

w49



a magazine of award-winning poetry,
fiction and creative non-fiction
vol.15

EDITORIAL

W49, the little magazine of award-winning writing, has been a starting place for Langara students and graduates who have decided to bravely take the plunge into the sometimes turbulent but always intriguing public world of creative writing. Indeed it is the aim of the Langara Writing Contest—to which all of these works were originally submitted—to prompt writers into taking the first step into that world. For well over a decade we have been the college's printed venue for poetry, short fiction (and now graphic short narrative) and creative nonfiction that might never be read by anybody but their authors. As everybody who has ever sat staring at a blank sheet of paper or at an empty white screen knows, writing is extraordinarily hard work.

We are proud to say that this issue of W49, Volume 15, marks the first time that the magazine will be on display—and for sale—at the Langara Bookstore. That, coupled with the online version we have had up and running since Volume 13, means that these written works will find readers far beyond the audience we had in mind when we put out our very first issue in the last century.

The layout and design of this milestone issue of W49 is the work of Mina Deol, a student in Langara's Publishing Program. Her patience and talents are very much appreciated and we thank her for her dedication of seeing this issue through to completion. Her professionalism and creative energies are testament to the high level of students we have at Langara. We also thank Jessica Wilkin, a graduate of the Publishing Program, for the engaging logo, which we first used in Volume 13 and, under Mina's expertise, we re-introduced for Volume 15.

On behalf of the editors, congratulations to all the writers whose work appears in this new issue of W49.

Peter Babiak
English Department

The Editors: Peter Babiak, Karen Budra, Heather Burt, Jill Goldberg, Carolyne Harvey, Paul Headrick, Felicia Klingenberg, Ramon Kubicek, Trevor Newland, Roger Semmens, Jacqueline Weal, John Webb, Guy Wilkinson.

It was an honor to be chosen as the design and layout artist for W49, Volume 15, and my thanks to Peter Babiak for allowing me creative freedom. I hoped to present the talented works of Langara students and alumni in the most pleasing format. The cover is a reflection of my fascination and love of German minimalist design. Enjoy the read!
— Mina Deol

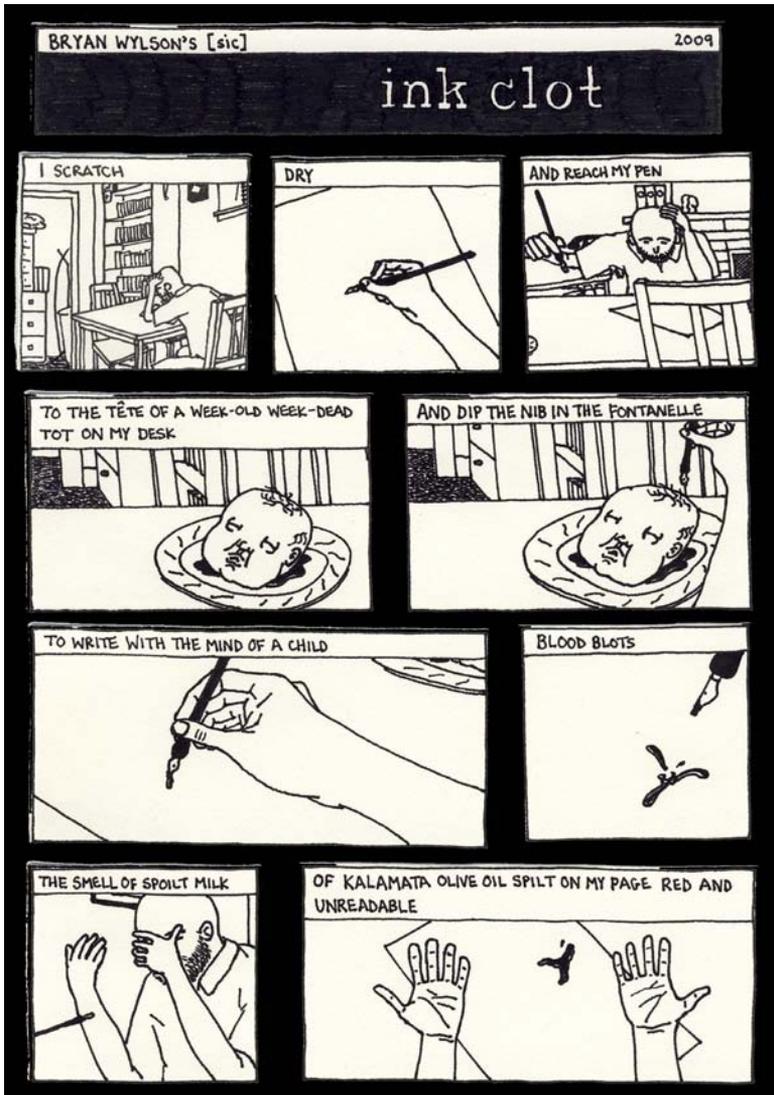
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POETRY

FIRST PRIZE | *BRYAN WYLSON*

Ink Clot





P O E T R Y

HONORABLE MENTION | RYAN FOSTER

Mr. Swan, High School Shop Teacher

You're doing it wrong
says Swan before he smashes
a fluorescent tube
across Mitch's calves.

Don't breathe that in now.
He laughs. The class laughs;
Mitch mouthbreathes. And Swan
returns to help me fit gaskets.

His body is Frosty the Snowman's twin,
wrapped in duck-shit green coveralls,
and I just know his hip-snugged belt
must be scratching his paunch underside.

Swan's hands are a mess of machine-chiselled nails
with blueblack cuticles, stained and *softened*
from forty years of scrubbing bolts in 15W-40.
He pinkie points at the gaskets,

talks me through, ratchet crank by crank,
separating manifold from engine block. *Repeat.*
He squints, silent, and wiggles his round specs
with an ear-flare. *Again.*

Class ends in desks, our greased coveralls
rolled to our waists. Swan leans
against the chalkboard lip.

Girls and Lady,

he jabs a little finger at Carla,
the class Buick,
and strokes his kegged belly,
we're done.

SHORT FICTION

FIRST PRIZE | *DELIA BYRNES*

Reveille

The dead ones you don't notice stink the most." His voice was hoarse and raspy, a serrated blade in the thick late-summer heat. He cleared his throat.

"So just make sure you pull em all out. I come out here and find rotting ones, you don't come here anymore."

The boy nodded, his fist tightening around a pile of stems on the ground beside him. He pressed his knees into the loose dry dirt.

The man stood up and coughed, patting his chest pocket. His whitish hair had the yellowed tinge of old lace from decades of cigarette smoke.

"I'll be inside. When you're done come and get me. Knock loud."

He turned and scuffled a few paces.

"You've done a good job so far," he said, as an afterthought, without turning around.

A delicate white picket fence hemmed the front yard, every ten slats marked by a tall, sturdy post that kept the whole thing rigidly erect, an assembly line of soldiers to convoy the garden. When the boy turned and scanned the fence he saw the glimmer of a blue eye, a white slat, a blue eye. He kept working and they kept watching.

Car brakes whined at the end of the block and a steel-blue sedan slid up to the curb. Summerland Realty stretched across the passenger-side doors. A man in a slate-gray suit stepped out, his skin shining in the sunlight. A line of sweat beaded on his upper lip; he wiped it with his wrist and walked toward the gate. In the swollen August heat, every sound expanded. The boy rested his hands on his thighs and listened as the man's feet thumped the oily asphalt. A motorboat roared across Okanagan Lake below them.

“Hey there. Bertul home? I’ve got some papers for him to sign.”

The boy glanced at the back door of the house and nodded.

The man reached over the fence and felt around for the latch. His fingers were cloying with sweat as he fumbled to open the gate. He reached the back door in twelve long paces and rapped on the window.

The boy turned his attention to the garden and leaned back on his heels. If he stretched back far enough, the quarter-acre long rows of sunflowers shaded him from the first blow of the morning sun. There was no wind in the garden, only a puff of lethargy. The heat moved like a sloth, its fingers pulling on plant leaves until they drooped from dehydration. The boy blew on a petal hanging limply from a flower and watched it pirouette. From the side of the house came the smell of corn where stalks lined up against the wall. Their ears hung heavily off the spires. The sweet smell of tomatoes mingled with it but the boy made a game of keeping the scents separate. He eyed a finger of roots that shot up from a flowering hawthorn nearby.

Forty minutes later, the visitor reappeared, this time with Gregor Bertul following. The stranger walked ahead of the old man and looked around the expanse of property. In the vacant lot to the right of the yard, a John Deere tractor slouched toward the garden. The boy fixed his glance on the pile of leaves in front of him and feigned disinterest as the forms of the men throbbed in his periphery. The black-haired man shook Bertul’s hand and folded a sheet of paper into his breast pocket. As he walked off he left soft footprints in the arid soil. The ground was that dry. The boy crumbled it between his fingers. Bertul should water it more or else all the flowers would dry out. Maybe he didn’t know.

“You’re done for the day, Caleb. Good job. Come up here.”

The boy stood up and dusted off his legs, his knees wobbling with preadolescence as he arose. He carried the shears and the old laundry detergent tub of dead leaves over to Bertul. The man put his hands on the boy’s shoulders and turned him around.

“You see this?”

Caleb nodded heavily and waited for Bertul to say something more. He didn’t, so the boy let his gaze slacken and wander over the property.

The rows were neat and orderly. Unlike all the ladies' gardens, Bertul's design was violent. No pale colours. Fiery lewisia grew close to the ground, condensing the heat in its flowers. Where pink and red petals emerged they looked like blisters in the sun. Fuchsia yarrow was next, four rows. These ones lost their buds quickly and rivers of tiny petals flowed like blood over the soil. With his nose to the ground, the boy swore he could smell iron. At the far end of the garden were newly planted hydrangea, but they weren't like anyone else's. These were cold blue, the raging cool of glaciers, not the soft powder-blue of garden parties. Caleb gulped them with his eyes and wiped the sweat from his hairline.

"No one else has a garden like this, boy," Bertul said. "Vera comes over yesterday and I hear her say the colours are garish. This is after her own garden is hacked all to pieces. She goes on and on about how nice Ruth's back garden was and what a shame someone ransacked it, the flowers were so soft and pretty, she kept saying," his voice rose in pitch, affecting the generic inflection of an old woman while his fingers danced in the air behind Caleb's ears. "It's doubtless some rowdy who doesn't like pointless prettiness. That's what I told her."

"You think they're garish?" His voice tightened and he gripped the boy's shoulders as he looked at the yard.

"No."

"What do you think of when you see them?"

Caleb shrugged. Bertul growled and removed his hands.

"I'll see you Thursday morning, nine o'clock. Here."

