class. No one hears Brandon leave.

Tom stays restful on his seat. He stares at the one pencil that has gone out of alignment with the others. He decides to leave it the way it is.

Professor Finley soon makes her presence in class. She rolls in with her a cart filled with small old, bound books. Tom thinks they look like diaries with the way a rope holds the brown leathery cover in place.

"Settle down class," Professor Finley starts. She looks rather solemn. Her lips part, but pause when the door releases a student through it. It's Garth.

Tom takes notice of his heart when he sees Garth heading towards him. His worst fears are realized when the boulder of a boy sits on Brandon's empty seat. Garth glances at Tom. Tom darts his gaze away, but not fast enough to have

missed Garth's menacing stare. Instead, Tom concentrates on Garth's arm. They have taken a quantum amount of space on their double desk.

"Okay, class, I want you all to settle down," Professor Finley states slowly. "Today is a very important day. Today is the day you've all been waiting for. Today, you get to learn the most important lesson of your life."

She picks up one of the bound books and raises it for the whole class to see. "This is the book of life - an instruction manual that you should have received at birth. Today, you get to have all your questions answered. All the questions you have about life - the meaning of life, your significance in life, why you're here, are all going to be answered."

Professor Finley starts handing out the books and Tom's finger itches in anticipation. He accidentally sets them on the desk and Garth slaps them off. Garth gives him a look and Tom understands.

Professor Finley takes her time before reaching the back of the class - before getting to Tom's table. Tom watches everyone get a book. He watches as they open it and soak their eyes into its knowledge, a satisfied, almost elated smile perch on their lips. Their questions are being answered. Tom's fingers itch the more.

"I'm sorry Tom," Professor Finley says as she reaches his desk. "I only have one book left. You'll have to share with Garth."

She hands Garth the book and walks away - walks out of class. Tom cannot object. Garth shifts to the end of his side of the desk. He unties the rope around the book and opens it. Tom eagerly tries to move closer, but Garth punches him aside. He turns his back against Tom and hunches it to secure his possession.

Tom sits back. He takes a look around the class and finds his classmates' eyes, embedded in the book, glaze in satisfaction.

Tom gets up suddenly and runs out of the class. He has to find Professor Finley. He has to get one of those books - the books that hold the secret to life.

The halls are empty. The only thing that accompanies him through it is the loud clicking his school shoes make against hallway floor. Everyone's in their

relevant classroom. Everyone has a book. Tom runs past the chemistry lab and finds that everyone in there with their starched, white lab coats has a book. Their brewing volumetric flasks abandoned, their eyes are buried in its words, learning the secrets of life. He runs past another class and all he sees are eyes caught in a brown bound book.

He is the only one running through the halls. He is the only one without the book. He is the only one not learning the secrets of life. Tom runs by the gym. He finds a circle made out of kids sitting on the floor in their gym shorts; their hands are preoccupied with a brown leathery book.

Tom runs, his shoes against the hallway floor echo louder through the empty halls. He is alone.

Finally, he reaches the staff room. He opens the large door without knocking. He lets escape the laughter in the room. His fingers are shaky, itchy... eager. Professor Finley is seated amongst the other Professors. She sees him and approaches the door. It is only slightly open.

“Professor...” Tom starts breathless. “...Garth... he... he wouldn’t share.” Professor Finley stares at Tom, her eyes hollow, cool and unsympathetic. She slowly moves her face close like she is about to whisper - like she is about to kiss upon him an important secret. Her lips part.

“That, Tom, is life,” she utters, then shuts the door. The door repeats itself through the hallway just in case Tom had not understood its closure the first time. Tom stands in front of it, alone, his face a mere breath away from the threshold.

David Paulson  
*Iraq Protest*



## I Live for the Movies—but for what be?

Jamie Quaranta

I live for the Movies – for idealistic and realistic fruitions

Entrenched on my Polyurethane Foam-Padded Leather Chair

When I could have lived for Television, am lenient

In my exquisitely plump Bedroom –

I self-analyze at profound ease, but why?

“For my collective Entertainment,” I say back –

“And-for my Provoked Thoughts – They are an Interdependent Two –

I Self-Assert, am,” I say back once again –

And therefore, as a Cineast, sit back at Night –

I inhale comfy at my exhilarated Bedsid e–

Without Self-Imposed Tedium in a skewed luminosity –

And not without-my inspired photo-moving awe –

## Impressionist Exhibit

Amy Nawrocki

A mong the sacred,  
the visitors pace with careful  
solitude, aware  
the great masters encourage  
silence only to beckon  
surrender to art  
in latitudes of grace;  
the canvas takes on  
every signature of truth  
yet hides these brushstrokes  
under do-overs, try agains,  
reconstruction of color,  
leaving sea-scapes  
in perfect sunshine. Beneath –  
castles of heartache.

Justin Luther  
*Trucks*



## Moving Day

Amy Nawrocki

Now photos,  
soon fish and folded linens;  
the present pulse  
of the house decorated  
with old friends, new

configurations.  
Tea pots sit waiting  
new sips, flashing  
into decades hence  
when dust finds comfort

in comfortable  
corners. Open porch doors  
permit cool spring  
breezes and bird songs  
embroider a new life.

In the late afternoon  
the sun reaches out  
to rinse another day.

## Occurrence at Owl Creek Ave

Cody Hill

Laura sat on her bed nervously chewing her hair. It was a habit she had since she was a kid, and it had the annoying side effect of turning the tips of her fair hair brown and frayed. She made a disgusted face as she spit the damp strands out of her mouth. She hadn't showered in a couple of days and the old hair spray and dirt in her hair wasn't a taste she was fond of.

