Icarus, by Danielle Williams
A Note from the Editor

Welcome to the twenty-fourth edition of Creative License, an award winning literary and arts magazine published annually by and for the students of Perimeter College at Georgia State University. Last year brought many changes to Creative License, but two things never change: the high quality of our students’ talents and the dedication of our Faculty Advisors and staff who, apparently, do not sleep during February and March as they work to complete each edition! As usual, they have compiled an edition filled with students’ substantial, thought-provoking poetry, fiction, artwork, and photography.

If you are fortunate enough to be holding this beautiful, glossy magazine in your hands right now, you can find more copies in each Perimeter College at Georgia State University campus library and Student Life office, and with each campus Faculty Advisor and Student Editor. You can also check out our Web page by typing Creative License in the search box or going directly to: http://studentmedia.gsu.edu/pc//

Because the quality of art reproduced in an online publication cannot rival the polished, high-resolution look found in the hand-held magazine, we hope to continue printing high quality hard copies of Creative License for limited distribution. But having Website access means we no longer need to worry about getting this magazine into the hands of every student in the college. Financially, it is not feasible. 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. It also provides a global introduction into the unique perspectives of Perimeter College at Georgia State University students and their communities. We are proud that Creative License is solely compiled of student work, which showcases the college’s richly diverse culture.

Now, as part of Georgia State University, we chart a new course—one rooted in the legacy of our past, as we continue to define our future. Thank you for your encouragement and support.

Sincerely,
Deborah Byrd
Faculty Editor, 2017
Eternity

by Amber Nobles

I had a vase for a head, but it fell from a three story ledge.
In the vase was some water, and in the water was a flower.
The water scattered with the vase, so the flower lies dead on the sidewalk.

I had a house for a heart, but a demolition crew wrecked it.
In the house was a fireplace, and in the fireplace was some ash.
The fireplace crumbled with the house, so the ash is carried away by the wind.

I have a sea for a soul, and it was bought with a hefty price.
In the sea is a boat, and in the boat is my Savior.
The boat rocks with the sea, but He says a word and all is still.

Her Shadow

by Darryl Page

A fragrance of toasted hazelnuts
rolls off her skin like smoke from a torch,
an incense that garlands her sinuous shape,
a procession that heralds her presence.

I can never escape the hold
of her lustrous, narrow eyes,
those shadowed rings of smoky quartz
beneath whirling dunes of golden sands
churning into the perfect
darkness of obsidian pits,
black holes that tear me from my thoughts
unseating all sense,
all reason.

I would gladly dive blindly
through that oblivion
if only to glimpse a single thought,
to wander her labyrinthine mind,
to bask in the lamp
that guides her steps.

To hear her voice is to walk
the shore along a sea of red wine.
Words decant from her lips.
Every sentence, every syllable
sloshes against my ears,
seeps into my mind like dye,
that paints murals
of swirling nebulas snaking
around her six-winged form
on the walls of my skull:
She inebriates me,
drowns me,
usurps all my temperance.
Holding On For More Time
by Diamond Jefferson

I bend down and bury my face
into his muddled man.
Inhaling, my nostrils are filled
with pleasant scents of coconut oil
and a hint of almond.
Dad, the freest man I know, lies
Here resting before me.
My fingers make tangles in his hair.
Long thick strands of rich ebony shroud my
hands;
a light salt of dandruff collects in my
palms.
Face-to-face,
His eyes are like mine,
Sand dunes of cinnamon surround his
pupils,
Black holes that barely peak
Under the horizon of hazed eyelids.
My eyes trail down his face,
And rest at his lips.
Kissing him,
Purple tulips that used to balance
the plastic tip of a Black & Mild cigar,
now cradled my warm, gentle lips.
My right hand stops its busy work on top of
his scalp,
runs down his bulky arms,
and caresses his right hand.

Stained with dirt and tar,
white ash webs
through the cracks of his palms.
“They Workin’ Hands, you wouldn’t
know anything about that.”
He always rants proudly.
Daddy’s touch is like cat kisses
Rough as sandpaper,
But mean no harm.
A slight hesitant smile creeps
Along the wrinkles of my cheeks.
Slowing down to a crawl,
My sight holds on the largest part of his
body;
Round as an overinflated balloon,
Its bottom traced with brown stretch marks
A gut that supported his restless babies
As they were rocked to sleep by the rise and
fall
Of his large stomach.
Clinging on,
My body fights,
But my fingers are pried from his hand.
As hospital halls echo my cries
For more time.

left
by Frank Cerinetti

I sat on the train unsuspecting,
Covered in the ecstasy of the night.
The train stopped, an exchange of people. Some got on, and some left.
But you got on.