He placed a hot and wrinkly ten-dollar bill in the boy's palm.

As Caleb scuttled down the path he saw the blue eye, white slat, blue eye hiding on the other side of the fence. His pace slowed and he chewed his lip but kept moving. They squinted after him.

Bertul positioned himself on the top step of the porch and strained his eyes to trace the periphery of the vacant lot. A bulging manila envelope sat beside him. He shuffled out a small round container of snuff from his shirt pocket and the lid of the two-by-two tin clinked open as

he took out a pinch of tobacco. Shoving it in his cheek, he watched twilight settle on the garden. The heat drifted up on the air and hung above the plant heads, waiting. Crickets buzzed and hinges squealed as porch doors wedged open. Bertul grunted and moved back in the house as the neighbourhood families settled on their porches for post-dinner languor and the quiet was beaten off like a ravaging dog. The evening burst of noise lasted only until dark. Dark, much like afternoon heat, ran people indoors. At ten o'clock Bertul flicked off the outside floodlights and a few minutes later the lights inside the house extinguished. Still at the fence, the blue eye, white slat, blue eye. And then they disappeared.

“Got a gun.”

Caleb stood inside Bertul's house, his feet planted on the water-marked linoleum floor of the kitchen. The air was musty and thick with the smell of animal fat and vegetables. In the next room, a white parakeet sat in a cage beside an armchair. It cocked its head toward the boy.

“Got a gun.”

“I have him trained to scare off robbers,” Bertul said, motioning toward the cage.

He shuffled around the kitchen, his slippers occasionally catching on the edge of a curling floor tile. The room was bare and the ceiling splattered with dots of oil. Caleb moved toward the bird and sat on the couch, waiting for Bertul. The only thing breaking the monotony of the maize-coloured walls was a dark wooden table, scattered with papers.

“Here.”

Bertul shoved a plate in Caleb's lap. It held four springerle cookies embossed with milkmaids. Caleb bit off a head and grinned.

“Good?”

He nodded. His eyes wandered over a framed photograph leaning against a leg of the desk. It was a black and white picture of a young man leaning against a Ju 52 airplane. His cheeks were full and his chin stuck out.

“Is that you?” Caleb asked.

Bertul stood and yanked on the shoulder of the boy's t-shirt.

"Not anymore."

The heat outside hit them like a tidal wave and made their eyes water. Caleb sat on the top step and gripped the plate in his lap. Bertul went ahead and stood in the pathway that led through the garden. He leaned forward.

"There's a snake sleeping in the grass."

He pulled his hand from his pocket and reached in front of him. His fingers were brown and leathery from the soil. He knelt down and picked up a garter snake and stood up slowly, raising it over his head. The sun was directly behind him. Caleb squinted to make out the shapes, the sliver of black writhing in the air, fracturing the sunlight, and the globular silhouette of the old man.

"What are you gonna do?"

"This is my lunch," Bertul said. He lowered the narrow, wriggling snake until its tail was inches from his mouth, twisting and squirming like a broken rubber band. He stood motionless, eclipsing the sun.

"Just teasing."

He lowered the flimsy snake and set it gently in the grass. Within a second it disappeared under a cluster of hydrangea.

"You're white as a sheet. I wasn't going to eat him."

Caleb straightened his shoulders and knotted his eyebrows.

"Once a man visiting my uncle in Osoyoos ate a red-bellied newt," the boy said.

"Did you see it?"

"Yeah. Its tail licked his lips until it disappeared."

"What kind of man eats a red-bellied newt?"

"He was a Pueblo Indian."

Caleb pronounced Pueblo pew-blow.

"So that means he eats newts?"

Caleb nodded.

Bertul leaned forward and began deadheading the sunflowers, his back to the boy.

“You didn’t see the Indian eat a newt,” he said softly.

Caleb’s cheeks flushed.

“Come help me with these.”

Bertul stood up stiffly and pointed to the far corner of the garden where the vegetables grew. Stalks of tomato plants were tied to wrought iron stakes, their stems slumped forward like tired shoulders. Caleb followed behind and watched for a moment as Bertul carefully peeled off the dead leaves that cradled the buds. The man looked beside him from the corner of his eye.

“Careful here, or heads will roll,” he said.

He kicked an old chunk of cabbage and watched it eddy along the floor of the vegetable patch. He laughed to himself.

Caleb looked at the sky.

“No one flies planes here,” he said.

He copied Bertul’s actions and tenderly plucked graying leaves from the tomatoes.

“No, people don’t want to fly themselves now.”

Bertul stretched up and braced his lower back.

“One more thing to do today. See that barberry over in the corner? It’s growing too wild and I want to keep it in before it takes over the garden. Go over and cut off any flowers that rise above the fence.”

He handed the shears to Caleb and wiped his forehead.

“I’ll be in the house, I’m getting tired. See you next Thursday morning.”

He surveyed the yard.

“Seems like summer stretches forever here,” he said. “She’s ten

months pregnant and won't let go yet."

Caleb turned and picked his way toward the corner of the property where velvety red barberry clung to the fence. He kept his eyes on the plant and knelt down. When he glanced up, he saw them behind the fence, right in front of him: the blue eye, white slat, blue eye. They blinked at him. He could see that her hair was parted in the middle and two blonde founts sprouted out. The hem of a blue gingham dress folded into the dry grass beneath her. She wasn't even trying to hide from him.

"Shh."

Caleb's cheeks drained of colour and his fingers tingled. He nodded.

"Don't say a word."

Her lips moved purposefully, slowly, the sounds reverberating on the heat waves.

Caleb shook his head and looked back down at the barberry bush. He focused his gaze on the handful of flowers that charged their way past the top of pickets. He forced his eyes on the tips of the shears as they chewed the stalks. Slowly, she became a blur of scenery. When he finished pruning the shrub, he scrunched the severed flowers in his palm and ran out of the yard.

"Here I am."

Caleb's voice cracked in the middle, forced and loud.

Bertul sat on the top step with a bulge in his cheek and the open tin of snuff beside him. He patted the porch and Caleb sat down.

"I don't like to look," Bertul said.

Caleb nodded and tucked his head down to mirror the man's. A wayward beard had settled on Bertul's face, white and black hairs growing every which way and obscuring his jaw line and chin. On Highway 97 below them, the report of horns echoed up the hill as the morning stream of trucks crawled alongside the lake and honked at the crossroads.

After a few minutes, Bertul looked up and Caleb followed. The sun

was high above them but the heat was still tolerable before midday. The sky was cobalt blue and a white curl shot through it, perforating the expanse as a jet sallied by. The garden was a ruined city. Sickled stalks lay on their sides. The spired amaranth bled into the hydrangea and the barberry petals covered the soil. Corn stalks had buckled at the knees and drained of color, and the air smelled green and wet from the chlorophyll that discharged in sticky spurts and clung to the garden floor.

Bertul sat on the edge of the top step. Caleb turned to him and his eyes wandered down the line of the man's figure. His hair was greasy and matted, his cheeks sallow. His eyes were gray, and his breath peppery and acrid from tobacco. He rested his hands on his knees. On the ground beneath him, the scarlet lewisia petals collected in a pool. 🌸

POETRY

SECOND PRIZE | *DANIEL GOWMAN*

Miss Lyssa

I see your lip curve up into
a smile;
profile on a pillow
your chiropractor recommended.
Eyes closed,
skin, wrapped
in your essence,
Your fingertips,
tip-toe down across my belly,
slide across my hip,
supple,
water runs over ancient stone
the way we form and follow
a caress.
Love is liquid
flowing between us
that stretches a life time wide,
catching beauty,
where
Your birth star,
a blessing,
kissed the horizon.
In the morning,
dew drops on your thigh.

FIRST PRIZE | *Melissa Patton*

The Heart and Soul of It

You know this illness is eventually going to kill you, right?" Hearing those words was something of a relief to me. Finally finding someone who had the courage to be honest was refreshing. Perhaps I was confusing courage with indifference. I'd known this to be true since I was five. I'd heard the doctors tell my parents, I'd heard my mother tell her friends and I had even found myself at times speaking those words to others, sometimes for sympathy but mostly for effect. I knew those words to be true and yet somehow I never believed they applied to me, I knew I was going to be different.

Different was an understatement, I never fit the mold, but it was not always for the obvious reasons. I looked sick and people pointed that truth out to me often, yet even when I did my best to look well, I was always different. I played outfield and never caught a single ball. I was an inflexible ballerina, an awkward tap dancer and a challenged gymnast. I used my illness as an excuse to get out of gym class until I realized that it was my only opportunity to socialize with the boys. I played soccer, basketball and volleyball, but I never fit in. I used to think it was my curse, now I know it is my gift, fitting in has got to be one of the most boring things a person could ever aspire to.

I wanted to go to medical school, I always felt that if a cure for my illness had not been found, then I would find one. My doctors feared that the stress of medical school would aggravate my health, ultimately believing that I would not live long enough to actually practice medicine. "What do you love? What is your dream?" As a child I had used acting as an escape, a way to hide my illness and the scars of my disease. When I was in makeup and costume, I could be anybody, I could be healthy. I decided to go acting school but it did not take long for them to realize that I had yet to come to terms with my illness. I used my attitude as a way to deflect my fear and anger. Acting school has a way of tearing down those layers until you are left standing knee deep

in your own denial. I remember being told that I would never make it as an actress because I looked too sick. I wanted to stay and fight, to prove them wrong, but a car accident gave me the necessary excuse to move on.

Fate intervened and I found myself on a snowboard hill with a location scout. A few phone calls later and I was working as a production assistant in the film industry, I had finally found my calling. It wasn't acting that I had been so drawn to as much as it was the magic of the process. I immersed myself in film for the next decade, slowly moving up until I had secured the title of assistant film director. It was an intriguing job which garnered the respect of strangers and it was something that I could be proud of. The film industry gave me the safety I needed to figure out who I was. It let me try and fail and try again, it judged me, but never too harshly and it always gave me a second chance. I often joke that the film industry employs the unemployable, not because we don't have great talent, but because we don't like to follow the rules. I was able to march to the beat of my own drum alongside a hundred other drummers, it was a perfect fit.

I did not wake up one day and realize that I had to change my life. There was no big epiphany, but there were many small miracles; lessons that I learned that led me irrevocably in new directions. Here is what I knew, I had an illness with a three to five year life expectancy and I had had it for over twenty years. I was living my life, but I was unable to plan my future. I was in immeasurable physical pain. I was blissfully unhappy. I was alone, lost and angry. Here is what else I knew, I was smart, determined, lucky, blessed and yet I was still angry. "Anger is a poison ivy in the heart and if it grows unchecked it covers all the soft spaces where you love and understand and feel joy. There's power in anger, sure, a power that can help you survive. But true wisdom is in knowing when to let it go." I had been searching for the right answers to the wrong questions. I had wanted a fix for my health, but it wasn't my health that was broken, it was my heart.