She stared at the little jewelry box on the bed next to her. It was a mahogany box beautifully inlaid with teal designs that reminded her of those tribal tattoos she saw on the backs of women her mom called whores. Laura's wide eyes examined the box, her hands too anxious to lift it up for a closer examination. It beckoned her to open it up and spill its treasures onto her tie-dye bed spread. The box begged her for release, pleaded to be freed from the contents it guarded within.

The posters on her wall were laughing at her. She could feel Jim Morrison's intense gaze upon her as his eyes evaluated the situation. "He would not be afraid of it," she said to herself, "he wouldn't hesitate at all. He would enjoy it like I should." His penetrating gaze cut through her like sunlight through the eye of a hurricane.

She stared at him, transfixed, until laughter from the bears on his right interrupted their bonded gaze. The Grateful Dead bears were mercilessly teasing her, laughing hysterically at jokes made at her expense. "What's the matter?" a blue one asked. "I do believe she's afraid of a box," a red one joined in. "She should be used to boxes," the blue one giggled, "she plays alone with one every night!" The bears erupted with laughter as Laura blushed and turned her head.

Her eyes met those of a girl sitting on a bed across from her. She stood up and cautiously approached the stranger that was likewise moving to meet her. The girl was just standing there, eyes narrowed with suspicion, and jaw clenched with distrust. She was pretty, despite the defensive body language. Her hair was tied back with a brown and white bandanna, save for a few strands that looked as if they'd recently been chewed. Her dark brown eyes darted around

inside her gaunt face, examining Laura examining her. The stranger was wearing a dirty white tank top under an earthy jacket, or was it a sweater? Laura wasn't really sure. The girl had on loose fitting pants that hid her feet under black fabric. Like the rest of her, they seemed unclean and needed to be washed. She looked like a gypsy to Laura, a transient being unsure of her surroundings trying to loose her tan, gym toned body underneath a heap of second hand clothes.

The stranger turned quickly to look at a jewelry box that was lying on a bed behind her, and Laura disengaged her to face the box that was tormenting her. Morrison and the bears watched intently as she approached it, and, for a moment, she felt as if the stranger was watching her as well.

She resumed her position next to it on the bed, sitting Indian style, and peering at it intently. Her hands reached out reflexively and gathered the box up. She lifted it into her lap and rested her fingers on its cold lid. She traced the patterns on the box's exterior with her index finger as the anticipation welled up inside her. "Do it! Do it!" the bears chanted. Morrison watched on impassively, implying consent with his silence. She turned her head to check on the stranger, and saw the girl in a similar predicament holding a box of her own in her lap with a mixed look of excitement and trepidation.

Her fingers grasped the edges of the lid and she lifted up with all the strength her will would allow. She closed her eyes as she opened the foreboding box and she inhaled the scent of wood and incense as the air washed over her. Her eyelids burned, aching to be opened to take in the glory that she knew lay before her.

It was nothing she hadn't seen before. In fact, she had been repeating this same course of events everyday for the better part of a year. The excitement was still there. It only seemed to get greater with each passing day until it became a burning desire that coursed through her veins. Only when the feeling was almost overpowering would Laura go up to her room and lock the door tightly. She'd sit on her bed, pull the box out from its resting place underneath

the mattress, and wait for the perfect moment to open it. Her body screamed at her, “NOW! The moment is now! You’re ready, open your eyes and let the sunshine in!”

Slowly, oh so slowly, she let her eyelids flutter open. Her blurry eyes began to adjust on the box’s cavity, and a slight smile lit her face as its contents came into focus. She reached in and wrapped her slender fingers around the object she had been craving.

It wasn’t so much the plastic tube she coveted, but the nectar that lay within it. The tube was her slice of heaven and she lovingly caressed its smooth round surface as she lifted it out of the box. She petted the cool cylinder top to bottom, making sure to give the appropriate attention to the measurements etched onto its surface. She let her left hand run over the helmet of her brave knight, and she made sure to avoid his pointed lance until the moment was right.

She brought him close to her face to examine the amber fluid that ran through him. His blood was her nectar, and the mere sight of it was enough to get her mind racing like a derailed train. She gently placed him beside her and removed the box from her lap. Freed of its precious cargo it was useless to her. She slid it underneath her bed where it would stay until there was a new knight who would need room and board.

In her rush to attend to the rituals that proceeded opening the box Laura had forgotten to prepare to receive the knight into her gracious arms. She slapped her hand against her head with an audible thud. “Damn it,” she cursed.

“Wait right there,” she politely asked the cylinder as she leaned across her bed and opened the drawer on the nightstand by her headboard. She reached in and rifled through its various contents searching for the proper attire to greet her guest. A couple of condoms, magazine clippings from *Entertainment Weekly*, and some nail polish was all she felt. “Where is it?” she wondered. She leaned over more and peered into the drawer. It was a mess of odds and ends. Along with the condoms and other junk was a hair brush, a pipe, matches from half a dozen different bars, and a copy of *Through the Looking Glass*.

“There you are,” she sighed. Her hands grasped onto a little piece of beige rubber that was peeking through the mess. She pulled on it and the little speck of rubber revealed its entire fifteen inch length. It was exactly what her knight would need to feel welcomed by her.

Laura closed the drawer and plopped back into her original position on the bed with a contented sigh. She could finally begin what she had waited all day to do. The foreplay with the box, the banter with posters, and the encounter with the mirror girl had all led up to this moment. It almost felt as if her whole life had led up to this moment. Every second of her childhood in this small town, every bored afternoon spent in those miserable classrooms, every party, and every man or woman she’d screwed around with seemed lead up to this exact moment in time. This is where she began and where she ended: sitting on her bed, rubber tube clutched tightly in her left hand, and her brave hero sitting patiently by her right leg. The seconds on her alarm clock seemed to slow down, barely ticking at all as it rested on her nightstand.

