Welcome to the twenty-first edition of Creative License, an award winning literary and arts magazine published annually by and for the students of Georgia Perimeter College. This past year marked a major milestone for Creative License: it now has its own GPC website and the magazine and entry form are online. Please check it out at http://depts.gpc.edu/creativelicense.

Admittedly, the quality of art reproduced in an online production cannot rival the polished, high-resolution look found in the hand-held magazine, so let us put any fears to rest. We will continue to print high quality hard copies for distribution, but we need no longer worry about how to get one of those copies into the hands of every student in the college. Financially, it is not feasible, but the online version complements the printed version as a valuable classroom teaching tool to promote learning and unity among the various campuses and centers of the college. In addition, it is an excellent introduction to the unique perspectives of GPC students and their communities.

We are proud that Creative License is solely compiled of student work, which showcases the college’s richly diverse culture.

Deborah Byrd
Faculty Editor
White slopes resembling

mountain tops of fresh powdery snow

sit idle waiting for blades of steel,

sharp enough to cut through

the surface of a frozen lake

like a knife through melting butter.

Swift swipes through the white matter

clear what brush remain beneath as to

expose a barren plot liken to a

farmer’s cleared field at season’s end.

The mixed waste--shoved aside -

dissolve like snow

on a warm sunny day.

I splash on my favorite scent

and once again my daily

task of shaving is done.
A few weeks ago I attended a documentary screening, the purpose of which was to raise funds for a community radio station I support. Naturally, the subject of the documentary was quite controversial as I thrive on controversy. After the somewhat lengthy, although interesting presentation, the director responded to a few questions from the floor. Some solid questions were asked. All the general sort of ass-kissery came first: “What inspired you?”, “What will you do next?”, your standard stuff. I guess mine wasn’t remarkably different from the other flat and flavorless questions. It was, however, a big deal to me because I’m usually one to nod and paint an expression of deep personal interest on my face while others ask things.

“But,” I told myself, “how often can you ask someone like this a question?”

So I raised my hand. The lady with the microphone floated over and after the director finished explaining what made him want to study film in college to an overly attentive twenty-something year old guy with a note book in which he couldn’t seem to write fast enough, it was my turn.

I felt a cold wave of crippling nervousness swim through my body and it seemed like the confidence that pushed my hand into the air had abandoned me.

“Um...” I stammered. “Do you have anything to say to my...?

“...Uh.

“I mean, I’m a 22 year old college student who was--I mean, I was really inspired by your film and...well...eh-hm... something told me that you might, like, have a few words to say on that. I mean, I’m not looking for ...um...advice but, you know what I mean? Uh...is there anything you’d...uh...you’d like to say about how we can maybe bring about some of the...um... changes your film f-f-f-focused on?”

As my question slowly died, a painfully stale silence was born. The director looked at the floor in semi-deep thought. This silence- cold and eternal in those few moments that it existed--installed in me the strange feeling that I had spoken complete and totally unintelligible nonsense. I knew that I had said “um” and “I mean” enough to seriously violate my social allowance. Even if it was understandable, it must have appeared nervous and selfish and supremely unintellectual of me to solicit advice from this man (even though I claimed I wasn’t trying to).

Relief fell on me as a slow smile emerged from his face and he raised his head, finally viewing the origin of this sloppy question.

“Actually, I do.” he said in a tone that added, “and I was wondering if you were going to ask....”

He collected his words, then released them:

“Don’t sell out.

Don’t give yourself away
Before you find out what you mean.
That’s what my generation did.

Look,
There will be pain and joy,
Life and death.
You will be embarrassed and sometimes walk alone;  
Some nights sleep alone.  
But,  
There was never (and never will be)  
Us and them;  
Never some distant enemy you can blame all your failures on;  
Never some immensely bleak fate  
That infects your hopes, desires, and your dreams....  
These are all untruths you must shatter.  
There is YOU.  
And this you must not sell  
(To any silver-tongued plastician with deep pockets,  
A shallow vision,  
And a narrow mind-  
Who will promise you the stars  
Then blame the stars for being out of reach).  
You MUST not sell this because it’s for you  
To Love and Share.  
Apathy is your only enemy,  
Anarchy your only friend.  
I suggest you KILL your idols.  
Because, if I may be so bold as to say…  
Art is not words;  
Not paint;  
Not music-  
It’s you.”

Time seemed to have stopped. As these things (way more than words) struck me with a furious mystical force, I forgot about my fumbled question, my over using “um” and “I mean.”  
He continued:  
“So my young friend, shake off burdensome hopes  
Of filling some socially constructed shoe  
And step out into the dawn of a new generation’s Day.  
Leave traditions you deem corrupt  
Chained to the pillars of the past.  
But don’t do what we did,  
Don’t settle.
This world of good and evil,  
Light and dark  
Or, more than likely just simple IGNORANCE  
Is yours to change.  
Kid, you are the future (that is, until you pass your relevance date).  
I may as well be dead.  
I hate to sound like a motivational speaker but  
Look,  
The dripping of CONGENITAL failure  
Is a leak for you to plug only  
Because the ones who make a difference  
Have to be crazy enough to believe they can.  
A better world is only a dead dream if YOU LET IT DIE,  
No pressure…  
All the world can do is stand back,  
Watch,  
And wait to see where you take it…”

There was a pause and again the silence, only now on FIRE with something celestial, something significant. It rose to a climax, then it burst:

“Does that answer your question, young man?” he said, smiling.

I’m not really sure if I could have answered. Either way, the microphone lady had floated back to the other side of the room to field a question from an older woman about the pros and cons of oblique angles. Something felt…unfinished.

But the director looked back at me.

In that dim and smoky room his gaze cut past the man with thick round glasses who was passing out Revolution! magazine (the Bob Avakian one); through conversation consisting of fried plantains, Mumia Abu Jamal, and law schools with cheap LSAT standards; and even beyond my biases about listening to persons older than myself. I saw in that moment that he had sat in my seat many years ago. I felt it. Maybe each person who asked this man a question that day also felt what I felt.

Before he threw his attention back to the older woman across the room he caught what I think he wanted to catch from my face: that I knew exactly what he meant, whatever it was.