I embarked on a journey that will, if I am lucky, last me a lifetime. I still live with my illness, I eat healthy, I exercise, I meditate, I laugh and I love. I push the envelope every chance I get, skydiving, motorcycle riding, snowboarding, scuba diving, running marathons and half

marathons. I found a healing modality that -although it cannot cure my illness- I believe has saved my life. I walked away from everything that I knew in Vancouver to chase an imperfect and unrealistic dream. I learned what it meant to love myself truly. I found compassion in its rawest form. I allowed myself to be vulnerable without judging the experience. I saw how effortless it can all be if we have the courage to just 'be exactly who we are'. Who am I now? I am an assistant film director, a Certified Hellerwork Practitioner, a writer, a marathon runner, a traveler, a patient, a healer, a teacher, a student and a thirty-two year survivor, but most of all I am an inspiration. 🌈

*“I remember promising myself that should I live,
I would prove myself deserving of life.”
- Terry Fox*

POETRY

HONORABLE MENTION | *NIKOLAI DOBRINSKY*

Par for the Course

one mouth
 we share a beak
two souls
 in one parakeet
two soles
 one pair of feet
when i'm with you, there's a pair of me
i mimic you, you parrot me
it's like we share a pair of socks
without you, i'm a parody
 – a Philistine and a Pharisee
 – a paradox, apparently
i thought we lived in paradise
but i rolled a pair of dice, and lost
 now i'm a parasite
 impaired
 and scared to fight
 paranoid and paralyzed.

how can i paraphrase your behaviour in one paragraph or less –
 parallel to paranormal?

in Paris you said parenthood, in particular, was paramount
but i had a paroxysm and then you called me a “paramecium!”
 i said, “pardon?”
 you: “a particle!”
 me: “i won't partake.”
 you: “prick.”

i didn't mean to rain on your parade
or crash your party
but – i am sorry.
you're still a part of me.
i'm still your partner
and you're still partial to me
so let's participate in passion again.

in relationships, i guess this is all part and parcel
– par for the course.

SHORT FICTION

SECOND PRIZE | *VINCENT JUSTIN MITRA*

Hi, I'm Oliver. What's your name?

The body of the man who leapt from the roof of the Hannigan Building this afternoon has been identified as a Mr Oliver D Brennan, thirty-seven,” said the reporter. “He has no living relatives. Weather and traffic when we come back.”

* * *

Mr Oliver D Brennan looked around. He looked up and saw that the sun was blotted out by grey clouds. He looked at the gravel beneath his shoes. He looked down at the street, and the snow, and the colourful lights, and the people far below him. He looked at all the memories floating around him. Memories flying up in the air like birds while he stood, tapping his feet. And then he looked at the faded photo he held in his hand. And he jumped.

* * *

Mr Oliver D Brennan stood quietly. He was reading the names and the dates over and over again. He read the inscription of the cold, hard stone through the cold, harsh snow blowing around him. Devoted Wife and Mother. And then he looked over at the smaller grave beside it. He squatted down to the ground. He placed a flower on each of the graves. He ran his hand over the inscriptions. He closed his eyes for a few minutes. All familiar actions which he had done every day for the last ten years exactly. He turned and walked quietly to the street and got into the waiting cab. “Take me to the Hannigan Building,” he said. And then he looked at the old photo he held in his hand.

* * *

Mr Oliver D Brennan looked at his shop. Its shelves were dark, the windows were stencilled in frost, and the fragrant aroma it once had was long gone. He remembered when he had first opened it, five long years ago. He remembered all the joy, all the life it brought. But in the three years since the accident it had only brought pain. He looked at his shop, and locked the doors for the last time.

* * *

Mr Oliver D Brennan was home baking cookies. Despite all the snow outside, the oven made the kitchen feel as warm as a summer's day. Half of the cookies had already been cut and decorated and were awaiting the fate which would befall them the following morning. The rest, however, were still awaiting the coloured frosting which his wife and son had driven to the store to get. He looked around the house, at all the decorations they had put up: the lights, the garland, the tree... the mistletoe. While he was alone in the house, he took the opportunity to check the closet. Yup, the boxes were still there. At midnight, while everyone was asleep, he'd sneak downstairs, put the boxes beneath the tree, and surprise them in the morning.

Then the doorbell rang.

"Oh, hello officer. How can I help you today?"

"Are you Mr Oliver D Brennan?"

"Yup, that's me. Did you want to place an order?" Oliver chuckled.

The officer took off his hat and looked sadly down at the ground.

* * *

"Oliver Brennan, what are you doing back here?" she laughed, walking into the back room of the store. "It was your idea to have a Grand Opening party! You should be out there mingling."

"I know, honey, but Ben here was crying. I think it was all the people."

"He's only one. They do that. He'll be fine. Give him here." She reached out her arms and rocked Ben back and forth. "You just wanted Mommy didn't you? Oh, yes you did! Who's my little Benny Boy?"

The child grabbed his nose with his chubby fingers.

"That's right! You are!"

"Ahh, here you all are! I've been looking everywhere for you. You folks open a bakery and you spend the whole party in the back room? Now, before you go back out there, how about a photo of the happy family, eh? Now, scoot a little closer... a little... there we go. Lovely. Now, one... two..." *CLICK*

HI, I'M OLIVER. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

* * *

“Wahhhhhhhh!”

“Congratulations, Mr Brennan. It’s a boy!”

“Hear that, honey? It’s a boy!”

The doctor handed the child to his mother. “Did you folks have a name picked out?” he asked.

“We were thinking of the name ‘Steve’.”

“Really, Oliver? I sort of like the name ‘Ben’.”

* * *

“I now pronounce you Mister and Missis Oliver Brennan. You may kiss the bride.”

* * *

“Do you remember this place?” Oliver asked her.

“Of course I do,” she answered. “This is where we had our first date.”

“Well, second actually. But that was six years ago.”

She laughed. “You were so nervous! Not as much as you were on our actual first date, though. Your foot was tapping, the rest of you was shaking; I thought you were gonna pass out. The cookies were amazing though.”

“How’s the sunset?” he asked. “Is it still as nice as it was six years ago?” He began tapping his foot.

“Yes, the sunset is beautiful,” she answered.

“Not as much as you though. You’re practically glowing.”

“Aww, Ollie, stop.” She playfully punched him in the shoulder.

And then, Oliver Brennan got down on one knee and reached into his pocket.

* * *

“Wow! These are delicious!” she said, taking another bite. “You should be, like, a chef or something.”

“Okay.”

“What?”

“Umm... isn’t the sunset beautiful?”

* * *

Oliver handed her the bag of cookies.

“Happy sixteenth birthday. I hope you like them. I made them myself, sort of.”

* * *

“You can look now,” Oliver said to her, taking off her blindfold.

“Wow, where are we?”

“A rooftop.”

“Yes, well, I can see that. How?”

“Yeah, I convinced Old Man Hannigan to give me the keys,” he said like it was nothing. He spread out a picnic blanket.

“Aww, that’s so sweet.” She blushed. “If anyone asks, we should use this as our First Date story. I mean, last week was fine, but...”

Oliver reached into his backpack and pulled out a bag of cookies.

* * *

Oliver ran past the lockers, carrying the blindfold. Good, she hadn’t left yet.

“Here, put this on, come with me.”

“What? Why?”

“It’s a surprise! Come on! Think of it as... a do-over of last week.”

* * *

Oliver walked up to her locker.

“Hi, umm, would you, umm, like to, umm, that is to say, umm, if you’re not, like, umm, busy...” He started tapping his foot.

“Are you asking me out?”

“Umm, yes?”

HI, I'M OLIVER. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

* * *

“Oliver Dwight Brennan! I am very disappointed in you, young man! Why do you have a black eye? You’re only ten! What could have been so important that you got yourself a black eye?”

* * *

“Guys, quit it!” she screamed. “Give me back my dolly!”

In front of him, Oliver saw that a pair of Sixth Graders had taken her dolly and were playing keep away, tossing it back and forth over her head. They were each a full head taller than her. They were the kind of kids who’d spray a garden hose over a snowy road to watch the cars swerve, even after their parents told them not to. Ollie frantically looked around for help. Not a teacher or lunch-hour monitor in sight. It was up to him. It was up to him to help the girl. It was up to him to fight injustice. It was up to him to use every single move he had seen on television.

“Aww, Mom is gonna kill me...” And he ran to save the doll.

* * *

“Now, class, we have a new student and I want you all to wish her a great big grade two welcome!”

She was standing at the front of the class and nervously shifting from side to side. While the class welcomed her, she smiled shyly. The girl was wearing a frilly white dress, and her hair was tied up in a ribbon to keep it out of her eyes. She had already taken off her coat, with the picture of a bird on its back; her backpack, which had a red and white pattern on it; as well as her snow covered boots; and placed them neatly with the others against the wall. After her introduction, the girl looked shyly down at her shoes and began tapping her foot, not used to being the center of attention. In one hand was a small, worn rag doll which she began to hug for comfort. She was very gentle with it, treating it as if it were her own child; as if she was comforting it as much as it was comforting her. The girl was directed to the empty desk next to me. On her way to her desk, she stumbled on a small black toy car lying on the floor and almost dropped the doll, but she caught it just in time. She continued on and sat down. The girl had a pleasant smell that I couldn’t quite place. The smell reminded me of family. It reminded me

of warm summer days and of Christmas morning. The smell was warm and comforting. I could not place it then, but looking back now I realize that the smell was of chocolate chip cookies. The girls' desk was beside a window covered in paper snowflakes and snow men which the class had made the week before. The sunset glinted off the snow outside and, for a split second, she almost seemed to be glowing. Almost like an angel "Hi, I'm Oliver. What's your name?"

POETRY

HONORABLE MENTION | DANIEL GOWMAN

Gone Away

Somewhere back
in a field under more
stars than sky, a
long abandon farm house
sits with no doors or windows,
on a hillside by a highway.
The prairie grass comes
howling along, when the wind
knocks through
empty rooms carrying
sounds of earth, ancient
songs from the bones;
mountains remembered in
dreams, far off in
the first times. When
iron rock was red blood.

Now it is sitting
as it was when we were all there,
years ago:
laughter frozen
along with a promise
in the eyes for new horizons,
Words reach back over time
fall on the ground
poppy petals
for dead soldiers,
Those boys are gone.
Lost mostly, to days passing
as train cars that carry
a feeling farther
and farther
away.