Don’t forget to breathe, she thought to herself as she grabbed the free end of the rubber tube with her right hand. Laura rolled up the sleeve on her sweater and inhaled deeply, holding the air in as she began to wrap the tube slightly above her left elbow. A dull pain started to emanate from the spot and she winced as she tied the two ends together tightly. She let out a measured breath. Her moment was rapidly approaching. It seemed like forever since her alarm clock last ticked over another minute.

Laura found the whole thing fascinating. Here she was sitting on her bed, circulation beginning to be cut off from her arm, and all she could think about was the man she had met at college that day. He had come up to her while she was baked and sipping from a cup of the cafeteria’s grossly sub-par latte. Her eyes stared transfixed on his black Misfits t-shirt as he began to speak to her. She had never seen him before, she was sure she would have remembered ever seeing someone as distinct as he was. He sat down next to her, awkwardly positioning his long legs underneath the low table, and leaned close to her

speaking in a hushed voice. He kept brushing his jet black hair out of his eyes as he spoke strange words to her. She remembered how black his hair was. It was unlike anything she had ever seen before, and it seemed to envelope all light that dare to cast a glimmer off it.

He told her everything but his name. He spoke of the town he was from, what his friends were like, and the exact year, month, day, hour, and minute he had lost his virginity. A roguish smile crept on his face as he recounted various encounters with illicit substances.

Laura sat dumbfounded as his words poured out of his mouth like a river of living history. He told her of life, happiness, and how he didn't find either until he got clean. After a half hour of almost uninterrupted speech he glanced at his watch and stood up hurriedly. Another smile shone on his ghost white face as he reached into his black jeans and pulled out a small folded piece of paper. He placed the paper onto the table, winked at her, and abruptly turned and walked out of the cafeteria. He faded into the hallway like a shadow into the light.

The clock finally turned another minute and Laura snapped out of her reverie. Her arm was throbbing and she could see the starved veins pulsing. No time like the present, she thought. "You are the only man in my life," she said to the knight beside her. She inhaled deeply again as she picked him up with her right hand. She was ready for him, but he wasn't quite ready for her.

The sheath would need to come off his lance if he was to entertain her properly. She put the tip near her mouth and bit off its protective end. It's time, she thought, I'm read. It's time. The vein was not hard to find by now; its blue roads lay before her ready to receive the sweet nectar. She placed the knight's point directly on top of the vein and closed her eyes.

The clock stopped.

Laura let out a breath.

Reality came at her in a rush of consciousness. "What am I doing?" she asked alarmed. She looked down at the needle waiting to be plunged into her vein. "Oh my God, what am I doing?!" Laura yelled. She quickly dropped the needle and

tore at the rubber tube suffocating her arm. "Why?" she questioned herself. The floor creaked as Laura stood up suddenly, grabbing the syringe before it got lost in the folds of her bedspread. She turned and faced the mirror to find the stranger in a wild eyed fury.

"Why?!" Laura screamed at the strange girl clutching a needle full of heroin in her hand. "Why would you do this to yourself," she asked, "why would you poison yourself like this?" The stranger just stood there, trembling. Tears started to stream down her face and Laura could not help but feel pity for her. "It's ok," Laura said, "It's all going to be ok..." The stranger slumped visibly and collapsed backward onto the bed. The needle slipped from her hand and landed with a small clink on the floor. The tears started to flow more freely now that Laura took her eyes from the stranger, and Laura could feel her own face being overrun by tears.

BAM! Laura's head flew around so suddenly she almost fell off the bed. Laura's mom was standing in the now open doorway, her tiny frame seeming to fill the space where the once locked door had been.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" she asked louder than her small size should have been able to project. "I... I don't know," Laura stuttered. She wiped tears from her face as she tried to look into her mom's hard blue eyes. Her mom's black hair seemed to stand on end, her muscles were taught as she stepped across the room and knelt to pick up the dropped needle. "Laura," she started, "this... this... why?" "I don't know," Laura wailed, "I just don't know anymore." She sighed dejectedly and looked away from her mother and the needle.

"Get out," her mother said calmly as she stood up composed herself, and smoothed out the wrinkles of her sky blue dress. "What?" Laura turned and faced her with an alarmed expression. "Get out of my house," her mother restated flatly, "I don't want any junkie whore living under my roof. You will leave and never come back."

Her mother stood firm with her arm outstretched, finger pointing to the doorway. Laura sat on the bed, dumbfounded and speechless. She looked up at

her mother with new tears welling in her eyes. "Mom..." she pleaded. "I SAID GET OUT!" her mother said as she grabbed Laura by the arm. With a strength summoned from anger she bodily threw Laura out of the room and into the hallway. "I'm not going to tell you again. You're not welcome here," her mother said, shaking with rage. Laura lay on the hallway floor looking up at her mother. This can't be happening, she thought, oh my God this cannot be happening.

Her mother started to approach her as Laura staggered onto her knees. "If you don't walk out of this house right now," she said, "I will drag you out of here myself." She grabbed Laura by the back of her sweater and dragged her towards the staircase. "Mom, please don't do this," Laura sobbed. "You did this to yourself," her mother said coldly. Laura's head hit the bottom of the first step with a bang. The carpet ended at the top of the staircase and there was nothing to cushion her head as it bounced off the stairs. Her mother dragged her down the staircase with no concern for the loud thuds as Laura's body banged against the hard wood.

Laura landed at the bottom of the steps in a heap of bruised flesh. "You're not done, yet," her mother said while grabbing her by her hair. Laura let out a yelp and scrambled to her feet to keep up with her mom as she dragged her towards the front door. "Mom," Laura tried to reason with her one last time. It was too late. Her cries fell on deaf ears. Laura's mom opened the front door and pulled Laura's hair until they were looking at each other eye to eye. "May God forgive you," she said, and with that she pushed Laura out the front door and locked it behind her.

Laura was stunned by this turn of events. In mere moments, she went from nearly enjoying her favorite feeling in the entire world to being homeless. She stared up at the white two story house where, until minutes ago, she spent her whole life.