Since that day most things have been just as they were before. But something did change and I can’t quite place it or explain what it means. I do, however, continue to support that radio station. Community radio seems to be the only trustworthy media one can find.
Veedel, by Nigel J. Glover (Nexzu)
Citrus Synesis
by Cole E. Thomas

**ORCHIDS**, making mother proud
Whistles, silent lunchtime crowds
Peppers, copper, sushi roe
Weaver finches steal the show
**SUNRISE** beyond sleepy marsh
Pumpkins, pansies, acorn squash
Long pod poppies, marigolds
Calendula, Garfield’s soul

**CITRUS SYNESIS**, iodine
Pararealgar, clementines
Tigers’ not-stripes or cheddar cheese
Sherbet order, smiling “please”
**FIRE**, carrot, fox, Creamsicle
Flirting lovers’ dance so fickle
Viceroy, Rayleigh scattering
Children’s presence mattering

**COLLABORATE KISSES**, cats’ meows
Snapdragon and babies’ smiles
Sweet potatoes, autumn leaves
A healing heart where someone grieves

**PEACH FLIP**, Goldfish, basketball
Hi-C, Nehi, Fanta y’all!
The back cover of *Goodnight Moon*
If “ROY G BIV” had one balloon

**HOT BRIGHT** shades with neon shoes
Not vanilla, not the blues
Tiny Trumpets, Marten’s boots
Gaillardia lips in photo shoots

**CATALINA**, chilly fall
Haunted gala, costume ball
Strolling through streets obvious
Baby, orange you marvelous!
There are four golden rules of the theater that should never be broken unless you want to suffer the consequences!” said Miss Bolton, Judson’s high school drama teacher. She was pacing the room with a look of seriousness as she continued. “Rule One: Never say the name Macbeth inside the theater walls. Rule Two: Never wear peacock feathers in your hair or on your costume. Rule Three: Never go on stage without your glasses or contacts. Rule Four: Never go on or around the stage while you are high on any substance.”

Miss Bolton turned to face her 9th grade drama students’ timid faces and warned them sternly that breaking any of these four rules would end with catastrophe on the stage. She told them horror stories of lights falling from the rafters and crushing actors who missed their mark because they were not wearing their glasses. She told the class about the woman whose costume was made almost entirely out of peacock feathers and how she fell through a trapdoor and broke her spine. She warned them with the tale of the man who had gotten too high and found himself buried alive under a stage when pouring a concrete slab for the play Macbeth.

Mesmerized by the tales Miss Bolton was telling them, Judson George knew he was finally in the right place. He had always wanted to be on the stage performing and now that he had broken free of the “tormented years” that were his middle school experience, he just knew that the next four years would be different. His old drama teacher had not let him on the stage very much and he aimed to change that pattern quickly. North Atlanta High School is going to be the place where I can really shine, he thought to himself. Judson then promised that he would never break any of the golden rules in his new theater and he even had to sign a sheet of paper saying so. Little did he know that one day he would break that promise.

Three years went by and Judson was on the stage constantly performing in one show after the other. He loved the theater and being around it. He not only acted but he also helped to build and paint the sets for each show. Whenever he was not in a performance, he worked back stage making sure everything ran smoothly. All his free time was spent around the theater and the shows put on there. He had also made a good group of friends through the theater and really felt like he finally belonged somewhere. Never once during all those years had he broken one of Miss Bolton’s rules and he was proud of that.

Things were going smoothly until the new drama teacher, Miss Bingly, announced that the spring production would be none other than Shakespeare’s play A Midsummer Night’s Dream. When Judson heard the announcement, he groaned and rolled his eyes.

**Hee-Haw**
by Judson George

He remembered back two years ago when they had done a very progressive version of Twelfth Night in which evening after evening the audience remained completely silent, not understanding a single thing that was going on. Needless to say, the director’s vision was not fully comprehended by anyone who attended the show nor by the actors in it. Judson hoped beyond hope that they would be doing a traditional version of the play and was relieved when Miss Bingly explained her thoughts about the production. She wanted to set the show in Elizabethan times with traditional dress and sets. Judson began to think that maybe it would not be so bad after all and, since it was his senior year, he was a shoo-in for a lead male role. After doing some research into the play, Judson decided that he wanted to play either Lysander or Demetrius, the two romantic male leads. He prepared for the reading with a partner and, when the day of the audition came, he felt like he knocked it out of the park. He thought he was a perfect fit for either of the roles he wanted but Miss Bingly had a different idea.
Several days later, Miss Bingly posted the cast list and Judson hurried into school to try and sneak a peek before the other students got there. When he found the list, he was shocked. Not only was he not Demetrius or Lysander but his partner had acquired the lead female role. He scrolled down the list of names and found his name next to the title Nick Bottom. Not having a clue as to who this Nick Bottom was, he decided to go talk to the teacher. As he glanced over the list again, he could not figure out who the individuals were that had been cast in the roles he wanted. Were they underclassmen? Were they even drama students? He did not have a clue so he hurried off to find Miss Bingly and get some answers. He found her in her room muttering to herself and paused for her to stop before he asked, “Miss Bingly, I was just wondering, who is Nick Bottom in the show?”

“Oh he is the lead comic relief of the play. I thought you would do wonderfully as him.”

“Oh cool, well thank you... um...one more thing... I was also wondering who are the two guys you've cast as Lysander and Demetrius?”

Her reply took Judson by total surprise. “They're basketball players that I found after the auditions and thought they would fit the roles perfectly.”

“Oh I see.” Judson said. He walked out of her room thinking bitterly to himself, so not only have these two individuals not even auditioned but they have no knowledge or experience of the theatre whatsoever and now all of sudden they are going to be the stars of the last show of my high school career. How freaking unbelievable is this? Judson rushed off to class disturbed by this news.

Later during the day, while he was trying to look on the bright side of things, he realized that these two basketball players would probably be horrible and that would give him a chance to shine all the more. He decided that maybe Miss Bingly had done him a huge favor by letting him go out on top in just a different way than he had expected.

Rehearsals began a few weeks later and it became apparent very quickly that the basketball players had been chosen purely on looks alone and neither one of them had much talent in the art of Shakespearian acting, or acting period for that matter. The cast supported them as much as everyone could, helping them memorize their lines, teaching them the correct way to project, the proper ways to move across the stage, and helping them with their hair and makeup. The show was approaching fast and the rehearsals got longer and longer, with little improvement from the basketball crossover stars.

Two days before the opening night, Judson had developed a sinus infection that was causing him bad headaches and a nasty cough. He left school early and went to the ear, nose, and throat doctor, who gave him antibiotics and some prescription cough medicine with codeine. He thanked the doctor and returned to school hopeful that the medicine would help by the opening night of the show. Judson did not even realize as he drank some of the cough medicine before that night's rehearsal that he was breaking rule number four.