P O E T R Y

HONORABLE MENTION | *AJAY JHAMAT*

The Romantics

At the evening's cooling,
when the wine is poured,
red silk cupped in hands
a sway in each other's eye,
along the table's white cloth,
art of patience and beauty as
Earth hung on canvas, rich oils,
as they dance in longing,
not only in the kitchen's heat,
for dinner's awaiting aroma;
a pairs' passion cooked,
with the open window,
for the sound of the sea,
a Kind of Blue, spinning,
their house warms,
her silk waist in his hand,
the sea billows unfolding
into the soft mirror,
spreading the moon's iris.

SECOND PRIZE | *TANILLE GEIB*

Yogurt Cunt

I always get worked up into a giddy girl excitement when Bryan makes me dinner, and that night was no exception. It is one of the most romantic things a man can do for his gal, to make her dinner from scratch and from the heart. Bryan has always impressed me with his cooking abilities and creativity in the kitchen. In the past he has introduced me to food I never liked, or even tried to like. I have tasted many delicious varieties of seafood with him that otherwise I would never have touched. I'm from Alberta so a typical meeting at the dinner table consisted of potatoes, mashed or baked, and a fat piece of meat. He took me out for my first Thai food experience and I sat there for 25 minutes refusing to eat a piece of tofu. He encourages me to take chances and follow my heart in food and love. The dinner he was making me this night was a surprise. He arrived with Safeway bags full of groceries (when it was still okay to request plastic bags), and his nose was cherry red from walking in the brisk Calgary winter. He put the groceries on my kitchen counter. I came close and tried to sneak a peak, but he said "Not yet sweets. I'll reveal my ingredients to you on my terms."

"Okay sure, keep the suspense..."

As I sat on my fold out chair I noticed him smirking as he always does when he is being creative. He reveals one by one the ingredients for the meal. Veggies galore. We love cooking with copious amounts of veggies and fruits. One of our rules when we are shopping for meals is that we select all the standard veggies for a dish and then go back for one special addition. One out of the ordinary, like grabbing a rhubarb stick to put in mango chicken pasta sauce. Sounds weird, right? Well it usually works out deliciously. He entices me with each vegetable coming out of the bag: zucchini, onion, carrots, red peppers, mushrooms, and the last ingredient out of the bag is habaneros. Then he starts bringing out spices I have never even tasted before. He continues to showcase his findings with a Vana White ohh ahhh factor, and I'm still excited. I feel my insides smile with gushy love. Paprika, coriander, cumin, cin-

namon, and turmeric. He continues to pull out more and more, and he finally lets me know that he is making homemade Indian curry. He looked up a recipe online, but adjusted it for his own creation. Bryan always likes to learn first and then break the appropriate rules. I leap to him and give him a sexy smile, kiss, and hug. I'm sure he felt accomplished, even though he didn't even start making the yummy dinner yet.

I'm usually the sous chef when it comes to the main event. I help chop and subtly recommend items or ways to complement Bryan's vision. When we are in the kitchen there are no limits in our cooking and in our love. It seems like that is when the most love we have for each other flourishes. Our creativity bounces off the cupboards into our sizzling pan. Any passionate cook will tell you that every meal-making session must start with olive oil, onion, and garlic in a frying pan. This is essential for all yummy things. Bryan started the mix in the pan, and I studiously started chopping the veggies. The meal-making seems to last a short period, but when all is finished, making dinner to cleaning up is a three-hour commitment. We definitely don't support the idea of a "quick 30mins weekday" meals. We like to mingle with our food, get to know it, and ingest it healthily. Our cookbook would actually play on the motto: "Clear your night's schedule because it is about to be consumed." Haha... consumed... get it? I have a weird sense of humor. Anyway fast-forward to all the ingredients in the pan, and Bryan, as he always does, announced: "it is now time for everyone to get to know each other." Which means we wait for up to an hour while the spices and veggies go on a rampage of intercourse. The spices are like a penis penetrating the veggies' soft vaginal walls. We headed for the couch to relax and wait for the mingling to happen.

When I first met Bryan I was in crazy first-love passion. One of my best friend's Chuck pointed out that my art would suffer because I'm happy and satisfied. After a long chat about art, love, suffering, and good art, I questioned if this whole love thing was good for writing, painting, and expressing me. There are already a lot of cheesy love statements in the world. I simply don't find myself sitting with my journal writing my heart out about love, "He makes me so happy inside and out I could sing at the top of my lungs at the top of the mountain shouting to the world about how much I love him..." blah blah shit. Who fucking cares? The

only thing I know how to express is the inner human conflict. Chuck and I went back and forth stabbing each other for loving and simply being happy. Being happy sucks. We both agreed in our idealistic thoughts to be never happy and sacrifice love for an interesting, hard, and intense life. As we both thought this, here we are today only talking about our happy loves turning into interesting, hard, and intense loves.

The meal itself was fucking divine. The spices gave a good romping to the veggies, and the naan really helped ease the burning sensation in my mouth. We even shared a glass of milk to help with the fiery dish. I was quite pleased with my man and his creativity in the kitchen. After the tea lights were blown out, we moved back to the couch entangling ourselves. Streamlining our bodies and kisses Bryan begins kissing my entire body. Removing my clothes, kissing, caressing, kissing. Kiss, kiss. I giggle. He “shhhhhhh....” Our roommates are in the bedroom, we wouldn’t want to disturb them.

On the couch Bryan advances downward. I already know that I’m soaking in my panties. After every meal that he has made I’m so turned on that I jizz in my underwear. I’m sure some other people must do this; I’m not the only one. He investigates and kisses along my labia majora. His favorite place on my entire body is the small patch of hairless skin before my vagina, where he gently rubs and kisses. I always know when he is at that location because it seems to be softer. He is taking his time and thoroughly enjoying himself. It is almost like in that moment he forgets about my pleasure and releases his inner wants. I think it is romantic. I also think it is romantic when he calls me “Miss Clitoris.” I like the word cunt. I would never use it in a negative way, some people might flag it as negative right away, but I think the meaning for me is filled with beauty. Most people think it is the most vulgar word you can ever call someone, but to me it actually is harmless because it doesn’t have a description or meaning behind it. For example: If you call someone a bitch, that person could very well be a bitch, someone who is nasty, rude, and selfish. But calling someone a cunt has no merit. So you are essentially calling them a vagina... and that is not mean. I cringe when someone else’s refers to another human as a bitch; it sends chills up my spine. It is probably because I was called “a bitch” earlier in life, when I was 11, and they actually meant it.

Bryan starts now more convincingly pleasuring me. I feel hot. I feel turned on. I feel... “Oh fuck I’m hot.”

“Yes you are.” he says.

I decided at that point that I was still receiving immense pleasure, and stopping would not help the situation. His mouth saturated with habaneros and his fingers juiced up from the spicy red peppers he chopped, all burning my outer lips, my clit, and my vagina. But it felt so fucking good. I wanted more, but I wanted the burning to stop. I couldn’t have both. After my first pungent orgasm I finally let him in on the situation. My genitals are on fire from our delicious dinner. For a moment he looks concerned, but then a smile quickly appears on his glimmering face. He laughs out loud. I hear Mike and Leslie stirring in the room. All I can think is, go wash... bathroom... now...

Bryan follows me to the bathroom and I climb into the tub. Legs above my shoulders, my back cold pressed on the bottom of the steel tub and my vagina uncovered upward, smoldering. Perhaps it looked like I was giving birth, but only to a hell demon; it was burning all the way to my anus. Bryan tried to splash water around to help the burning, but it actually just inflated the pain. Burning. He tried dousing the flames with skim milk. Wow, okay...mini relief. After I’m sure what was half litre of milk it isn’t doing the trick. We were laughing hysterically. I held back peeing. Here I was flailing my legs around in the air trying to expose the best position for milk spillage. But only temporary relief with each splash. Bryan leaves me with the 4-litre jug and heads to the kitchen. He returns looking as he did when he revealed ingredients for dinner. A knight in shining armor. He has something to cure my burning sensation. He reveals the leftover half-used yogurt. Holy god, yes! As proud as can be he straddles me on the tub ledges looking down at his hurting lover and pauses with his first attack of creamy pain relief. He opens the container and heaps the spoon with organic plain yogurt. I’m just thinking “throw it all on me”, but my lover has a different plan. I’m laughing and crying and burning. My roommate knocks at the door. “Are you guys okay? What the hell are you two doing?”

“ahhh...”

“Yes, we’re okay... oh shit... I’ll tell you tomorrow!” I say. With her

gone we burst out laughing again. Thank god the recipe called for only half the yogurt! Bryan carefully aims at my exposed vagina letting the first dollop fling from a metre above me. I can't take it anymore. With a big smile and a roar he dollops, flings, and dings the yogurt right at my cunt. The relief is immediate and exquisite. Holy fuck. He dollops again. He looks like he just won an award at the grade four science fair, and I fucking love him. More relief. More yogurt. More relief. More yogurt. More love. More flinging. More relief. More laughing. More relief. More crying. More yogurt. More love. 🌈

Yogurt Cunt Curry

Ingredients

½ cup pt plain yogurt
 1 tsp cardamon
 1 tsp cumin
 2 tbsp oil
 ¼ cup butter
 1 tsp cinnamon
 1 tsp paprika
 1 tsp tumeric
 3 cloves (ground up)
 ½ cup sour cream
 1/4 teaspoon saffron, crushed
 ½ cup Cream
 1/4 teaspoon cornstarch
 1 tablespoon water
 1 large yellow onion
 2 habenero peppers (finely chopped)
 2 small red spicy peppers (finely chopped)
 1 head of garlic (pureed)
 4 cups of any veggies you desire
 1 special veggie