What am I going to do now? she wondered while fighting back tears. She knew it was too late to cry. Too late to do a lot of things, she supposed. She reached into her pocket and fingered the folded piece of paper that resided there. It had slipped her mind that she had put it there after meeting the strange man, and she drew it out of pocket with care. She unfolded the note to see what was written on it. In

all her rush to get home and up to her room she had forgotten to read it earlier. It took a few seconds to unfold the letter and when it was finally open Laura was surprised not to see a note at all. Instead, lay bare on the page in front of her were a name and an address: Todd - 14 Beecher Ave, Shelton.

Laura looked at the address contemplatively. Shelton was two towns away, ten miles easily, and her car keys were lock inside the house. It didn't seem feasible that her mom would give her the keys, but what was she going to do here? Wait around for her mother's forgiveness?

No, she decided, I don't want it. She looked down at her bare feet and sighed. "It's going to be a long walk," she mused to herself.

Laura started with her left foot and followed it with her right. Her bare feet pressed against the pavement, and stray pebbles and other sharp objects dug into her feet. She put her hands in her sweater pockets and hung her head slightly as she walked down the street. Each step was painful, but she saw the pain as a necessary penance for her sins. Each step brought her closer to peace, closer to personal forgiveness. She turned onto a main street that would lead her towards Shelton.

Cars passed by, and their passengers stared at the strange hippie girl walking slowly down the road. The November sky was overcast, and while Laura was relieved it wasn't hot out, she eyed the sky worriedly hoping it wouldn't rain.

The miles passed. Laura's muscles were aching and her feet were bleeding. The blood was leaving red footprints in her wake, and every once in a while she would turn around and see how far back into the distance she could still see them. The sky started to rain on her, drizzling at first, but then opening up into a cold, steady rain.

Laura trudged on, her sweater getting heavy from all the water. She tossed it on the side of the road when the weight became unbearable and it was no longer doing the job of keeping her shivering body warm. The rain seeped through her tank top quickly exposing her to the world. Cars honked and she heard catcalls as they drove by. She ignored them as best she could, and she

crossed her arms across her chest self consciously as she walked on. The rain felt good in a way. It washed her, cleansed her of her past and made her ready for the future.

Laura was almost there. She had been walking for about two hours, nearly half of it in the pouring rain. Her clothes were soaked through, and it felt as if her skin had become saturated as well. The feet that had carried her the entire way felt numb, and each step she took got harder and harder.

I made it, Laura thought. She looked up through the rain and saw the sign for Beecher Ave. She pulled the damp note out of her pocket, and, even though the ink was starting to bleed into an indecipherable mess, she could still make out the number 14. Her journey was almost at an end, and she forced her feet to move more quickly as she got nearer to Todd's house.

What's he going to say? she thought as she passed 8 Beecher Ave. He'll understand, God I hope he understands, she continued as she passed 10 Beecher Ave. Her brisk walk turned into a desperate jog as her destination came into sight.

14 Beecher Ave. was right in front of her, it's white picket fence and gate seemed to come from a decade long past. It was perfect she thought. The houses around it were yellow and white and its two storied barn red frame stood head and shoulders above its neighbors. Just the kind of place he should live, she thought as she approached the gate. She slowed her jog down to a walk, and reached her hand out through the rain and pushed the gate tentatively. It gave with no resistance.

Laura walked past it and followed the cement walkway to the front porch stairs. She looked at them, and then looked at her feet. They were a mess of blood and road debris and she prayed they'd be able to make the last few steps of her journey. She lifted the left one on to the first step and winced with pain. I can do this, she thought. Another step, another shot of pain tore through her.

"Almost... there," she gasped as she took another step. With two steps to go, Laura's feet gave out on her, and she pitched forward onto the porch, her shins and knees scraping on the last steps. Under the awning of the porch, the rain couldn't

touch her, and Laura cracked a faint smile. I may be in pain, she thought, but at least I'm out of the rain.

Laura crawled towards the doorbell using her arms to drag her near useless body towards it. Only a few feet more, she thought. She reached up toward the button, but lying there she couldn't reach it. "Damn it," she hissed. She pressed her hands against the porch and leveraged herself onto her bruised and bloody knees. A gasp of pain escaped her lips as the rain echoed around her. She turned her attention back to the doorbell. She reached out, leaned forward, and stretched her finger towards the button. I made it, she thought, I finally made it. I'm ready for the future.

The clock started again. Laura opened her eyes and looked down at the needle waiting to be plunged into her vein. She let out a breath and injected the heroin into her arm.



Minerva Miller  
#3

## The Boiling Pot

Michael Molina

A frog thrown into the water of a boiling pot

will know whether to jump out or not.

A frog in water heated slow

is destined to be boiled but will never know.

When the frog realizes something is amiss,

that's when Death will give it her final kiss.

Minerva Miller  
*Cracked*



## The Couple at the Play

Deb Torres

I noticed them as I was scanning the room. I spotted her first. Her head was tilted to the side and she was smiling in her special way. He sat attentively by her side glancing over every few minutes. I didn't want to stare, but I was fascinated at his apparent love and devotion for her.

They were somewhere in the sixties; probably married thirty or forty years. A younger couple sat to his right, I imagined they were their daughter and son-in-law.

Every so often I would check to make sure they were still there. That he was still displaying his unconditional love. At one point, she left the room, probably to go to the bathroom. A couple of woman accompanied her.

After some time passed, I worried she might not come back, but at one point I looked over and there she was. I started to become engrossed in the play sharing in the collective laughter at the actors' antics. I was periodically distracted as I checked my hobby of interest to make sure they were enjoying it too. They were.

She was laughing, and he was laughing with her; stretching his arm over to pat her on the shoulder. She clapped- tapping fingers to fingers, like those aristocratic women did.