That night at the dress rehearsal, Miss Bingly threw a major curve ball at Judson causing him to break another rule, number three. In the play, his character Nick Bottom got turned into a donkey and the director's original plan was to portray this through character makeup. Well, Miss Bingly had a surprise. She had been hard at work at home creating a realistic donkey mask made from padding, wire, and fabric that was to fit over Judson's head. In order to get the head on, Judson was forced to take off his glasses and, since he did not own any contacts, he was virtually blind while he had to maneuver around the stage as a donkey. To avoid any major accidents, Miss Bingly had the girl who played the Amazon Queen, Zanada, take Judson by the hand and lead him around the stage while he sang a song and hee-hawed to the audience. Judson protested to
Miss Bingly that he thought this was a bad idea to break one of the theater rules but she cut him off abruptly saying, “We all must take risks in the theatre, Judson. You have nothing to worry about because Zanada will be by your side the entire time.” Warily they rehearsed with the new appendage on Judson’s head and he began to get used to the twenty-pound donkey mask.

Opening night finally arrived and a nervous cast and crew arrived in small groups to start getting ready for the evening. Judson was out on stage going over a few last-minute changes Miss Bingly had given him from the night before. The set looked incredible. On most of the stage there was a forest scene with a large jungle gym frame covered in green paint and foliage. Branches hid most of the wooden structure and there were platforms up and down on either side where the actors would be strategically placed throughout the production. It looked like a giant tree had almost fallen into place and this would be where a major portion of the play would take place. Everything was painted and detailed to perfection and, while on stage rehearsing, Judson was transported to a different world where he and his fellow actors would entertain from that night. He was very excited about the show and had been told earlier in the day that they had a sold-out audience for that evening, so the pressure was really on to do well. Judson took out his bottle of cough medicine and swigged from it several times. He was feeling pretty good from the medicine and it calmed his nerves. He just knew that this would be a night to remember.

About an hour later, when Judson was finished with his makeup, he went over to the ladies’ dressing room door and knocked, asking to speak with Zanada. He wanted to go over the plan one more time so that they did not have any accidents during the donkey transformation in the show. Zanada came out and Judson could not believe his eyes. He said, “What are you wearing on your dress? Those were not there yesterday during rehearsal.”

“Oh yeah, Miss Bingly added them to my costume today. They’re real peacock feathers. Aren’t they beautiful with my purple and blue dress?” Zanada said smiling.

Judson was horrified. He felt like snatching them off her dress right then and there, tearing the feathers up into little pieces, stomping on them, and then burning them in a trashcan. All he could say was “Um….They’re nice and all, but you know the theatre rules as well as I do and we can’t have those things out on stage with us tonight. It will bring an omen upon this show and then something terrible will happen.”

Zanada laughed. “Oh, Judson - don’t be so silly and superstitious, nothing bad is going to happen.” That was it for Judson, who hurried off to find Miss Bingly to protest until he could set things right, but he did not have much time before the curtain went up. Judson looked everywhere for the director, but she was nowhere to be found and he could not risk missing his first entrance or being seen outside the back of the theatre in costume by the audience coming in. Against his better judgment he finally decided to ignore that rule number two had just been broken and he would just try to have a great
show without literally breaking a leg.

The curtain had just gone up and the crowd was electric. They were getting every joke and laughing loudly in all the right places. Everyone was excited but Judson could not shake this bad feeling that he had about things being all out of sorts since three out of the four golden rules had been broken in this performance. He was even more nervous because he was deliberating breaking two of them himself. He was high off the cough medicine, he was not wearing his glasses for an extended amount of time on stage, and now Zanada was parading around with peacock feathers sticking out of her dress. Surely this was going to end badly.

As the curtain closed on Act One everyone was filled with the excitement of thunderous applause. Judson let his guard down and thought to himself; Maybe all those rules really are just silly superstitious nonsense. Nothing’s gone wrong so far and we are having the best opening night ever. He took another swig from his cough medicine and went to get his donkey mask and prepare for Act Two. The second act started out with a bang and when Judson came out on stage in the donkey helmet the crowd roared with laughter and applause. The scene progressed and it came time for Judson to sing his song and waltz around to Zanada’s lead, but Zanada never showed up to take his hand. Judson began to panic, not wanting to move around too much because he could not see and yet not wanting to stand still and ignore all his blocking for the scene. “Where is she?” he thought. “Oh well, I’ll just feel the hotspots and move around a little while I’m singing.” He began his song strongly. He was standing at what he approximated to be the middle of the stage and he decided to take a few steps around before the finale of his song. “The finch the sparrow, … hee haw… and the lark, (side step) The plain-song … hee haw… cuckoo grey, (Side step) Whose note full many … hee haw … a man doth mark, and dares not answer (forward step) …hee haaaaawwww.” The donkey man had disappeared and a loud crash alongside the sound of wood breaking was heard throughout the theatre. As he stepped forward, he had walked right off the front of the stage and fell fifteen feet into an orchestra pit.

The audience was absolutely silent until Judson’s father could be heard from the back of the room, “Judson! JUDson! JUDSON!” Suddenly the shapes in the room made sense—he was in a hospital!

“Dad,” said Judson. “I have had a most rare vision….”
Black and White Elegance, by Alexander Baxter
Ode to a Sharpened Pencil
by Alex Coble

What life exists in cold, grey granite,
Suffocated by sealed, dead wood
Resting, neatly, on some unrelenting surface,
Atop a white piece of paper unawares, cannibalistically?

And made to toil against his own flesh,
Granite smearing, bleeding, in vain
Only to be smeared further into ultimate oblivion
By a rubber, annihilating end

That, too, will be wiped away like tears
from a weeping woman,

Until borne weight blooms, relents, at last
And a dulled pencil may rest once again
Atop paper, holding in its folds, like arms
The result of its suffering:
Sprawling, everlasting life.
Presently, gaunt Jack Abel reached across the sink for the razor as his left hand painted his neck and face with white cream. He didn’t look at the mirror. In the past he would tell his friends, “Only a narcissist looks upon his reflection.” The idea stood with him. His attire for the day hung in the closet outside of the bathroom. It consisted of a black suit, black pants, white button up dress shirt, black tie, and a white undershirt. The weather was predicted to be cool, with a lack of wind and a chance of rain. As he shaved he did not look at his eyes. He watched only the razor. When his eyes met their reflection he thinly cut his neck in distraction. “Dammit,” he said to himself.

Eight years previous Jack Abel married Sylvia Westinghouse. Jack was then a French immigrant. He was born Jean-Jacques. When he came off the boat from France, an immigration officer asked him for a name. He could not write English, nor spell it with his lips, but he told the officer, in warbled tones, “Jean-Jacques.” The officer, under-educated, scribbled the moniker “Jack” into his log. Realizing the foreigner could not give a signature, he instead asked Jean-Jacques to mark the log. Jack his mark. Months passed, and with this transformation from the French Jean Jacques to the American Jack, the foreigner found love.