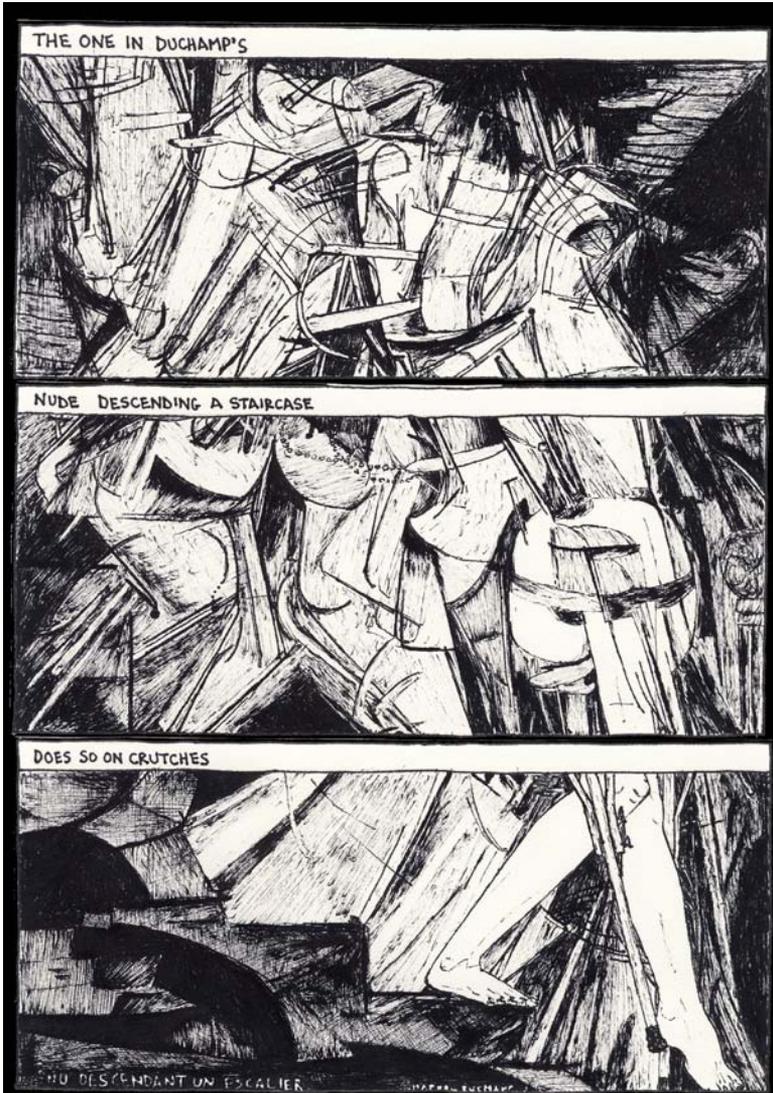
Method

Sautee garlic and onion with oil in frying pan. Add spices & finely chopped hot peppers. Add yogurt, cream, sour cream, water, and corn starch. Add veggies. Let mingle for one hour on simmering heat. Enjoy with your lover. Warning: no sexy oral time immediately after consumption.

POETRY

HONORABLE MENTION | *BRYAN WYLSON*

The One in Duchamps



POETRY

HONORABLE MENTION | *MADELEINE GORMAN*

After Seeing You

Thoughts like birds in a closet—
the fluttering of feelings
without a song sung back.
The asking of why (and how)
someone could
reach into
and
touch
like
that.

HONORABLE MENTION | *JOYCE MAH*

Mission Impossible: Code Retail Restraint

My name is Joyce and I'm a shopaholic. My disease started early and sparingly with on-line auctions. Today, it is a near daily indulgence. My quest for one-of-a-kind luxury merges with my penchant for "Double D's": Discount Designer goods.

The thought of quitting cold turkey is like agreeing to shop only at WalMart; I immediately go into survival mode. Twice I delay the start date. It's justifiable: I have two important rare vintage designer items to bid on. You could call it the eating disorder equivalent of bingeing before fasting: a fusion between bulimia and anorexia. So what if it's through Ebay to a seller who's on-line identity is "Uncles-R-Us"? Rare is rare. Designer? Even better. Maybe an item with Cleopatra on it, she is the Queen of da Nile.....

The restrictions are clear: no purchasing, no window shopping, no price comparisons, no fliers, and no on-line ordering. Pure abstinence. Pure purgatory.

I'm wondering whether stopping cold turkey might be unhealthy. The thought alone is lowering my blood sugar level.

March 19, 12 Noon: Home.

I commit to starting today. My decision is greeted with the unmistakably uncomfortable emotion known as: Anxiety. "How are you going to fill your time?" she jests. "None of your business. I can manage," I snap back. At that moment, I realize I am experiencing the beginnings of withdrawal. Wondering how I am going to survive the week, I briefly court the idea of delaying the start date a third time. Only the knowledge that this experience would be made public at it's conclusion, does the incentive to stick with my mission surface. After-all, I'm the calm, sensible and reliable Joyce everyone has always known.

Decision made, my next thought is, “what uncommon Gucci bargains am I missing out on?”

March 20, Early AM: The weekend.

Traditionally, a physical retail ritual. However, today is a judgment call: do I extend my mission to include practical purchases?

Feeling confident, I decide to broaden my challenge to include abstaining completely. Absolutely no shopping is going to take place. As the day progresses, my mission impossible is turning out to be quite possible.

Until I realize, how am I going to get next week’s groceries?

March 21 and 22: Home.

Quiet. Surprisingly uneventful. Feeling my inner resolve strengthening.

By the end of Day 4, a shift occurs. A peace I never knew begins radiating around my Being. I am beaming. Light is dawning everywhere.

An Epiphany: maybe life can be full without a relationship with shopping.

March 23, 8:40am: Tai Chi class.

Under Master Lo’s guidance, I find myself trying hard to please. Usually a refuge, class begins taking on the shape of a dragon snorting at my mental focus. I find myself resorting to fantasies of the kitten-soft Spanish shearling coat I saw at Pappa’s Furs the weekend before. I’m ordering myself to concentrate. The more I try, the more that high-end coat beckons. “Only 15 more minutes”, I exhale to myself.

It’s no use.

Deprivation of designer eye candy and a dwindling food supply was overcoming my senses. My usually stoic ‘Punching in Horse Stance’ becomes, ‘Wild Grabbing like a Crying Banshee.’ I finish class with my dignity intact. Just barely.

March 24, 7:20am: Survived the night.

Forgave myself for yesterday’s mental relapse and re-grouped my

senses. Self-respect restored, I carry forward with this new day.

“You only need to make it to 11:59am”, I tell myself reassuringly. “After that, you’re free to celebrate.”

Images of a mega shopping spree instantly begin to flicker in my mind’s eye.

At this very moment, I become sadly aware of how deeply involved I had been with shopping most of my adult life. I begin to understand I had been using shopping to replace feelings of low self-worth. My “Wild Grabbing like a Crying Banshee” was a direct protesting of life-long control from others. I make the decision to let go of my long-term dependence on shopping. As if by miracle, my decision gives way to a new relationship with a lighter, simpler Self. I am being cleansed. I am being elevated.

I am experiencing a new truth: a retail Awakening. I feel as if I can do Anything.

11:59am comes unceremoniously. A quiet denouement to a week which marked a turning point in my personal development: I had survived my battle with my shopping demons.

12 Noon: Mission Accomplished.

I begin to type ww.....and break into a cold sweat.

Next mission: Eradication of PMS. 🌸

SHORT FICTION

HONORABLE MENTION | *AJAY JHAMAT*

Dust in the Sun

Their eyes were closed in the direct beam of the sun. Lying beside one another upon the tan dirt sweating a haze of tiresome warmth in midday was where the boy and girl relaxed. Unlike the others that fell desirably into the shaded nooks of small black pools they enjoyed the light. It was peaceful and silent along the apple orchard.

“I want to get away.”

“How so?”

“You know, leave home,” they didn’t move nor open their eyes as they spoke with low voices they could only hear.

“I guess, but why?” she asked with a frown he couldn’t see.

“I just think there’s more than this. You know Mr. Obi right?”

“Yeah, he seems nice.”

“Well, I walked home yesterday with him and he was telling me stories about himself.”

“About?” the girl asked as the boy rose from the dirt, bringing his thin orange legs beneath him and turned towards his friend lying as a lily pad on the scorching dirt. Her eyes opened in the rustle and alter of his body; she peaked at his brightened face before the sun closed her eyes again.

“He’s from Africa you know?”

“Really, I didn’t know that.”

“Yeah...don’t you ever wonder how people get to where they are?” the boy asked holding his hands above his eyes, to be looking beneath the sun.

“Not really, everyone here is from here, except Mr. Obi.”

“Exactly, it’s kind of sad our parents just lived and worked here. Mr. Obi had an adventure though. When I talked to him yesterday he said when he was our age he had to leave home.”

“How come?”

“ I didn’t ask, it seemed rude to and it didn’t sound like anything good. But he told me he got to travel to a lot of places and do amazing things. I’ll ask him today to tell me more. Wouldn’t you wanna live an adventure?”

“Yeah I guess. It seems scary though. If your all alone, cause I don’t think he has any family or a wife,” the girl said as she leaned on her side away from the sun to face her friend.

“Well I’m sure he made friends but it must have been hard. I’d like an adventure though.”

“Come on let’s go get some water,” the girl said getting up with a smile.

“Sure, help me up?”

She laughed giving him her hands. He smiled red, putting his hands in her soft ways. They walked between the rows of trees, leaving dust behind them. She wished she could still hold his hand.

When their day was over, everyone was retreating from the trees, holding to their bellies’ baskets full of apples smooth as candles. The fallen apples were scattered and forgotten. Mr. Obi was up ahead walking slow carrying his old limbs from his torso.

“I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yup,” the girl said joyfully.

“Okay, see ya.”

“Bye,” the girl said smiling to return her friend’s. As she walked home alone, she looked in the far distant red sun and yawned insatiably. Her feet dragged in their torn runners and her brown golden hair felt empty trailing behind.

Mr. Obi was walking down the hill carefully after his quiet day of

picking apples. Below his feet small stones were rolling down the hill as the boy came much livelier from behind the path.

“Oh, hello,” Mr. Obi greeted turning kindly to observe the boy’s enthusiasm.

“Hey Mr. Obi, how’s it going today?”

“Tired but I’m alright,” he replied giving a small smile, “and you?”

“I’m okay too,” replied the boy looking up at Mr. Obi. He was tall and old thought the boy. His dark wrinkled complexion glistened with a soft layer of sweat on his skin. “What other places have you traveled to?” Mr. Obi’s smile grew understanding the boy’s curiosity.

“I’ve been around, quite a few places, very different, very majestic places.”

“Do you have a favorite place?” the boy asked looking at Mr. Obi’s eyes that were elsewhere remembering.

“Home was always nice,” the boy listened intently, “there’s been too many places and friends I don’t think I could say one was a favorite. Something about here reminds me of home; maybe it’s the heat!”

“Yeah, it’s always like this during the summer. I wish I could travel the world like you.”

Mr. Obi laughed, “you will in time, you still young,” he said reflecting his life, “it was very hard sometimes. It could be very lonely and I was scared. I had to work hard to survive but I can see you work hard yourself,” Mr. Obi said looking at the dirt on the boy’s face. The boy laughed, “yeah, just during the summer time, otherwise I’m in school.”

“What grade are you in?”

“This will be my last year coming up.”

“Do you know what you would like to do?”