The night's mood was bittersweet. I would laugh at the humor of the play one minute then glance across the room to stare in sadness. I wanted to stand up and scream, "It's not fair damn it, it's just not fair!" I wondered who the hell I thought I was to presume their life was somehow less fulfilled than mine.

I turned my attention back to the end of the play, my friends who I cherish, and this precious life that I love so.

I realized it isn't appropriate to judge. We all make our way with the cards we've been dealt. I wondered how life could be so grand for some and such a trial for others.

I wondered if she hated that her head was tilted permanently and her smile fixed as she struggled to breathe through that damn tube attached to that damn chair!

I said a prayer for their continued health and happiness and went on to the bar with my friends to hear some head banging rock-in-roll. Later I would go home and snuggle up into a ball in my bed.

At least that would be my choice- not my life-style. Thank God!



Henry Gomes *Off in the distance*

## The Lulu Doll

Remi Abdu

# Dead.

Geena is dead. As much as I chant those three words, I cannot seem to get myself to understand the magnitude of their collective meaning.

Geena.

Is.

Dead.

Geena is dead. Geena is dead? What the hell is that supposed to mean? That there isn't going to be a seventh birthday? That I won't be picking Geena up after her ballet classes? That no one will eat peanut butter straight out of the jar? That I won't hear Geena say "I love you Daddy!" anymore?

What?!

Geena is dead. What the flaming fuck does it mean? That my sweet little six year old daughter has been plucked out of life so violently? And for what? What reason? What possible purpose did it have? Why was it necessary? But how could it be necessary? How could finding your daughter - your six year-old daughter - with her eyes ripped out and the volume of her blood drained and soaked into her bedroom carpet have a purpose or reason?

The detectives didn't find any evidence of a break in or forced entry. They also couldn't find Geena's eyes - her beautiful amber eyes. They couldn't find them. That's why the detectives think it was some ritual killing. And now, because of the circumstances of the case and the fact that I am an archaeologist with odd artifacts in my house, I am a suspect.

Me! A suspect!

"But I'm her father!" I yelled at the detectives when they let me know of their interest in me.

The detectives replied by saying: "We find that most of our juvenile victims' attackers are close family members."

And do you know the funny thing about this whole situation? Shannon blames me too. Well, she doesn't name me the murderer, but she thinks it's my

fault our daughter is dead. Of course, Shannon knows I wasn't the one who reached into Geena's eye sockets and extracted our lovely daughter's eyes, but she still thinks it's my fault.

Somehow, I don't blame her for holding me responsible. Somehow, I agree. I may not have murdered our daughter, but I was at home with her when it happened and I was still unable to protect our little girl.

"You were at home, Allen," Shannon had told me that day in the park. We were sitting at the spot where she always brought Geena. It was one of those days that defined Autumn. Littered ground. Scarlet leaves. Barren trees. And yes, the air smelt of sick fever. This was a week after she had moved out of the house with Derrick. She couldn't stand being in the house, especially with the mystery of our daughter's death still trapped within it, so she moved out and took our son with her. I, on the other hand, will be captive in this house till it releases the secrets of my daughter's death.

"You were at home with her," Shannon had repeated when I hadn't responded. She was watching the little kids on the playground. Her steady stare was locked upon their cheery disposition. I could see that their merry screams mocked her. They jabbed her like a finger between the eyes. I remember, never as such innocent high-spirits seemed so sinister, so heartless. Her stare did make her appear distant, but even with this distance, you could see the longing within her eyes. Shannon wants her Geena back. Well, so do I.

"I don't understand how you could be at home and not hear her scream, Allen."

Of course, at the moment she had said this, I wanted to reply by asking whether she had relayed those exact words to Derrick. But he is tormented with as much guilt as I am, especially when he was in his room when it happened - the room next to Geena's.

"I - I had my headphones on and-and the music was turned up pretty loud," Derrick had stammered when the detective's had inquired whether he had heard any struggle or scream from his sister's room.

Poor Derrick. My poor son. He's fallen into the same darkness that has overwhelmed his mother and me. Consumed in so much guilt, is he, he voluntarily has started spending time with his mother, and he has stopped doing...whatever he does when he is alone in his room and on one of those websites. Shannon doesn't have the heart to torment him as she does me. But I know deep within her, she blames him. Right now, she can only punish me.

Shannon is filled with so much agony. Shannon is filled with so much grief. She tells me she is filled with rage that is directed toward me. I believe her; she won't let me see Derrick. She keeps sending me pictures of Geena in her ballet outfit with "Where were you, Daddy?" written at the back of it. She really needs to lash out at someone. And I let her do all the lashing at me because I believe I deserve it. I wasn't far from Geena. I was just in the basement. Yes, the basement door and Geena's bedroom door were closed. But still, I should have heard her scream. We were under the same roof.

There couldn't have not been a scream. There's no way a human being could bear such pain without vocal recognition of the pain. And anyway, there was evidence in the room that Geena had tried reaching for the door after her eyes were gone - a bloody trail led from her bed to the front of her door. She must have called for me in her search for it. She must have been screaming for her daddy. But he didn't come. He wasn't there to save her.

"You were at home, Allen, and you couldn't protect our daughter," Shannon had said. She hadn't looked at me since the beginning of the conversation. She was still transfixed on the children in front of her. I, on the other hand, hadn't said one word.

"I just don't understand any of it, Allen. I'm trying to comprehend the whole situation, but my mind can't wrap around how someone could have gotten into the house, mutilated our daughter and gotten out without you or Derrick hearing a thing."

I've wondered whether she kicks herself for being away that weekend on her business trip. I've wondered how many times she has re-enacted the whole

Saturday evening with her at home and her apprehending the psycho herself. Oh Shannon. You gallant supermum.

"You were there, Allen. You let someone come into our house and do... do... do this to our daughter and get away with it." Shannon was crying now.