Walking right in front of me.

My heart sunk like a rock in a fast moving stream. I hadn’t felt that since I saw you last.
That was three years ago,

But it felt like my most vivid memory.

I had been waiting for this moment since then. And yet I couldn’t be any more unprepared.
I dropped my head and hid myself from your gaze. Counting the marks in the floor I began
to wonder. If this was the other way around,
Would you even hesitate? Or worse,
Would you not even remember?

Have I been so foolish to think you would? I pray for my worries to be wiped away.
Just get off this fucking train.

Simultaneously my prayers are answered. And my worst fears come true.
You turn around, and I lift my head. Like a pet waiting for food.
It’s your stop and you prepare to leave. But for a second you look at me,
and nothing.

Your eyes neither linger nor dart away. They just pass on by casually.
You look at me but you don’t see me. I am nothing.
You walk off the train, without a worry. And I stay, drifting off into the night.
Alone, confronting my delusions
Where you left me.
Poppa’s Porch Swing
by K. Taylor Brown

The layers of paint have weathered and cracked
and soon the Western Red Cedar will take over every slat.
The Begonia cushions once purple are now ash-colored
like the tray that used to sit here full of half burned Cuban Cigars.

The pale yellow flakes falling from under the seat
take me back to that Spring of 2003.
It rocked us and rubbed our backs
while we read that letter Uncle Jo sent from Baghdad.

I sit and gently sway like a pendulum;
after every push my feet still dangle.
A dry September wind rustles past
and a leaf clings to the rusted chain.
It’s like those times we’d crash after hours
of fishing at Hard Labor Creek.
The warm breeze in the shade
cooled our sweat as we ate homemade peach ice-cream.

I listen as the ceiling sings
with every creak and ping
and fat bullfrogs harmonize
among crickets serenading.

A sweet melody like those nights
we’d sing Willie Nelson songs
at the top of our lungs
while you strummed that old banjo.

The day is fading,
the dusky pink sky has turned to soft navy.
The sheen of the white acrylic is long gone
but still holds our deep conversations
like that night when I found Jesus.
A Scene Unseen
by Darryl Page

I kept a single, tall sunflower nestled in a chipped terracotta pot on the edge of my balcony, and every day, I’d drizzle cool water on her thirsty golden crown, trace the veins of her fuzzy green palms with the tips of my thumb and preen away whatever shriveled rot blighted her lanky stem.

Then one day, I spotted her lover, a yellow spider sprawled on a silk quilt woven across the dilated pupil of that sunflower’s coiled, golden eye. He plucked his dewy, silk wires, stretching and bending his legs in the breeze, little bone fingers on guitar strings, strumming some slow, soundless song only we three could hear. It was a dirge that prodded a beast to lurch in the pit of my gut, the fear that wrung sweat from skin and howled in countless ears for the swift death of creeping, crawling things.

And now this rib-caged monster clawed at my innards as that spider wheeled around to me and we locked eyes, my two against that eightfold cluster of glistening orbs that may have pricked at the hairs and rattled the spines of others, but spurned me to fetch pencil and paper, to sketch, re-render the scene Nature had secretly painted for me.

The Grand Exit
by Jacob C. Smith

How do I want to go out, you ask.

Like a light?
Sputtering, jolting, dimming to nothing as someone pulls a plug?

On a fancy date?
A stroll out the door in my finest suit, to be met by my driver at the front gate, carried in a long, black car, then greeting a six-foot gentleman with lilies, lying down beside him at the end of the night?

Maybe I’ll just pop over to the grocery store, pick up some eggs, maybe some milk, and come straight back, not to be late for supper.

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The Dictator

by Kaila Glass

The whirring of my laptop sings from the corner of my bedroom.
Its red, dusty frame is nestled beneath my bookshelf,
A simple, dark wooden guardian,
Its contents a colorful array of knowledge –
Bright greens, calm blues, and loud yellows: stickers that read USED SAVES.
Though I am trapped by four walls of lifeless white,
I find solace in the irresistible musk of paperbacks.
My radio clock changes its color every second –
Each hue melting into the next –
Like a hungry child’s tongue on Halloween.
The clock plays lazy coffee shop tunes,
And the click-clacking of my keyboard keeps the beat.
It ceases briefly as I scan my room:
The floral comforter and grey bed sheets are in a constant, heated argument;
The overflowing wire trash bin and makeshift laundry basket are on the verge
of munity;
And the white linoleum floor is drowning in poverty.
With a shrug of my shoulder, the click-clacking resumes.
Parasol, by Emily Nguyen

Dragonfly, by Taylor Moreland

Daydream, by Amber Nobles
Watercolor Max, by Sarah Stallings

White Noise, Light Noise, by Girod

Midnight at the Russian Ballet, by Girod
Self Portrait, by Amber Nobles

Self Portrait, by Dalon Dantzler
I’m telling ya Danny, tonight is gonna be different!” I said as I leaned against the phone booth’s glass.