Her name was Sylvia and she was lovely. They would dance and talk of the silliness of the world. Together, their youth would seem forever eternal. Being in poverty and with few things to promise, they declared their mutual desire for a child. In the spring of their first year together, Jack and Sylvia Abel bore a baby. They christened the child Valery. He was a portly baby, with massive blue eyes and an enormous head. On the night of the baby’s birth Jack commented on the constellations in the strata.

“The sky is flooded with the light of heaven. He paints an image, an image that gives us hope, feeds our belief in the promise. For he loves us, and all he asks is that we love him back. Agape, agape.” Jack thought himself a novel philosopher. Valery sat on the front lawn of the house, playing with a stone. He would drop the stone, watch it fall, and then pick it up again. The act became liturgical. He pulled at strains of the grass, and taking the straightened green fragments he would crush them into a brittle paste. Feeling ashamed, he would blow this paste out of his hand. “I shouldn’t do that,” he said to himself. “Father says I’m only killing the plants. You wouldn’t like it if I pulled you up, played with you, and then when I got bored, crushed you up and spit you out all over the universe.”

His father would sit at his desk at home, toiling with his plants. They loomed from their crevices and surrounded his study like a rainforest. All kinds of flora and fauna, some he claimed were key ingredients to ancient rituals of sorcery. Other strains were common additives. He was a gardener by trade, and through his profession he found an art in exploring the plants he cared for. He would dissect bits of leaves, placing samples under microscopes, applying solutions and acids, and then he would tabulate his results. One evening Valery, fascinated with his father’s work, watched
the foreigner apply a colorless liquid onto the plants.

“All of nature is a construct, a machine, a system,” pronounced the foreigner to his spawn, “We are all atoms, each of us. No different structurally from this plant. We require the same materials to survive. Our bodies perform the same functions. We are both living. When a plant dies, its body is absorbed back into the earth, where it becomes the nutrients for the next generation of plants. It is a constant cycle of life and death, of resurrection. We humans,” he said, pointing back and forth from him to the boy, “We are the same. Our dead bodies feed the ground, and it gives us the fruit we eat each day. That is our purpose, to provide this world with continuity, with survival. You understand me?”

_We all come back._

Valery touched the stem of the crooked plant. Father had told him it would die soon, “Water can’t get to the highest point. Eventually it’ll stop trying, and then it will wilt and die off.” Valery began to cry. He begged his father to do something about it, to fix the plant, to replant it, to stand the stem straight. His father only said, “It is nature, sooner or later it will die. Why delay the will of our creator?” But this was not good enough. So the father made a promise. He would construct an apparatus to save the plant from dying, to stand it up straight. However, he had a condition. He would only do it if the boy found the parts. Once the parts were found, Jack would assemble the construct.

The boy’s persistence enraged the father. He would curse the boy violently. The house was quiet now. The boy played outside, watching the plant grow by the smallest measurement, while the foreigner would study his specimens. Jack had made a list of items. He thought about including some things the boy would never be able to find on his own. In this way he could sabotage the boy’s desires, and he could teach him about nature’s indifference. But the boy was smart. Valery, with his globular blue eyes that projected a vast intelligence beneath the veneer of his pupils, would not be fooled.

In the ways of struggle little Valery was wiser than the foreigner. The foreigner broke down a bit each day. He watched the boy run around the house, emptying cabinets, unloading drawers, tearing through old cardboard boxes, a treasure hunt. By this day, sitting in the garden, dressed like a gentleman, waiting for his father to get ready, the boy waited with all the parts ready for assembly.

“He promised, he promised,” Valery would mumble to himself.

The whole house smelled like tobacco. A fire had been burning in the chimney for the past month. That’s how long the preparations had taken, the preparations for today. The front door opened from the inside, and Valery swung his head around. He looked upon his father. Tall, skin like leather, combed and lathered hair, with shrunken shoulders and a crooked back. He did not smile. Soon they would meet here again. Valery Abel stood up. They both looked at each other. Silence, and then Jack turned around to lock the door.

When he came off the stoop, Jack walked to where his son was standing in the yard. Jack smiled mirthlessly.
Then he stared into his son's eyes. The boy tugged on his father's coat sleeve, saying: "Daddy, Daddy, did you hear me? I've gotten everything. You promised." He did not whine. He only reminded. So Jack Abel stopped pouting.

"Yes son, yes you have. Let me see those things," he said. The boy took the box and handed it to his father. Jack made quick work of the pieces. He combined them and when finished, presented the final product to Valery.

"Stick it into the ground next to the stem and rest the end of the plant onto the crutch. It's a plant crutch."

Valery smiled, and he did as advised. The plant was upright now, and it began to strengthen. When it was done, he grabbed for his father's hand. Jack and Valery Abel walked, hand in hand, along the street to the town graveyard. They were to attend a funeral.

The boy's face did nothing. His countenance was absent, void. Those eyes like stars gone supernova. Entire galaxies, uncharted interstellar space locked behind those curtains that dwelled on the erect figure of his father. He held up a small cardboard box that contained all of the parts. The foreigner became aggravated.

"I've gotten everything you need," the child said.

"Valery," began the foreigner. Then he looked at the crooked stalk of the plant. It was small, not yet an adult. The boy had taken a keen liking to this malformed creation. How do you care for something so meaningless? A little mistake of nature, and here I am, trying to correct it, make right the errors of our creator. Who am I to do this? Nature does not make errors. She has no opinions. I have opinions. We're matter floating through space, what room is there for opinions, for change?
As I kneel my eyes run along the golden letters stitched across the crimson velvet that covers the altar:
   THIS DO IN REMEMBERANCE OF ME.

I raise my head and open my mouth.

The Flesh swells like cotton on my tongue and the Blood tastes as sour as tamarind juice.

The preacher’s thumb passes across my forehead and I fear that the oil will sizzle setting my skin alight burning me from head to toe.

But I swallow and do not choke and my bones are not smoldering heaps lying as a warning to the wicked.

Is this Mercy or Absence?

As I move back to my place among the congregation tears soak my cheeks as a testament to my grieving for what I have lost.
The creak of the floor board stops me from entering the room fully
I turn to look behind me.
My grandmother is still asleep
in the dark brown chair in the living room
and the dishes banging in the sink mean that my aunt is still in the kitchen
down the hall.

When I turn back her eyes are open
but she doesn’t see me.
Not yet.