“Nope, not a clue, I just wanna travel I guess.”

“Take your time. I remember when I was about your age I had already left home. I was still in Africa and found work in Tunisia. I didn’t

know anyone but made friends quick. I was watching some kids play soccer and they let me play too. I became friends with them and one boy's father was a fisherman. I told them I was alone and needed work. So in the early mornings when it was cool, he would take his son and me. I wasn't paid until I knew what to do," he paused coughing deep from his chest and began again, "sometimes we would steal some fish for the other boys. Then in the evenings we would play till the sun was gone. And under the stars, we had fires to cook the fish. It was like that every day for months. It was a different time, a simpler time, a long time ago. That was the first time I was truly happy since I had left home but I couldn't stay too long."

"Why?"

"Well I left Africa soon after and had to start from nothing again. Sometimes you'll find happiness and have to let it go," Mr. Obi said stopping on the path to look at the boy with his fragile eyes that felt tired from the sun.

The boy smiled but felt sad for Mr. Obi. He was pleased to have listened to him. Where their paths diverged, the boy thanked Mr. Obi and said 'goodbye'. As the boy walked in the rust of the evening's light, he dreamt till the feel of freedom had its instant to inspire.

At home the girl was sitting outside on the porch reading. She was tired but calmly enjoying herself. Her mother came outside to tell her to come in for dinner. When the girl walked in she could feel the warmth of dinner and the cold wooden floor fresh beneath her bare feet.

Her parents were already eating at the table when she came in. They talked as she quietly ate her food. Smiling between bites she thought of tomorrow. She thought of him and thought she'd ask him if he'd want to go to the lake.

"We wanted to ask you something," her mother said in a timid voice. The girl looked up at her parent's stern faces. Her father continued now, "what do you think if we moved?"

"What? Why? Where?"

"Closer to the city."

“But why, you guys love it here.”

“We do but things at work aren’t going well. The mill may have to shut down. We just need to be open and...want you to know what’s going on.”

“Well, sorry but I don’t wanna move.”

“Neither do we,” her mother said. Now the girl sat not calm but rushing through her thoughts.

With the weekend passed, the two friends had returned from their time off. They were mixed in the grove with a new aroma of day and heat. A red burst of light and night’s violet receding became the crimson dawn. The tender wind would not stay long. During the day the two friends were told Mr. Obi had passed away over the weekend. Standing with a spear of confusion and pain between them, they didn’t understand.

“He was old,” said the boy turning his cold eyes into the very near warmth of the girl. She would lift him from the ground, her delicate freckled face opened. “come on,” said the boy walking ahead and lifting his basket. She stood behind watching him, her head down, her hair grazing in the last fumbling wind.

It was the following Thursday Mr. Obi was buried. The children and their parents and not many others attended the funeral procession. All the faces were recognizable. In the heat of death the crowd in black formed dry around the mound. The two friends stood opposite one another sharing their first of life’s reason. He never left her green eyes and listened.

A lanky priest began: “Not many of us knew Mr. Obi but we all know that he was a very kind, honest, and worldly man. I have a passage from Mr. Obi’s journal that he was holding when he had left us. I’ll share the last words of Mr. Obi,” he read solemnly, “I want to be hidden behind my hair, to not show my shameful eyes filled with failure. I would like to find the silence, to reside where the darkness stays. Gain and become the ignorant in the corner. Where I come heavy from the frozen grove and protrude like a demon’s tongue, I scream. I squirm with anxiety against the grass, this dance with gravity’s pelf. Stretch and snap the hindrance of my identity give this unrelenting fool his freedom. Leave me. I am dust in the sun.”

The priest spoke when the world stopped, a hush with gentle hands held them afloat. A turn of their stomachs, the thoughts curled in their heads, and an unknown man had been gone. Except for the boy, his stomach breathed deeply, the thoughts were radiant, and a man had lived a story. After the funeral, as the parents walked ahead, the two friends trailed behind.

“You okay?” asked the girl.

“Yeah. It’s just strange, the last time I saw him he told me one of his happiest memories. I heard it no one else, I know what made him happy.” The girl just wanted to hold him, “I’m sorry,” she said.

“Its okay. Listen I wanna talk to you about something. I don’t wanna stay around here anymore. I just don’t see the point of staying here when there’s so much out there and so little time.”

“What are you gonna do, run away?”

“Yeah but I want you to come. I need my best friend, I wouldn’t wanna be alone like Mr. Obi.”

“Your not actually serious? How will we survive? Where would we go?” she asked excitedly trying hard not to let him see how much she wanted to hear that.

“I have a plan but we need to talk about it. Come over tonight, I’ll tell you everything.”

“Okay.”

When time had allowed the two friends to plan their endeavor they met above the hill that rolled down adust into raw tall grass. The boy had stepped first and turned waiting for his friend to follow. “Aren’t you scared?” she asked holding the straps to her pack. The boy went up close enough so his hand could reach hers. Her body went in awe; she put her hand into his and stepped down next to him. He stared into her green eyes, “no,” he smiled and kept her hand.

Beneath the red sun, the invisibility of their inspiration was lurking. In the beams that spread, to what they find, like Mr. Obi, to be but in one way, the story they bind is dust in the sun. 🌹

SHORT FICTION

HONORABLE MENTION | *TAEGHAN LOCKHART*

There's No Place Like Home

Sara found herself poised hesitantly before the lock, the keys jingling in her outstretched hand. She was standing on the front door step of her own home. Their home. She let her arm fall back to her side and choked out a big sigh. How could she look him in the eye now, without seeing all their young faces staring hauntingly back out at her? How could she face the man who was supposed to be her fiancé with this knowledge? Would she even recognize him at all?

She let out another smaller sigh and taking a deep breath, unlocked the door then quietly slipped inside this now unfamiliar home.

Uncharacteristically leaving her shoes and purse haphazardly strewn by the front door, she tentatively ventured towards the dining room, where she could hear her favorite jazz album playing. There was a big bouquet of daffodils, also a favorite, on the table, a bottle of red wine and two places set. He'd thought this all through. She could hear the tap running in the kitchen. She stepped across the hall and glanced quickly into the living room; the computer left an empty space on the desk, and there were a few gaps in their movie cupboard where the burnt DVD's would have been. She wasn't surprised, but it was still shocking; he had warned her of all this during their brief phone conversation mid-afternoon. She was very relieved to see, however, that he'd tidied up after the police came through. A big mess, on top of everything else, would have been too much to handle right now.

She went back to the dining room, pulled out a chair and grabbed the bottle of wine. As she was removing the seal, he stepped into the room.

"I didn't hear you come in. I was in the kitchen. Here, let me get that," he said, stepping towards her and taking the bottle of wine from her hands. She looked blankly at him. He disappeared back into the

kitchen for a moment. She heard the pop of the cork. He came back in with the wine in one hand and a big bowl of salad in the other.

“I made that chicken salad you liked so much. I didn’t know when you’d be coming back, and this wouldn’t get cold. I was so worried about you. When you weren’t back at the usual time I tried calling your cell, but you’d turned it off.” He’d put the salad down and was pouring her a glass of wine. The salad looked delicious, but the smell of food was making her stomach turn.

“You sound just like my father. I’m all grown up now, I can look after myself,” she growled at him.

“I know. You’re a perfectly competent woman. You’ve just never come back so late without letting me know before,” he said, looking her straight in the eye and handing her the glass of wine. “Look, Sara... For what it’s worth, I am so sorry. I’m sorry for what I did, and I’m sorry for involving you in this mess.”

She glared at him, searching, but all she could see was the brown darkness of his eyes gazing coolly back at her. Nothing more, except that twitch he’d get at the side of his mouth, usually when he was under a lot of pressure at work.

“Jacob, I don’t know what to make of this. I don’t know how I should be reacting. I’m just so... shocked. I need some questions answered,” she said, trying to hold back her anger. She didn’t want an argument; she just wanted the whole truth.

“Anything you need. It’s better you hear it from me now,” he replied.

“How long has this been going on? How old are they?” Holding up her hand for silence, she took a big gulp of wine as she gathered her thoughts, then continued, “Why?! And how could I have not noticed this whole time?!” she spat out.

“Honey, there’s no reason you would have known. I’ve barely looked at that stuff in the past few years. I think I did maybe eight months ago when we had that big fight... It was something I used as an escape when I felt bad. I am ashamed by it... I’d usually just feel worse afterwards. I kept it hidden. There’s no way you could have

known.” His face was long and sad, his eyes focused past her head.

An escape. It made think of her own guilty pleasures: her books, the fantasy novels. It was a way out. Or a reprieve at least. A private little vacation into an elaborately concocted fantasy life. The chance to be someone else for the space of a few pages.

“But if it made you feel bad, why would you do it in the first place? It’s disgusting,” she threw back at him, sitting back in her chair and drawing her arms across her torso, still holding the glass of wine.

“I told you about how shy I was in high school. Well, I was seventeen when I started looking at pictures of girls a few years younger,” he started.

“How old exactly?” she interjected.

“I don’t know exactly, fourteen, maybe thirteen. They weren’t much younger at the time; it didn’t seem like a big deal. Pictures girls posted of themselves, playing porn star. But I was fascinated by them; they seemed so unachievable, so innocent. I guess I never got past it,” he said, his eyes downcast on the floor beside her.

“Ha,” she let out a bitter laugh, “that’s for sure. You’re thirty-two years old and looking at pictures of girls almost twenty years younger. Am I not good enough for you? Not pretty enough anymore? Not young enough?”

“It never had anything to do with you. It’s a disease!” he cut in before she could go on. Now taking a breath, continued, “I’m sick, and I’ve been so ashamed. I’ve been too ashamed get help. To ask for your help. But now that it’s out, I’ll do the right thing! I’ve already contacted a therapist, and I’ve signed up for group therapy. The first meeting is tomorrow night! I’m going to use this whole mess as an intervention; I’m going to turn my life around!” He looked directly at her, his eyes big and hopeful, and a smile daring to grace his twitching lips.

Sara sighed, trying to breathe out some of her anger, but it was all too much. The noxious frustration building in her stomach rose up and spilled out. “You fucking freak!” she screamed, standing up and looking down on his slouched, seated figure. “It’s gross and unnatu-

ral! How could you have let something like this go on for so long?! It would have eaten me alive!” She brought her shaking hands to her chest, then to the solidity of the table’s edge. Retrieving her glass she finished the last of her wine, then clunked it unceremoniously back down.

“You know how you still hang on to that teddy bear your ex gave you? How you’ve said the bear is comforting, even though it reminds you of him?” he was talking about Ben. Ben had been such a slob. The bear was from earlier, when things had been better between them.