“Sal, you don’t have to keep doin’ this for me… my insurance will come through soon,” Danny replied, doing his best to hold in a cough.

“Not soon enough! I swear those factories downtown have cleaner pipes than yours!” I said, tapping my fingers against the phone box. “Besides, they already agreed to give me a raise, in fact! They’ll be paying me in advance… tonight!”

“If you say so, Sal.” Danny said with a nervous chuckle. “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“Alright, alright, tell you what… wait for me at the bar tonight, and I’ll change that tune of yours!” I said with a smile, “Just try not to drink too much before I get there! I need someone sober to count the money!” I laughed.

Soon afterwards, the conversation finally died down, timed almost perfectly to the sound of raindrops tapping against the glass walls. I quickly fastened my coat and adjusted my hat, in preparation to step outside.

The phone booth’s door slid back with ease and closed with a satisfying click as I walked away. I was in a bad part of town, but at least they kept some things in good shape.

The dark street, much like the buildings, was slowly cracking from the rainfall. The few street lamps still working spewed a disgusting yellow on the abused pavement.

No matter where I looked, buildings were either in indefinite construction or half-assed demolition. I’m guessing some big cheese thought there was a chance of fixing this place. It’s a noble idea, tearing down the past and building a future. If only it was that simple, but from the looks of things it seemed like they ran out of time, money, or just dynamite.

As I walked further down the street, the rain began to pick up in tempo, each raindrop echoing through the construction sites with a cacophony of rusty creaks and hollow clangs. This place looked like a warzone, it doesn’t take a war veteran to see that.

It had been a few weeks since I worked at the meat packing plant just around the corner. After the war, I never really found a respectable job until I heard about the joint. A couple of fellas at the bar told me, “Yeah, they’ll give ya uh job. You can bet your bottom dollar on it!”

Well… I was on my bottom dollar, probably the last dollar I’ll see in my life if I botch this job. Any cent I earned, I gave it to Danny.

During the war, he fought and nearly died under my command. The higher ups made a mistake of putting me in charge of those poor bastards. Good men have died because of my poor decisions, and I’m gonna have to live with that and unfortunately, so does Danny. The only bad choice he made was taking a bullet that was meant for me.

Poor kid can’t even walk five feet from his bed without coughing, with his lungs shot up the way they are. Lucky for him our favorite bar is just next door from his apartment. I can always find him sleeping behind a wall of empty beer mugs at least once a week.

I should tell him to ease up with the drinking, but a bar stool is cheaper than a hospital bed, and he had to find some way to deal with the pain.
"A bright glow polluted the horizon with shades of red and orange like a sunrise made from hellfire..."

But I can think about liquid therapy later. For now, I needed to focus on getting payment.

I wasn’t bluffing about my raise. In fact, I was looking right at it, a couple of sharp dressed goons standing next to an unmarked delivery truck. Far from subtle, they parked in the middle of the street with tall lights facing the meat packing plant. I didn’t know who they were, but I knew they were calling the shots tonight.

Suddenly, a cold feeling ran down my spine. It wasn’t from the rain; a little water never bothered me. I wasn’t close enough to the meat lockers to feel anything, but then again, this feeling was colder than that.

No, this was the same feeling I had right before I joined the army. Back then, I felt like I made a huge mistake but... it’s hard to turn your back on the world when it’s on fire.

I curled my fists inside my coat’s pockets and took a step forward. As I approached the two suits, I gritted my teeth as if I was preparing to get punched by a heavyweight champion. By the looks of these guys, that was indeed the case.

As we entered the building, the ceiling lights finally gave me a better look at his outfit. His suit was pure white, as if Saint Peter himself sewed it. The fabric was sharp and crisp, unaffected by the rain as if they were bullets bouncing off of a tank. If a man wears a suit that clean, no cop would dare think he was dirty.

The more I stared at his suit, the heavier my mind was ready to do its own fair share of shivering.

"Now, I don’t need to tell ya to be careful with this hardware," he chuckled as he slapped the top of a box with his free hand, "but as cold as this fine establishment is, I wouldn’t worry too much about these babies going off anytime soon.