As I wait I hug the door frame
and my fingernails catch on every little groove in the wood
that shows how tall I have ever been.

After a while her eyes focus on me
And in a voice I barely recognize
she calls me to come in closer.

My chin rests on the edge of the mattress
while we talk about silly things
like if a fat toad can jump higher than a skinny bunny
or what a humming bird would sound like if it could sing.
All the while her thin, cold hand rests on my cheek
or pulls at a beaded braid.

When it gets harder for her eyes to stay open I begin to cry,
burying my face into soft white blanket that surrounds her.

I tell her that I miss her when she sleeps.
I beg her to stay.

A cool hand returns to my cheek as her eyes close.
And I know that less of her will come back
when she wakes.
Dodge Viper, by Jason Luong

Living Room, by Cyrus Walker
Shyness, by Jasmin Jester

Fall at Mrs. Watson’s House, by Terence Curry
Swing in Shadows, by Vahe Chamesian

Nephew with Grandmother’s Glasses, by Cyrus Walker
The Parent I Never Knew
by Tina Caulder

The blinding sunset trickled layer of yellow, purple, and red over the peaceful neighborhood nestled between Fort Bragg and Fayetteville city limits. The brisk winds of March marked the onset of Spring in North Carolina. My mother returned home from work around 6 pm on the weekdays after which she would promptly shower and prepare or finish dinner, depending on what stage the main course was in. She also took this time to catch up with my older brother and me. My mother bore four children; Detrin and I both shared the same father. My father. tall, lanky, dark as shiny onyx. Temperamental, possessive, angry, domineering, geech. These are the memories that reigned supreme in my adolescent mind. Memories mostly given from my mother’s accounts.

March not only marked a new season in our household but it also sprung thoughts of nostalgia from my mother’s weary mind.

“You know your dad’s birthday is this month,” she would say every March. It humored me how she could never remember the day.

“Your dad completed four tours in Vietnam. Did I tell you about how your dad pulled his battle buddy out of a foxhole?”

Of course, these didn’t top my favorite recounts:

“One time, me and Duke were sitting in traffic, and your dad was so impatient he drove on the sidewalk!”

Despite his heroism, my mother never hesitated informing us about my father’s mental instabilities as well. How else would she explain to her two children why a seemingly strong man managed to voluntarily take his life? I was three years old at the time; Detrin was six.

On this particular fall evening, my mother settled in the only recliner in our spacious living room, with me between her legs, my back facing her as the reminiscing began. By today’s journalism standards, my mother occupies the first and largest tier of news consumers which are those who get their news from local networks and 20/20 specials. It’s likely that my mother’s choice in topic was a result of my father’s birthday month and a tragic news story she had viewed combined. Right before my mother tells me something disturbing or off beat, she prefaxes with an uneasy pause, lips perched together, and eyes fixed on my face as if to brace herself for my expression. She hadn’t realized at this point that my father’s suicide trumped any antics she could fill in the middle, so any reactions to any future revelations would be lackluster at best. Then again, this could have opened the floodgates, as my mother spared no expense while sprinkling facts throughout my young adulthood.

“You know your dad used to touch you when you were a baby.” My eyebrows bent as I digested the information. This is the only time I recall my mother achieving a startle out of me with daddy news.

“We used to notice something wrong with your diaper, like it was put on wrong or something anytime we left you with him.”

I was frozen. I sat there and let my mother’s words sink in.
“Am I still a vir-”

“Absolutely!” Her somewhat proud reply interrupted me. “I took you to the doctors to make sure your hymen was still intact.”

After the heart-stopping news, I allowed my mother’s conclusion to offer a wave of relief.

The constant coddling past 10, the special attention over not just my siblings but my cousins, over my entire family, on both sides. Suddenly it all made sense. My childhood resilience took over as it had previously as I continued living my life. As the days progressed, I felt blessed. Being young enough not to know and eventually, my mother’s words were put into a memory bank. Never leaving. Escaping in spurts.

It was about a month after my 16th birthday, close to midnight, when myself and three other night owls found a secluded patch of land in a subdivision to carry out our rowdy, irreverent acts. The space was only occupied by tall leafy trees, and since, as most of Fayetteville would suggest, it was a piece of the suburbs nestled in the country, we were sure our ungodly acts would not be disturbed.

It had been five years since my mother broke the news about my father, which I had processed with the same ease she issued the data. The four of us, three young men and I, sat in Hidayo’s smokey, 93’ Honda Accord while passing a joint, lewd comments, and the reflections of the day. We only shared in common the high school we attended and the propensity to sneak out at night. Though three guys and I may sound disarming, I always carried a certain confidence around the opposite sex that served as my safety net, plus, as a loner, I always took advantage of the opportunity to socialize. Besides, who could resist the company of such a charming bunch of hormonal boys?

“So out of all three of us, who would you choose?” one comfortably asked from the driver seat.

“Not you, don’t worry,” I swiftly rebutted.

Sharp cackles faded in and out. After two rounds of the wacky tobacky, I had reached my limit. At 16, it did not take much for me. By this time, my eyes tightened and it was clear the lucid effect of the plant had encapsulated all of us. The conversation continued at its steady pace:

“Have you ever been with more than one guy at once? You might like it,” one mischievously remarked.

“Leave her alone, she’s obviously not interested,” shouted back Hidayo. Though he was loyal to his gang, and by no means less horny, he was more diplomatic than the bunch. Thus, they listened to him with the same reverence a son would show his father.

“I’m only kidding” responded his inferior.
As the conversation shifted from one subject to the other, I leaned forward between the passenger and driver’s side to center myself in the dialogue. The next phase in this repartee took such a sharp turn. It’s still hazy to me. Being under the influence, I sunk into a euphoric state, as a drunkard ignorantly telling the police all of his illegal acts:

“Why don’t you have a boyfriend?”

“How many men have you slept with?”

“When I was two years old, my dad used to touch me.”

The swift silence that followed mirrored the quickness of my confession. This is the moment I was waiting for: The Reaction. I noticed mouths partly opened from the corners of my eyes; their eyes shifting among themselves but never falling on me. Because of the marijuana, I was in an elated state, and despite my outburst, I had a smile on my face despite my chilling words, or at least I realize how chilling they were now. I always wondered how one would react to such news, especially since my own original reaction was so solemn. This group of rebellious souls served as my focus group. After several moments of silence:

“Are you telling the truth?” one asked.

“She is lying, look, she is smiling,” said another. “Are you serious?” asked Hidayo.