“How dare you bring any of that up! This is about you! About your behavior!” She parried the blow, unwilling to make this about her. She swung her chair around and straddled it, placing the back firmly between him and her heart.

“I was just comparing!” he said, caught on the defensive. “I was just going to say I held onto it the same way. And then later I could never sit down and systematically destroy it all because that meant facing my flaws.”

“How can you compare something like that!” she hissed, quiet outrage fueling her words. Her eyes like spotlights, exposing him for all to see.

“It was escapism, a way to step outside myself.” he said cautiously, “I only looked at that stuff when I was sad.” He reached out and grabbed the bottle of wine, refilling her glass. She continued to glare at him, his every move on display. “And I really haven’t looked at it much since I’ve been with you. You know, had a really solid relationship? I’ve been so much happier with you. I thought it would just disappear on its own.” He was now looking down at the floor like a berated child.

“But we’ve been together for five years! How much longer did you think it would take?!” she lectured him safely from behind the wooden strength of the chair. “Never mind. You’ve fucked up now. So now what? How do you deal with this now? How do I deal with this?” she said, throwing her hands up in utter confusion.

He looked up at her, his shoulders still slouched, like Atlas carry-

ing the weight of the world. The weight of their world. The dimmed lighting reflected in the faint sheen of sweat on his forehead. She picked up her glass and took a deep drink.

“I need your support, Sara. I don’t know if I can do this by myself. If I’m going to fight my demons, I need to look forward to coming back to a loving home after the battle,” he pleaded.

That hit a button. She felt it in the pit of her stomach. Home. Ever since her mother and brother died in the accident when she was six, the idea of a real “home” had become an insubstantial daydream. Sara polished off her glass and poured herself a third. These days she very rarely had more than two. She had a feeling that was about to change.

“I don’t know how to help somebody through something like this! I’ve never encountered anything like it before.” Her eyes grew wide in desperation.

“It’s the same as any other addiction. I just need your love. Remember how we got your drinking under control? You just needed someone to support and love you. That’s all I need. You are strong; I know you can help me through this. I know we can get through this,” he said, looking at her directly in the eye. Sara let out a slow sigh, defeated.

“What do you want me to do then?” she asked more quietly.

“Partners can attend the group meetings as well. Come with me tomorrow night,” he responded matter-of-factly.

“Alright. I can start by doing that. I’m still so confused by all this,” she said in a softer voice.

“It will take time, Honey, but everything will become clear,” he said, reaching for the salad and portioning it out on their plates.

Sara scooted a few pieces of lettuce around on the plate and finally skewered some vegetables on her fork. But she could only taste cardboard, and washed it down with another gulp of wine. Somewhere along the way, she had lost her footing, and could feel herself being gently born down into the darkness. But unlike Persephone, there was no mother to notice her absence.

“We’ll take it slowly,” he was saying, “like when we had that big argument earlier in the year. One step at a time. We’ll start with the foundation, just like rebuilding a house.”

Sara agreed absentmindedly, vaguely picturing the beautiful façade they would build together.

“Now that this deep dark secret is out, I can already see things getting brighter. No more hiding from myself, or from you. I love you so much. I’ll never do anything to hurt you again,” he said.

She was looking at the salad, her hand still on the glass of wine. She slowly looked up and saw his hopeful smile, the twitch, and then met the gaze of his dark eyes where she could just faintly make out her reflection. She could see herself falling into their darkness. 🍷

P O E T R Y

HONORABLE MENTION | ANNA-MARIE MILAN

How did you know that it was good?

What was it like that first day,
when you marked the day from the night?
Did day feel light and warm in your hands?
And night, was it as heavy as it looked?
How did you know it was good?
Is it like kneading bread dough and you just know
when it feels the right consistency?

How did you know what to do on that second day?
What was it like, creating the heavens?
How did you use them to separate the waters?
Was that as difficult to do as it sounds?
How could you tell it was good?
Is it like when you separate an egg and you know
it's good if the yolk doesn't break?

That third day, how did you know what shape to make the land?
Why did you cover it with so many plants?
When did you decide to put salt in the oceans and seas
but not in the lakes and rivers?
How could you tell that it was good?
Is it like making soup and knowing
that it has just the right number of vegetables
and doesn't need any more spice?
On that fourth day, what made you think we might need
the sun, the moon and the stars?
How did you get them to shine at the right times?
Was it hard to decide how many of each to make?
How were you sure when it was good?
Is it like putting up Christmas lights and knowing
without being told by the neighbours that it's not too many?

On that fifth day, how did you know how many
different fish would be just right?
And how did you decide what all the birds should look like?
Did you create the Blue-footed Booby just to make me laugh?
How did you know that all together it was good?
Is it like colouring a picture and knowing
what crayons to use so it doesn't look like your baby brother did it?

On that sixth day, why did you make all the animals
before you made Adam and Eve?
Did you smile when Adam named the Earwig?
Did we really need mosquitoes?
How did you know that this was all good?
Is it like building with Lego and knowing
when your space ship has enough rockets and lasers?

On that seventh day when you rested,
did you take a nap?
That whole day, did you ever once think of tweaking creation?
When you blessed everything, did that include viruses?
Did you play, or did you really rest that whole day?
I don't really know what it's like to rest a whole day,
but I bet that it was good.

SHORT FICTION

HONORABLE MENTION | *JAMIE DALE WALRAVEN*

Something More

Archie Meades stepped out of the outpatient examination room on the third floor of St Paul's hospital, and waited for his results. This was his ninth visit since he first came to the hospital six months ago, as a result of a seizure he'd had, which was later diagnosed as a brain tumour.

"It all begins and ends with prayer," said Rowland Hazard.

When they had met on Archie's first visit, Rowland had said he did mental health work at the hospital. Archie wasn't entirely sure what mental work was, but he figured Rowland was some sort of government touchy-feely social worker or something. He was there practically every time Archie went to the hospital for tests, like he was waiting for Archie to arrive.

"As if I'm going to pray to a God who took away my wife and daughter and leaves me with a debilitating illness," said Archie.

One year earlier, Archie had been in an automobile accident that killed his wife and two-year-old daughter. He fell into a deep depression, stopped calling his friends and basically quit all social activities. Then he had his first seizure.

"Do you think it is coincidence that we keep meeting?" Rowland asked.

"I don't know if it's coincidence, but it's definitely a nuisance."

"God has brought us together. I've bumped into you every time you've come in."

"A brain tumour has brought me here, and you work here. So I can't say that I see any coincidence in that."

Rowland was always going on about things that were pretty far out for a mental health worker: living in the fourth dimension of space-time,

the age of Aquarius, unity consciousness and the like. Whatever it was, Archie was really getting quite tired of it. He kept hearing the same thing every time they spoke: pray, meditate, reflect and help others.

“Archie Meades,” a woman’s voice came from the examination room.

“Well, gotta run,” Archie said, then got up coldly and walked into the examination room.

“God bless,” said Rowland.

In the examination room Archie received only bad news. The tumour, rather than being a lump inside the brain, was growing across and pushing on the motor cortex. This was causing the seizures, and the medication was no longer suppressing them. This was a devastating blow for Archie.

He slumped over in his chair. His head fell into his hands, as though he were about to cry, but nothing came out, not even a sob. He sat up, and his face matched the blankness of his mind. They were both empty. He didn’t even hear the doctor schedule his next appointment.

When he came out of the examination room, there was Rowland, still sitting there.

“Don’t you have any work you need to do or something?” Archie asked.

“As a matter of fact,” said Rowland, “I do. There’s a garden plot on the roof of the hospital, and I help out with the weeding and watering. Would you like to come up for a look? The view is really quite stunning.”

“No thanks.”

“Well, the air’s quite fresh up there,” said Rowland, “and you look like you could use it.”

Archie couldn’t really understand anything Rowland was saying, but still, there was something about him, a peacefulness and contentment that Archie strongly desired. So, feeling like he was running out of options, he decided to go up with Rowland.

While they waited for the elevator, Archie told Rowland about the latest news of his tumour and seizures, and as usual Rowland told Archie about the power of prayer.

“I need real help,” said Archie.

“This section of Burrard Street is the spiritual centre of Vancouver,” said Rowland. “Some forms of healing are beyond human aid. Many unhealthy, homeless, drug-addicted and sick people from the Main and Hastings area come here to St Paul’s to be healed, and it’s very good that you do too, but sometimes, in the final analysis, something more is required.”

Archie could almost feel some truth in those words, something more.

As they stepped into the elevator, an old man in a wheelchair stepped out, breathing oxygen from a tank and being fed from an IV.

“How can an all-powerful and loving God allow so much suffering in the world?” Archie asked.

The elevator doors closed in front of them. Rowland pressed the number seven.

“Blaming God for people’s suffering would be like blaming yourself for your tumour,” said Rowland. “Sure, on some level you may feel partly responsible, but really all the blaming has got to stop, especially blaming God. We must accept responsibility for our lives, and it’s not about fault-finding or blaming.”

Again something shifted for Archie. He recognized that it wasn’t very responsible to go around blaming this non-entity that he didn’t even really believe in for all the troubles in his life.

They stepped out onto the seventh floor, the psych ward at St Paul’s.

“There are stairs at the end of the hall that will take us up to the roof,” said Rowland.

As they walked up the stairs, Archie read the sign on the door: Resident Patio & Garden. Archie became a little suspicious of Rowland, thinking that sometimes Rowland acted more like a resident than staff, but that wasn’t important at this moment. The fresh air and the sunshine

on his face felt wonderful as they stepped out onto the patio.

He was still suffering, but at least he was doing it in the sunshine. The garden was not much, but it was nice. Benches surrounded a couple of planter boxes, and the view was spectacular.

“St Paul’s hospital is really the best place for me to do my work,” said Rowland as he began digging in the dirt and pulling out weeds.

“Are you sure you’re not just a patient here, Rowland?”

“No, Archie, I’m not a patient here, and even if I was, it wouldn’t make any difference in this moment. The point is that God put me here. God has provided this place for me to do my work, and He has also provided all my food and my home.”

Rowland passed Archie a bucket for the weeds.

“Most people would say that I have my job here and that I use the money I make to pay for rent and food,” he continued, “but I know different. Sure, money changes hands. There’s no arguing that. You also can’t argue that planets are moving in and out of alignment and synapses are firing in the brain, but we don’t point to these things as cause. It is much simpler and more honest for me to recognise God as the source of all things. I simply accept what God offers me.”

He threw a handful of weeds into the bucket.

Though Archie struggled with these concepts, he was feeling too good to be argumentative: the sun, the wind, the feeling of his hands in the dirt. For the first time in a long time he felt present.