"I don't think I could forgive you for that," she drew a sob. "You know, my mind tells me that I shouldn't blame you... that you are beating yourself hard enough as it is, but my heart won't let me not hate you.

The killer is still out there, Allen. And just that fact boils my insides. I need a scapegoat, Allen, and right now there is only you."

Shannon took in a deep breath to collect herself before she continued:

"I don't want a divorce... at least, I don't think so. But I need some time away from you, Allen. I just need some space to think and heal away from you."

Those are the last ill words my wife said to me. They are the last words I've heard from her. She stopped taking my calls.

Oh Shannon. My wife. The love of my life. The heartless bitch. The frigid whore.

She has left me alone in this house to fend for myself. I could always abandon this fruitless space, but I cannot leave Geena. She is still in this house. I feel her spirit emanating from every crevice-parting hole in here. I need to find out what happened to her. I need to know what had transpired at that last moment of her life.

So I stalk the length of the house, searching - an act that has become a ritual bordering towards obsession. Searching for anything the detectives have overlooked. The new coat of dust collected on the coffee table. The impossible space between each wooden piece of the floorboard. The keyhole of the kitchen and front door. The ceiling. The murderer must have left something behind. But hours pass without any result.

Soon enough, I realize the futility of my actions, and I collapse on the kitchen floor with my tears. I feel violated. It was my daughter, but I feel like I am the one who was physically violated. Not knowing what happened drives me

crazy. I still don't understand why anyone would want to hurt my Geena - my sweet daughter. I am consumed with so much guilt, I can't even find the energy to pent up my rage toward the fucker who did this.

I can only think of Geena now. How she laughed at my stupid jokes. How she watched Spongebob early on Saturday mornings in just her underwear.

I still remember our last vacation to the Virgin Islands. It was just a few weeks ago, but it feels like a century has passed since the vacation when everything was still normal. Derrick was his old self - reclusive from his family and very interested in ladies in bikinis. Geena was alive. Shannon loved me. I had used the opportunity to research on some of the pagan rituals still practiced on the island.

We were on Saint Croix when I decided to go examine an old shrine. Geena had tagged along while Derrick and Shannon had stayed on the beach. I still remember how excited Geena had been to come and watch me work - she still didn't understand what I really did.

"Daddy gets to play around in dirt and gets paid for it?" she had asked once. The excitement in her golden eyes had fueled my thoughts. I had imagined her following my lead and becoming an archaeologist too. She had shown genuine interest in some of the artifacts in the shrine. And she'd even shown that she had a keen sense of what was a valuable find.

For instance, she had been very attached to a wooden, hand-carved idol that appeared to have West African origins. It was probably over 5000 years old - the mahogany had gone dark and worn off considerably, but the idol still had such defined details. I really wanted to examine it, but the local priest prohibited it - something about it being cursed, I didn't really understand his dialect of English.

Anyway, Geena had christened the idol the Lulu doll. She was a remarkable child. Any other seven year old girl would have been terrified of its hideous appearance. Jagged teeth. Hollow eyes. Wooden claws. Drooping breasts. Even I felt a bit intimidated with the idol's profile. But not Geena, she wasn't scared.

She found the idol's raffia skirt cute. And she had asked whether she could give the idol a manicure!

Oh, Geena. You were remarkable. The Lulu doll, that's what she had called it. She'd called the idol a doll!

I collect my thoughts on the kitchen floor, but the kitchen floor secures no warmth. A cold chill has invaded its way up my naked toes and fingers. My fingers are stained with something too. Mud. The mud is still on the floor - the mud stolen in by all the police officers and forensic team that has swept through this cold kitchen. I collect myself, hands and feet, legs hugged to chest, and back against the kitchen floor cabinet.

It's funny how cold I feel in here when the memories found in this room are still fresh right out of the oven. Geena helping Shannon bake her Girl Scout cookies. Geena breaking one of Shannon's favorite china. Geena trying pointlessly to reach for the cabinets above the sink. Geena. This room is still fresh with Geena. It's usually warm, you see. I always thought the air in here was so warm and sweet, one could eat it. But all that is gone now. All that I have left to keep me warm are my memories. I will gnaw on them, and just for a little while.

The dimming of the setting sun finally wakes me from my thoughts and I decide to go check Geena's bedroom windows for the hundredth time. I may find something new this time. I may discover that someone may have actually broken in through Geena's windows and slipped back out the same way. I may find the smoking gun - as they call it - that would prove to the detectives that someone did break into my house, hence, finally proving that I am not responsible for my daughter's death.

I leave the shadow that remains of my kitchen, and allow my wary legs carry me up the stairs. I pass Derrick's room and his door is open... it's never open. I hastily close it just to bring some normalcy back into the house and step back. Stare. Their doors stand side by side, Derrick's and Geena's. Derrick was on the other side of the wall when it happened. He was completely oblivious to his

sister dying next door. He was so close...so close. Could he have been in danger too? What could he have done? He could have cried out for help. Would that have saved Geena... my Geena?

I step right in front of Geena's door. The door still has "Geena's Room" written with sea shells colored in pink, red and purple on it. Every time I pass this door, I imagine her strolling out in her cute little ballet outfit, all okay with her amber eyes still in her head, smiling.

She'd been dead for a whole hour before I found her on her bedroom floor, the coroner said. A whole hour!! She'd been alone on the cold floor in her own blood for a whole hour. And I was downstairs while her brother was just at the other side of the wall. We were right there while she died ...while she slipped away... while she bled to death... while she cried in pain.

The misery...I'm surprised I haven't been charged with gross neglect. But the pain makes me dizzy. Staring at Geena's door makes me dizzy. I still remember, you know. I remember calling for her from behind her closed door. I remember opening the door while rapping my knuckles on Derrick's, shouting: "Okay guys, time to go get some dinner. We're eating out!"