“Of course,” I responded. “Why would I lie about a thing like that?” Another awkward silence was followed by an abrupt change in subject. “I’m so high right now. Let’s go get something to eat.”

On that note we departed the wooded area, leaving the heaviness in the landscape. It wouldn’t be long before we all reconvened and curiosity took over, leading to more questions from the boys.

My father, the great war hero who fell at the hand of his unstable mind had left me here, on Earth to explain his transgressions, yet instead of wondering why me, I welcomed the challenge, a behavioral trait I always possessed.
His eyes glow in the ghostlight of the PC,
devouring scraps.
Any pixelated thumbnail photo he can salvage.
All treasures to stockpile
into the growing desktop folder.

There are ways
around security settings.
Cut-and-paste statuses about tuna salad and waffle fries,
comments about “girl time.”
He rebuilds her in screenshots and daydreams.
Reads, rereads, her birthday.

Predator
by Jordan Budnik

Whenever she forgets him,
he rekindles her inbox
into an inferno of messages:
quips about her new boyfriend
or the latest family vacation.
He watches her burn
through cryptic new accounts.
Clever usernames worn like Venetian masks.

The thud of the gavel
constructs an impenetrable tower
and places his Rapunzel in it.
Legal papers and court orders
are the brick and mortar she hides behind.
He doesn’t know how he’ll ever see her again.
But there are ways.
The Nectar, by Andy D. Acosta
You shouldn’t do this,” Fowler said.

The Tupperware bin sat open on the motel room’s stovetop. Bryant fingered out each brownie and immediately threw them into the waste basket. We don’t want those, he thought. A blackish paste was left at the bottom of the plastic container.

“Do you have a spoon or anything?” Bryant asked.

Fowler shook his head. Dickson reached into his back pocket and pulled out a Swiss army knife.

“Will this do?” he shrugged.

“Yeah that’s fine.”

Kim and Jesse sat quietly on one side of the counter. Kim could barely hold her head straight; it was constantly swinging left and right, eyes darting around the room. But whenever her eyes passed over that black goop at the bottom of the Tupperware she would pause just a moment. Jesse wasn’t as bad, though, a little loopy too, but under some control. They were just homeless kids, for all Bryant knew. Judging by the frayed fabric of their clothing and their greasy, matted hair they were just junkies that spent all their time tripping or looking for their next fix. He wondered for a moment if they had any idea how removed they were.

“You shouldn’t do this,” Fowler said again.

“It’s science.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s right.”

Bryant reached into the container and scooped out a glob of the black. He handed it to Kim.

“That's too much,” said Fowler.

Bryant laughed, “No it's not.”

Kim held the knife in front of her for a second, and then slowly wiped the entirety of the black on her bottom lip. She sliced into her gums but didn’t give any sign of noticing. She returned the knife to Bryant, who took a smaller scoop out of the container and handed it to Jesse. He took the knife and smeared the black on his middle finger, then he brought his finger to his mouth rubbed the paste under his tongue. Kim’s shoulders dropped, and shortly after, Jesse’s did too. Bryant exaggerated a slouch in his chair.

“When they’re like this they’re into it.” He said, gesturing to his posture.

“So until then?” Dickson asked.

“Let’s hear about what you have,” suggested Fowler.

Bryant got up, picked up his backpack and walked into the bedroom. He pulled out a chair from the small round table next to the window and beckoned for Fowler and Dickson to join him. He sat down and grabbed a binder from the front pocket of his pack and he slapped it across his lap. Fowler and Dickson were now sitting three feet from him, expectantly. Bryant must have looked puzzled.

“The door’s locked, we have people outside, go ahead.” Fowler said.

“What do you want to know first?”

“Just start talking,”

Bryant chuckled.

“Well,” He began, “As you know we originally were into this stuff to see why so many people were dying from it. The good thing, or bad thing, I don’t know how you want to look at it, is that there are no chemicals in it that are especially lethal, which also means there’s nothing about the drug itself that would deter potential users. I guess that would be the bad thing.”

“Especially lethal?” Fowler asked.

“It’s lethal like smoke is lethal,” Bryant explained, “You get enough of it and eventually you’re gunna die, but it’s not like swallowing mercury.”
They looked like they understood.

“But anyway,” Bryant continued, “It’s not deadly because there’s something deadly in it. And it’s not physically addicting, which is surprising but not the most surprising part. It’s just a drug that people really, really want. There are no shakes, no scratches, no twitches,” he pointed into the small room where Kim was slouching, “The head movements are just her. In order to know this, though, we had to make it impossible for someone to get black. That’s just the name of it, bee tee dubs, it’s just black.”

“Creative,” Fowler joked.

“Shut up,” Dickson said, “What’s in it?”

“Nothing important, chemicals of the tryptamine family. LSD stuff. Hence the visions and things of that nature, but I’ll get back to that. Just know it’s definitely made in a little lab somewhere. But the male that we separated from the black, and I mean separated like locked up, was out of control in less than seventy two hours. And I mean bonkers.”

Bryant flipped open his notebook and thumbed through a few pages before he found the pictures he was looking for. There were two photographs of an adult male’s skull; grotesque, discolored bruises spotted his head. Some patches of hair had been pulled out.

Dickson looked up, “And you’re saying this isn’t physically addicting?”

“We monitored him, there was no pain or irritation. Well, until he bashed his head into the wall.”

“Where’d y’all keep him?” Fowler asked.

“In an old car dealership. Big parking lots, easy to see if anyone’s trying to come or go.”

“This is fantastic.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” Bryant chuckled again.

Fowler sighed, “I hope you do.”

“We kept him very well fed, we provided him with plenty of entertainment, we even gave him company for as long as we could, and until he couldn’t control himself anymore he expressed that he was satisfied with his care. He did agree to do this, by the way, as long as we gave him black afterwards. He was high when we took these pictures.” Bryant closed the book and leaned forward, “But here’s the big thing. Pay attention, because I should not have to repeat this. It’s not a hallucinogen.”

“What?”

“I just said I shouldn’t have to repeat it, Fowler. Pay attention. It’s not a hallucinogen.”

“Bullshit.” Fowler spat.

“It’s not, it really isn’t. I only have a few images in the notebook-“

Dickson grabbed the notebook from Bryant’s lap and flipped through the pages.

“These them?” he asked.

Bryant ignored him, “Hallucinogens start working in the brain and end with the brain, the drug causes the brain to simulate a sensation and interpret it as a legitimate feeling. But look at those pictures, I don’t know how well they show it, we probably need a video from the equipment, but sensations start at the sensitive body parts and move up. The nose, the skin, mouth, eyes, whatever the other one is, they send the message to the brain, the brain doesn’t just make them up. It’s not simulation. It’s actual sensation.”