“It’s funny,” he said, “normally I would have some rational argument against your opinions, but my head is not there. I’m enjoying digging in the dirt.”

Rowland told him, “A wiser man than me once said, ‘If it works, do that.’”

They finished off their weeding in silence.

When Archie got home that night, he had a very restful sleep and woke up refreshed and rejuvenated. It had been a long time since he had slept that well, but soon he was back to his old routine. He was

now finding fault in all of Rowland's opinions, and he was back to replaying the incidents of the accident in his head.

Having no appetite for breakfast, he decided to go outside to try and find the peace he felt the day before, but he could not. He had been to this place of circular, negative thinking so many times. It was as though the world were playing a cruel joke on him. He went back inside.

The thoughts would not go away. Angry, he cursed God for bringing him to this cesspool hell of a life. Practically writhing on the floor, he couldn't take it anymore. The pressure was building in his head. He began having a seizure.

Archie felt as though he had pushed to the point of no return, like he was moving to his dismal end. As the seizure took him over, time seemed to almost stand still: visions of his beautiful wife, her bright blue eyes. She was standing on the beach, holding their daughter, her hair blowing in the fresh coastal wind.

Again, he heard the words: something more. He sensed that he had crossed a barrier, and that from this point there was no turning back.

He woke up on the floor.

"Please God help me!" he called out.

No more bargains. No more deals. No more figuring it out. He was defeated, and he was willing to do whatever it took, from this moment forward. He began to apply Rowland's principles in his life: pray, meditate, reflect and help others.

Sitting quietly every morning, he continued to see visions of his wife and daughter. So warm and beautiful, it gave him strength and courage. Clearly, he could see that his negative attitude was not helping anyone, especially himself. He called his old golf buddies and got back into the stream of life.

Weeks went by that turned into months with no seizures. So he went back to the outpatient ward at St Paul's for a check up. At the hospital the doctors couldn't really explain it, but the tumour had gone into remission.

"Whatever you're doing," they said, "keep doing it."

He thought about Rowland and went looking for him, but he was nowhere to be found. He went and inquired at the reception desk.

“I’m looking for a Rowland Hazard,” he said. “He does mental health work here.”

The receptionist punched a few keys on her computer and scanned the screen.

“Nope, there’s no Rowland Hazard working here.”

“That’s what I figured,” said Archie. “Thanks for your help.”

He got in the elevator and pressed the number seven.

“There’s no Rowland Hazard here,” the nurse of the psych ward told him.

Archie’s mind began to race. He had to know what happened to Rowland. Where had he come from, and where had he gone? Archie thought of endless possibilities: Rowland was not his real name, etc...

Then he stopped.

Whatever reason he came up with and even if he confirmed that reason, Archie now understood that it was not the cause of Rowland’s appearance in his life. He walked out of the hospital and into the sunlight as a free man. Whether he ever saw Rowland again or not, whether the seizures stopped or not, it did not matter. Whatever happened, he now had something more to give. 🌧️

SHORT FICTION

HONORABLE MENTION | *WILLIAM HOLT MONTGOMERY*

The White Coyotes

K-rock, Brooksie and I were sitting around the coffee table in K-rocks living room. In the center of the table sat a two foot tall bong and a pile of dope that was busted up and ready to smoke. It was late in the evening or early in the morning depending on how you perceive time or perhaps, we were sucked into that moment between the two where all things are silent but you can feel the still presence of something else, watching from far away, a something else that doesn't remain only in our plain of existence. A mellow beat with a soft voice speaking in rhyme preaching inspiration and positivity played in the background as we watched the muted television screen.

“Fuck man. Look at us, just sitting here. Smoking dope like a bunch of bums,” I said.

“Hey,” Brooksie said with a dopey grin.

“What?” I laughed, “Seriously, what the fuck are we doing?”

“Chilling, man,” K-rock said.

“Chilling,” I snorted, “that aint going to get us anywhere.”

“Why? Where'd you think you're going? Mr. Big Time,” Brooksie teased.

“Nowhere, that's the thing.”

Brooksie has a square face with blue eyes and a solid chin. He has a goatee and usually styles his hair with gel and spikes it up. He was wearing jeans, white Nike Air Forces and a black track jacket that said “Irish” on the back with a four leaf clover under it. I looked over at K-rock; he was wearing a pair of blue denim jeans and a white beater, no shoes. His face is rounder than Brooksie's and his cheeks are full of pock marks that were disguised by his unshaven scruff. K-rock reached for the bong on the coffee table with his right hand and with his left he

grabbed at the pile of dope. After scooping up a good amount he placed the dope into the bowl and sat back.

“Lighter?”

Brooksie and I grabbed at our pockets and began searching around us. I saw a glimpse of silver and red wedged in between the cushions of the couch.

“Yo,” I handed him the lighter.

“Thanks.”

K-rock sparked the flame and put it to the bowl of the bong. The bubbles churned as he pulled the smoke into the chamber. The smoke billowed to his lips as he kept pulling. His face went red as it imploded on its self; his cheeks sucking in, the veins in his neck bulging, his head trembling. He pulled and pulled until the point where I thought he was going to faint. Then he suddenly released the choke pushing fresh air into the chamber and with a gurgling whoosh the bong was clear. His head knocked backwards as he inhaled the last of the smoke. He held onto it for a few moments and then released it into the air.

“Hoowa-she-e-et,” he coughed.

I watched the smoke drift upwards towards the ceiling and across the large sun window that looked out onto his porch. Behind the smoke through the glass a movement stirred in unison with the swirling of the grey. As the cloud thinned two ghostly figures became apparent. I rubbed my eyes, squinted and focused hard too only see the figures even clearer. The stirring movement became still and their features became distinct. There, just outside of the window peering through the glass stood two white coyotes. Their fur was perfectly white like a field of fresh snow. Their tongues hung from their mouths as their hot breathe made fog on the window. They both had exquisite blue eyes that resembled sapphires. The coyotes were identical like a set of twins.

“Dude!” I pointed to the creatures.

Both Brooksie and K-rock looked at me.

“No, dude! Look!” I pointed again.

They slowly turned their heads and when their gaze met with the stares of our visitors, Brooksie and K-rock jumped back in astonishment.

“Whoa!” Brooksie said.

“What the fuck?”

“That’s a trip.”

Very slowly we all rose from our seats. We approached the coyotes with caution even though we were separated by the glass. We stood in silence staring at them. Their blue eyes pierced into me as if they were looking into my soul.

“What do we do?” I asked.

“I don’t know man.”

“My cats, where the fuck are my cats?” K-rock hurried over to the glass patio door, the coyotes gathered on the other side looking up at him almost hungrily.”BAH!” he smacked the glass.

Un-phased, the creatures looked at him with the same intent.

“BAH!” He smacked the glass again; the coyotes once again didn’t react.

“What the fuck?” K-rock laughed.

He cracked the door open just an inch. The animals as if they had just smelt a warm meal began piling over each other, competing with one another for the right to enter first. He slammed the door shut almost pinching the snout of one of the ghostly white figures. Outside they circled each other in excitement pawing the door. Inside we looked at each other in confusion.

“I know,” Brooksie said as he headed to the kitchen.

Moments later he came back to the door with a pot and a wooden spoon. He gestured to us to back away from the door; he opened the door quickly and just wide enough for him to step through. He closed the door behind him. With the spoon and the pot he began to clang them together creating a deafening racket. The animals at first; slowly backed

away from the noise, after a few steps they cautiously turned their backs towards us never braking their cold glare. One of them before turning a corner paused for a moment, raised its head, howled loudly to the moon and then darted off. This startled us for a moment then a surge of energy washed over us leaving us with an electrified inspiration.

“Let’s follow them,” K-rock said.

“Yeah, dude!”

We ran after them into the cold damp night; with no jackets or sweaters, K-rock with no shoes. We turned the corner and found an empty street, dimly light by overhanging lamps.

“Where the fuck did they go?”

“I don’t know man? It’s like they just... disappeared,” Brooksie said, his jaw hung slack in amazement

“It’s like their ghosts or Angels or some shit,” K-rock said.

One of the beings emerged suddenly from behind us and streaked down the street in a white blur. We followed after the creature, remaining at bay for we had no knowledge of its intentions, if it was a friend or foe, or a spectral nomad from another dimension, just passing by. We reached wild absurd conclusions that this visit was an omen from the heavens above or that it was just an existential roll of the dice, by chance two perfectly smooth white stray dogs popped-in for a snack of kitten. It moved quickly for a couple of blocks, then stopped abruptly at the edge of a park. It circled around a solitary tree sniffing at its base. We approached it slowly; not wanting to spook the majestic creature or to spark its rage. We stopped dead in our tracks just a few meters from the coyote, when it turned its head and glared at us coolly. It began to move towards us, sniffing at the ground.

“Oh shit, man. It’s coming for us,” Brooksie said.

“What do we do? Holy fuck man, what do we do?” K-rock asked.

“Don’t do anything, don’t move... Don’t do a thing,” I said.

We stood frozen; the three of us huddled together in fear. It sniffed the ground all the way to our feet and then our legs, circling us.

“Dude-man,” I said under my breath.

The creature rounded us three or four times then looked away with disinterest. It strolled over to the edge of the park and howled out into the distance. Through the dark a far away cry, that sounded like a pained moan responded. The coyote perked its ear in the direction of the noise and darted off into the darkness, disappearing like a spirit, leaving us in silence. We walked back to K-rock’s apartment; our heads hung low, our feet shuffling, with hands in pockets. Back at K-rock’s our minds with a hungered wonder lust began to travel from our miniscule spec of existence to the surreal outer reaches of reality.

“They were fucking Angels, dude!” Brooksie said.

“Maybe they were like the Angels of Death, like Michael or something and they came to tell us that you know? Our time is up and shit,” K-rock laughed.

“Whoa.”

I put the bong down, exhaling a large plume of grey, “What if they were spiritual guides sent to inspire us, like to inspire a change in our spirits?”

We all looked at each other in silence for a few moments and then busted into boisterous laughter. The rest of the night continued this way, our conversation ran in philosophical circles and tangents, peppered with bong tokes and laughter, each one of us creating our own interpretations of the events.

* * *

I sit on the couch with a bundle of joy bouncing on my knee. In silence, contemplating over a past life of achievements, commemorations and plaques arranged on the wall. My mind helplessly drifts to that evening; whether they were inter-dimensional time travelers, symbols of inspiration, majestic Angels or simple hungry earth dogs looking for scraps, I felt a small hope that somehow that experience completely altered the direction of our lives; an experience that led us to a place that was unknown before. Far away, to a somewhere that surpassed the furthest reaches of the imagination. 🌈