Geena's door had eased open with a little urge from me. I first saw her bloodied fingers sprawled on the floor over her head like they were reaching for something - the door maybe. The door opened wider and there she was, lying in her own soaked pool. Her shag carpet had absorbed most of the blood. She was lying on her chest and her head was facing her left shoulder. I could see that her eyes were gone.

I can't really remember much after that. Come to think of it, I don't even remember whether I first noticed her eyes were gone when I was standing by the door or when I had her in my arms, screaming, calling for her.

I'm not sure if I even screamed for Derrick. I just remember his appearing at the door. His eyes were wide and had lost their light when I looked back at him. I recall telling - screaming at him to call 911. He didn't move. He didn't move when I told him to do so. He just stared at us. He just stared at me

holding on to what was left of my Geena.

Did Derrick move at all? I forget. Oh, yes he did. I threw a shoe at him - one of Geena's gym shoes. He ran off to the phone when I did so, but even as I saw him scurry to get help, I knew it was too late. Geena was already cold. Her skin felt lifeless, clammy.

I held her bloody head in my palms, still screaming. I gaped at her hollowed eye sockets. I was screaming, did I mention that? What was I screaming again? Where are my baby's eyes?! Where are my baby's eyes?

They were gone. They are gone. And they left with Geena.

I'm trying to find the courage to open her door now. It's hard because I'm afraid I'd find her in there, dead again just like I do when I close my eyes.

But I find nothing this time. All I find is her empty room, her stained rug and the smell of her blood. The sight overwhelms me and I rush to sit on her barren bed. I take in deep breathes but it only makes it worse. I feel my body repel the stagnant smell of my daughter's blood, and I vomit, convulsing violently. My head starts spinning again - it never really stopped - so I let gravity pull me to the ground where my vomit lies.

I do not attempt to get up. It's actually my intention to lie here forever. I imagine Geena lying here with her eyes gone. Did she start crawling from this spot?

I feel sicker. Maybe I should call... wait... I see something. It's under Geena's bed. A toy? No, a doll. Can it be? Shannon had cleared the room of Geena's things.

I reach for it, my cheeks sliding on what my digestive tract had expelled. My fingers brush the object, so I stretch more for it. The object is further away than I thought, but my fingers manage to pull it close, and I bring the doll to the light.

But it's not a doll; I see now that there is illumination upon it. It's a wooden... carved out object. I recognize it. It's an idol. It's the idol... from Saint Croix. It's the Lulu doll - Geena's Lulu doll.

What is it doing here? How did it get... oh, Geena. Now I see. She stole it.

I lift myself off the ground, filthied in my own vomit. Now that there is more lighting, I find dried blood on the idol. I let it slip off my fingers immediately because I know whose blood it is.

A hard 'thud' accompanies its collision with the floor. My heart starts racing when I notice something is different about the idol. There is something different about its features - something that has to do with its eyes.

They are no longer hollow. They now have eyelids - with long lashes that look very detailed. I decide to pick it up again when an eyelid lifts.

My hand jerks back. Not because the eyelid opened, but at what the eyelid had uncovered.

There is an eye lying beneath the eyelid. A miniature, but yet, very real looking eye. I see light reflect in those eyes in a way that is familiar to me.

The eyelid closes and the other opens just as confidently. An identical eye lies beneath the newly opened eyelid. The air around me is starting to thin away. My insides go sullen and sink like something is wrong. I am scared, and I don't know why.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

Why am I scared?

I realize now that the idol's eyes are amber.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

Why am I scared? Is it because I now realize I have found my daughter's eyes.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

Unimaginable horror washes over me, but not without confusion. I try to comprehend what my brain is trying to warn me, but I cannot make any sense out of it... or don't want to at least.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

I open my mouth to say something, but realize that I can't.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

In fact, I realize I can't move a muscle in my body. I drop to the floor, yet again, but this time, much harder.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

I'm scared, but more miserable. I can only think of Geena and how she felt. I start to cry. Her death was more horrible than I thought.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

I feel a stab of excruciating pain beneath my lower jaw. I want to scream, but it won't let me. It didn't let Geena. My tears trickle down my cheeks. They itch.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

The pain radiates to the rest of my lower jaw and into my upper jaw. It now feels like someone is pulling my teeth out with a pair of pliers. I scream silently. I'm horrified now. I can't imagine my daughter going through this - my sweet six year old daughter.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

It now occurs to me that I might die. I'm scared and the feeling makes me feel worse about Geena, the fact that she died alone, petrified without being able to call anyone - without being able to move.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