“That’s impossible,” Dickson said.

“Yeah it is,” replied Bryant.

Dickson studied him for a moment, “You don’t actually believe that.”

“You’re right, I think it’s legit.”
“What does that mean, though?” Fowler asked, “Do they go to some other place when they’re high on black?”

Bryant almost didn’t want to speak, “Well, not all of them.”

They raised their eyebrows.

“Users who are still within their fiftieth or sixtieth use are still pretty good in keeping up with reality. I know what I’m saying when I say fiftieth and sixtieth, too, that’s still a fairly new user. It’s a lot more than we thought before, isn’t it? When they’re on it they can still perceive real things, they can have conversations, they can play sports, hell they can even drive. But once they get past that users begin creating, I guess, new worlds in their head, worlds that they can add and return to. People create relationships on black, they have kids, some even level up like a friggin’ video game.”

“You have got to be kidding me,” Dickson smiled.

“I am totally serious, come look at this.”

Bryant got up and went back into the small kitchen between the two rooms. Kim had slumped over on top of the counter, and Jesse had fallen completely out of his chair. He was belly up on the floor. His chest was barely moving.

“Holy-“ Dickson muttered.

“Yeah, this is way past their sixtieth. His body has slowed down tremendously. Look at ‘em, they’re barely breathing.” Bryant put two fingers on Jesse’s neck. “His pulse is far below what’s healthy for relaxed.” He took his fingers off of his neck, spread his hand, and slapped Jesse clean across the face.

“What’re you doing?” Fowler gasped.

“He can’t feel anything. The brain is completely ignoring any real stimuli. You couldn’t wake one of them up if you burned them.”

“I have a feeling you know from experience,” said Fowler.

“But I won’t put it in my journal,” Bryant laughed.

“You’re telling me that black creates a new real reality for the user?” Dickson asked.

“Well, they may not be new. There have been many reports where users, early ones at least, have seen and interacted with other users. In the example I’m thinking of, two users shacked up from completely different parts of the country, and the other user reported the same ‘hallucination.’ The mind’s a big place, man, sometimes drugs are just the train tracks.”

“Did they have any proof?” asked Fowler.

“Check this out.” Bryant took a few steps over to Kim and examined her for a few seconds. He found what he wanted and lifted up her sleeve.

“Look at this.” Her skin was red around her wrists. Bryant reached for her collar and pulled down her shirt to reveal several hickeys on the base of her neck.

“Those weren’t there before,” He said, “Wait, look at Jesse.”

Dickson and Fowler turned around to see white smoke rising from Jesse’s mouth.

“He’s high while he’s high.” Dickson laughed. No one else did.

“Is that proof enough?”

Dickson and Fowler didn’t respond.

“How long are they gunna be out?” Fowler asked.

“I don’t have a good idea, to be totally honest. Jesse should be up sooner. He hasn’t taken as much and he hasn’t used as many times. And Kim is in deep, so I don’t know. And that’s the other part. Why we started all of this stuff.”

“Go ahead.” Dickson gestured a speed up motion.
“Most people die,” Bryant said, “Cause they just don’t get up. Calm down. I’m about to explain. There’s this thing called the black truck. We don’t know what causes it, but basically the brain just succumbs completely to the hallucination. It’s completely random as far as we can tell. It’s called the black truck because it just hits you completely from one end of the spectrum to the end. It can happen as easily to a first time user as it can to a ‘I don’t know what year it is’ user. You aren’t coming back. After that a person’s brain seems to permanently operate in the other world. Where’d you put that notebook, Dickson?”

“It should be on the bed.”

Bryant went back into the bedroom and picked up the notebook. He noticed a white SUV sitting in the middle of the parking lot. Two men were in the car. One young man stood in front of it with his hand out, holding something that looked like chap-stick, and two other young men sat on the hood. One took the chap-stick, rubbed it on his lips and passed it to the other on the hood. They were doing black in broad daylight. Bryant returned back to the room where Fowler and Dickson waited.

“You do have people outside, right?” Bryant asked Fowler.

“Yeah, why?”

“Just making sure,” Bryant opened the notebook and flipped to the back, “Look at these two scans. This is the brain before and after the black truck hit a user. On this image right here, before the black truck, all these areas are white. It means an incredible amount of pleasure is being experienced by this person. It’s a state of complete euphoria. This is seen in almost all of the other users we studied.”

Bryant moved his finger down to the lower image.

“But check out this one. Look at that, all those areas are grey again. The white’s in other parts. Here and here, these are stress and pain areas. The complete opposite of before, it’s like a hallucinated hell. And we can’t fix it. No methods we’ve tried have even slightly alleviated what’s experienced by the people hit by the black truck. It’s pretty ridiculous. Their breathing stops, their functions stop, but technically they’re still alive. Their brain is alive, and the body doesn’t decay. Eventually, though, someone decides to pronounce them dead and they bury them, while the person’s mind is still in hell. That’s what all these deaths are from, and no one knows. Any instances of this that we’ve seen we’ve pulled the plug; literally removed the brain from the rest of the body. Hey, it stops working after that. But it still makes me wonder; if the brain is already a part of the other world, does destroying it in reality mean it ceases to exist in the other world, too?”

It was quiet for a few moments.

“If this is at all true it’s pretty incredible, I must say.” Fowler whispered.

“You’re telling me. Let me go put this up. We need to start getting out of here,” Bryant closed the notebook, walked to the bedroom opening and threw it on the bed. Outside the SUV was still sitting in the middle of the parking lot but the young men were gone. There was black paste smeared on the hood.

“Fowler and Dickson, come here.” Bryant called.
They took a few steps back into the bedroom.

“What is it?”

“Tell your people to keep an eye on that SUV. Someone dumb enough to smear black could-”

Bryant was cut off by a loud pounding on the door.

“Is that y’all, Fowler?”

Fowler ignored him, “Where’d you get that black from, man?” he asked.

Bryant glanced over to Kim and Jesse. Both were still high and passed out. There was more pounding on the door.
There was a holler from outside. “Open up!”
“Where’d you buy that black, Bryant?” Fowler raised his voice.
Bryant thought for a few seconds, and he realized he didn’t know. He had no idea why he was in a motel. He didn’t know how he got a key to the room. He didn’t remember taking the black out of his backpack. He didn’t even remember taking off the top of the Tupperware container.