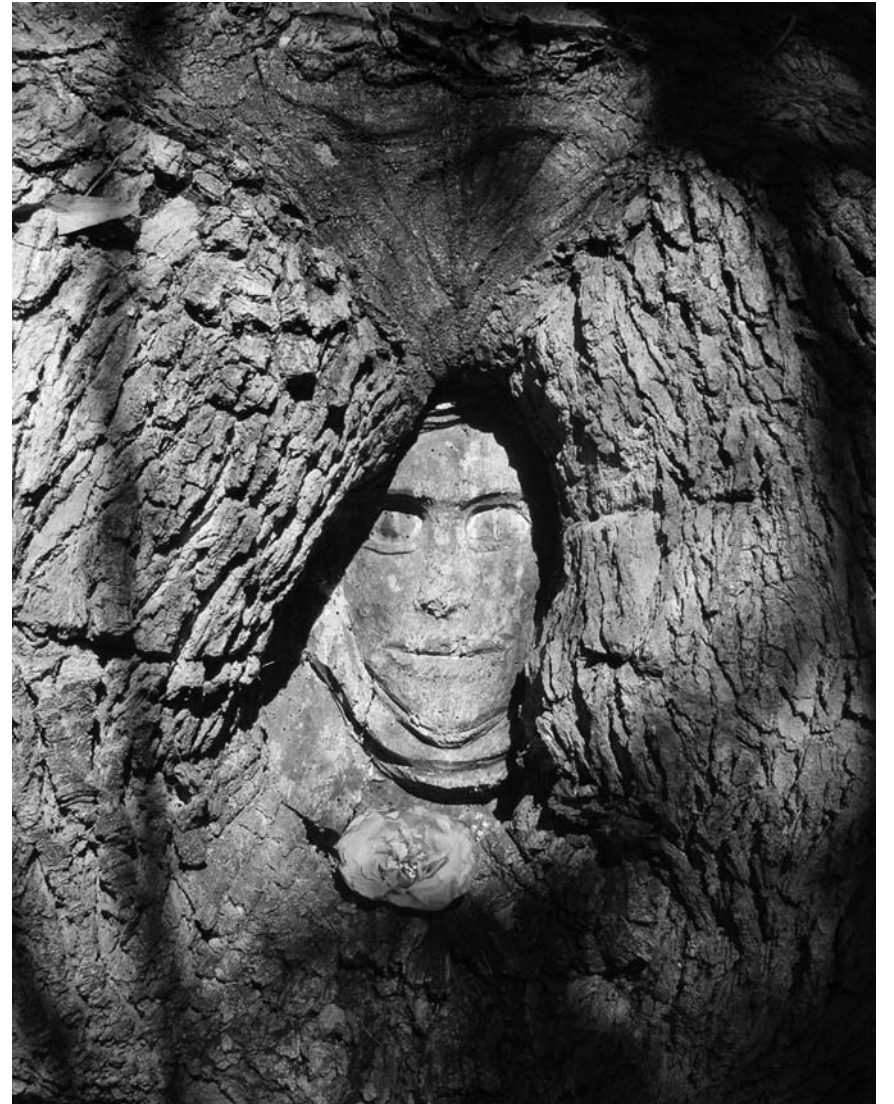
I can feel blood rushing out from my mouth now. It's really gushing. Tastes like iron. Crude. I suddenly can feel my fingers move. My voice isn't back, but I can definitely move, slowly. My tongue shifts and realizes that its company-teeth are gone. I kinda expected that. But I didn't expect the idol to smile back at me with a set of starling white dentition.

The eyelid closes and the other opens.

I accidentally swallow some of the outpour and start to choke. My sobs are audible now. I don't really think my tears are for me. They are more for Geena - my Geena, my sweet little girl. She must have been so scared - so alone, and I had only been downstairs. I had only been that close. I don't bother making it for the door. I don't bother moving. I don't want to. The idol smiles at me; it knows.

The eyelid closes...  
Oh, Geena, my sweet, sweet Geena.  
... and the other...  
Daddy's coming.  
... opens.

David Paulson  
*Face*



## To a Free Bird

Brandon T. Bisceglia

### A melodious breeze is rolling

over chilled hills drowned  
and left barren by a receding ocean  
of stygian corruption slipping  
southerly to infest the maturation  
of proud men's crops.

It smells of river dumping grounds  
capitulating in swirling blue-grey  
brownish churning briny whirlpools  
where wretched mollusk corpses  
rest and rot in mounds of cool white  
pearly treasure-troving shininess.

Up runs the air,  
retracting and compressing  
in warm  
burlesque-sweat.

Hardening and pounding, pressing  
sloppy cramped buzzes  
of exertion cling mercilessly  
to your neck  
and run dribbling infant drippings  
tracking inch inch inch inch  
past the downward swoop of shoulder  
drawing the earth to it.

It crushes.  
You fall discarding  
dress and thought  
and faint, slow to pause  
and finish face-down  
in the puddles of black-baked heat  
that claw at the nerves of your skin  
to bleed them unceremoniously.

Drink it up.  
It lasts all day,  
and only cools the coiling wind of  
street leading to nowhere  
every night.

## David Paulson

*Flock*



## Viva Las Begs Us for More

Jamie Quaranta

### Picturesquely blue sky

flying out of LaGuardia;  
not a single gas-laden haze cloud  
foaming up from down below.

Good six hours later,  
With a view of an iconic American  
Canyon  
To boot,  
inconvenient wait for luggage  
before bona fide giddiness  
finally starts to stretch its  
flamboyantly Showgirl-style  
wings.

Both glitzy and grimy  
hotels, casinos, and resorts  
await my percolating eyes.  
Only to find out pure, great  
Distractive, neon-lit,  
vibrant, and ultimately profound  
flash all around.

Breakfast is like a good solid poker's  
tournament.



James Christophe  
*Sea and sun*

Lunch is like a healthy  
Cosmopolitan-like model  
walking right next to your “normal”  
self,  
even if it’s a sensual trip up an  
incredibly  
realistic yet truly faux Eiffel Tower.  
Dinner is like a not-so-bleak,  
post-apocalyptic,  
Ultrafuturistic society in which  
smooth, sexy jazz  
Accompanies a hearty, urbanely  
entrée and a  
slow, silky rotation of a sexy and  
vigorous  
nocturnal landscape.

Slot machines and craps,  
what better way to spend a day  
than that of a testosterone-fueled,  
crisply sunlit afternoon.  
But water illuminations  
on each sleepless night,  
what better recipe  
than that of a romantically yet  
non-sexually fresh night.  
Blue Men’s show of  
heart-pulverizing percussion,  
Avant-gardist slapstick, plus  
outrageously exuberant

Audience participation  
before the dawn of midnight.

Slot machines and craps,  
what better way to spend another day  
than that of a testosterone-fueled,  
crisply sunlit afternoon.  
But water illuminations  
on my last of sleepless nights,  
what better recipe  
than that of a romantically yet  
non-sexually fresh night  
before all said and done.

Scintillating yet misty nighttime sky  
flying back to La Guardia  
not too long  
before midnight;  
not a single moistureless substance  
darting down my eye.