There was still pounding on the door.
He began to get dizzy.
“Bryant!” Dickson snapped.
“Did y’all bring it?” he wheezed.
“Why would we ask you, then?”
More pounding.
“Open the damn door!”
“Where are your people!” screamed Bryant.
The door shook. It sounded like grinding metal. Bryant was frozen. Fowler and Dickson stood staring at him. Bryant reached out to them to steady himself but they backed away.
“Get someone over there, Fowler!”
Fowler didn’t move, he didn’t say a word.
“Fowler!”
Metal grinded against metal. Bryant realized what was happening.
“Fowler.” he whispered.
The sound of shattering glass echoed throughout the motel room. Six men climbed through the window; they were the same men from the white SUV outside. Two stepped into the kitchen and scooped up Kim and Jesse and took them off. Bryant fell to the ground, gasping for air. He was immediately surrounded by four men. One stood over him with a gun in his hand and a green bandana over his mouth.
“Where’s the black?” the man yelled.
Bryant realized he couldn’t speak. He didn’t even have his eyes open.
“We know you got it, where you got it?” he grabbed Bryant by his hair and lifted him up. He stuck the barrel of the gun into his cheek. It started to hurt. Bryant still could not say a word.
“Alright, bitch. You’re only making it worse.”
The man threw Bryant back to the ground. His head hit hard on what felt like concrete. He began to open his eyes but he couldn’t see much at all. The motel room started to slowly dissolve, he could see the rusted steel of an old warehouse.
“You’re dead.” He heard the gun cock.
The masked man put the barrel between Bryant’s eyes, pressed his head back, and let up. Bryant could see Dickson and Fowler standing on either side of the man, half smiles on their face. He opened his eyes just a little wider, and Dickson and Fowler’s colors began to bleed. He began to see sunlight pouring through the warehouse windows. He was beginning to come out of it. Three young men stood over him as the masked man, too, began to melt away. The gun was almost gone when he heard a voice. He didn’t recognize it.
“You shouldn’t have done this.”
There was faint sound of a shot going off, as if it were very far away. Bryant looked towards where the barrel of the gun had been.
A giant black truck was hurtling towards him.
On a thin line stretching from far left to far right
You balance.
Careful not to tip too far on either side you gracefully
use your words to anchor you.
Ever aware of the height
of the depth to which you will fall
You balance.

Using the thin line as a gauge between truth and lies
between love and hate
between heartfelt and heart loss
You balance.

Delicately placing one word in front of the other
Artfully structuring what should be said with
What needs to be heard
You balance.

Being careful not to disturb the perceived calm
Acknowledging the sway of the line
You extend your words to steady yourself
As if they are a pole you bear in your hands
To help you navigate
You balance.

Skillfully mixing the right with the left
Creating a blend that will maintain your perch
Careful not to add too much of one or the other
You balance.

In awe of the balancing act
the length of the line
the peril of the fall
your audience admires you
You balance.

And then, you fall.
Fog, by Jason Luong
Summer
The archway offers slight relief from the sting of the afternoon sun. She runs her index finger down the length of his Adam’s apple. When he swallows against it she giggles “Boys really are strange” she whispers and then she kisses him.

Fall
A breeze floats across the rooftop that instantly scatters the smoke that rises above her head. When she turns to look at him her face is like a puzzle, her eyes are no longer paired together and her lips are hidden from view. It fascinates and frightens him. The space below where her eye should be is wet with tears that he dries with his thumb. When he kisses the spot where her mouth should be it tastes of salt and ash.

Winter
The wind and snow bats against the windows and they stay in bed for days wrapped around each other while ignoring the things that are and wishing for the things that ought to be. Sometimes her fingers brush across his throat or his thumb will push across her cheek.

Spring
The television plays the Weather Channel with the sound muted while cartoon tornadoes dance across a map of the Mid-West. He sits next to her watching while she works the key from the ring. They don’t touch or speak when she leaves.
The Offering
by Sarah Stephens

The pines are not without their cycle
They may stay green all year
But who else will change wind into music
Whistling with their leaves
The pines do not shed
Sunflower yellow
Deep blood red
Rusted tin
Once a year
They shed all year round
Whenever the time is right
Whenever they need a change
The pines are not without their cycles
They grow the seeds of new life
And release them to the earth
Like an offering
And they are no strangers to the sky
Assist me in writing my thoughts and feelings.
Muscles intrinsic and extrinsic
Heel on the paper,
grab my pen,
10 and 2, don’t text and drive.
A friendly wave to passersby.
Come together
clap, clap, clap.
Raise up to the acknowledged,
traffic must stop.
A shield over my face,
one side light, the other side dark.
Behold a little cloud rising like a man’s hand
to guide, even when weak,
shriveled up, age spots, dirty,
cracked, diseased fist
clenched, wrinkled.
Please, join me in prayer.
A multi-fingered extremity
provides the sense of touch,
a deep tissue massage,
a hug, a shake, a pat
hold me.

Hands
by Charlene Bowden

Project Open Hand, not seeking a hand out,
pledging allegiance to something greater
than you.
Hands on Atlanta Day needs your support!
Get dressed, tie your shoes,
cover your mouth, wash your hands,
you’re in good hands.
Rings on my fingers,
nails polished so bright.
Winter brings mittens,
remember the gloved one?
These are a few of my favorite things.
So I salute you.
You have served me well.
Past, present, future,
Not a palm reader.
Catch me if I fall.
Help me get up.
Push-ups
Weightlifting,
One-two punch.
Use them to talk, hold the stars,
embrace life, life is in your hands.
Give me a hand.
We lay side by side on the hood of my black 1987 Corvette.

The moon lights the scene like a bulb above us.

The sky is filled with a thousand stars,

Burning like a farmhouse.

If only that pathetic drunk could have known.

Nobody cops a feel on Rusty Coathanger.

You’ll be tied to your bed,

Drenched in gasoline,

And burned down with your farmhouse.

The flame from below lights our faces.

Her hair is as black as the car,

With the exception of the shaved side of her head.

Her lips are black as they kiss a cigarette.

She wears a tight dress covered in a design of red posies.

Ink dances across the full span of both her arms.

Deadly as a Viking.

Hotter than a burning farmhouse.

She flicks her cigarette at the perverts burning house.

I put mine out on my boot.
My head turns to find her smiling face.

Her dark eyes set my heart racing,
Like two criminals running from the police.

I lean in.

Her kiss fills my soul
Like ice fills the cup,

Then Jack,

Then Coke.

She is wrapped in my black leather jacket.

We stare up at the stars,

Dreaming of the heavens.

But with all the blood on our hands,

You might call it Valhalla.

She is a jungle cat that could kill me at any minute,

But here in my arms,

She purrs.

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by Ross Howard
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