"I know what ya thinkin," he chuckled. "This is a bit shadier than just moving liquor around like ya been doin the past week." He continued as he picked up another box from the stack and placed it on top of the one in my hands.

"But a sketchier job means a bigger payday!" he yelled as he pushed me out the door, through the halls.

"A bright glow polluted the horizon with shades of red and orange like a sunrise made from hellfire..."
Even before I accepted this job I already knew the place was deep in the pockets of the mob. Just from one quick look of the building anyone could tell it was bad business, but it made good money.

All I had to do was keep my arms strong and my mouth shut. I did a pretty good job doing both of those. I even threw in keeping my eyes down for free.

As I loaded the last box into the truck, I heard a cigar drop onto the wet sidewalk and loud CLICK behind me.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes.

I should have known this is how the night was gonna end; the job was too easy. I never hear about any other security guard getting rich, and this was why. At least I could call this an early retirement, a very early retirement.

"I'm sorry, Danny. I hope you know I tried…" I felt a solid cold metal press against my jacket.

"Reach for the skyyy! This here is a stick up!" He laughed as he threw his chin out to further sell his act.

I slowly turned around to witness him holding his gold cigar case like a cowboy in a high noon showdown. He was squinting his eyes even harder than before and pushing his chin out to further sell his act.

"Ya get it? Ah 'stick' up? Because it's sticks ah dynamite? Ah stick up!" He laughed as he took the last cigar from the case and wedged it between two fingers.

The other suit finally made his reappearance and handed me a solid brick. It wasn't until white suit lit a match that I saw the brick was actually an entire stack of the green stuff. I didn't need to count them to know they were paying me more than what was promised.

The other suit shook my hand and got behind the wheel to start the engine. As white suit walked towards the truck's passenger side, he slipped his gold cigar case into my coat pocket and tapped me on the shoulder.

"Ya did good, Sal," he said releasing a cloud of smoke into my ear. "Ya got a bright future ahead!"

The truck engine roared and screeched as it turned on the street and sped off into the night. They were in a hurry, and so was I. The job took longer than I had anticipated thanks to my own hesitation and mistrust. A relaxed sensation finally set in as I felt the banknotes bounce in one pocket while the gold case jumped around in the other.

Once again, I had my hands inside my coat pockets, but at long last my hands finally had company. As my fingers flipped through the crisp paper, I came to the realization that I had made the right choice.

It didn’t take long for me to make it back to the telephone booth I used earlier. The walk felt shorter than usual, most likely because my mind was already on vacation.

I decided to call ahead to find out if Danny was still at the bar and to let him know I didn’t get snuffed out. If I called a taxi, I might be able to drop by before the night got too late. With the cash I got, I might even buy a car tomorrow.

With each twist of the phone dial, I was already creating a grocery list in my mind. As the phone rang, I was in the middle of creating a Christmas list and about to start on planning real estate.

An answering click interrupted the ringing and put a hold on my musing.

"Danny! I hope you’re ready to hit the bar tonight because boy do I have a surprise for you!" I said as I pulled out the gold case to look at it. From the reflection, I actually saw myself smiling at the thought of seeing his reaction to its sheen.

"Sal, I don’t think it’s a good idea to come tonight" Danny said, turning his head away from the phone to cough after he finished the sentence.

"Why’s that?" I asked as I took a sizable piece of the cash and stored the rest inside the gold case.

Danny coughed again, and I heard him pick up the rest of the phone to talk with it.

"Well, I saw this big truck park outside the bar, and I’ve been hearing some commotion in—"

The conversation cuts off with an ear piercing buzz that forces me to pull the phone back. As my face turned away from the receiver, my eyes caught a glimpse of a disturbing sight in the distance.

A bright glow polluted the horizon with shades of red and orange like a sunrise made from hellfire. Black skyscrapers of smoke began to rise and devour nearby clouds of the night. As the phone became silent, I could hear the howling of sirens rushing towards the chaos.

I dropped both the phone and my jaw to the floor. Any hope I had for redemption was gone in an instant. My mind emptied itself away and replaced with ice cold reality.

The phone slammed against the glass, momentarily snapping me out of shock. I had forgotten that it had a cord connecting it to the box which caused it to swing into the wall like a wrecking ball.

I wouldn’t find out until later that our favorite bar was owned by a rival crime boss. Not that it mattered, my friend was gone, and this was why. At least I could call this an early retirement, a very early retirement.

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Ode to a Barbecue Chip
by Jacob C. Smith

O bubbling, rippling crisp,
thin as petals and brittle as bark
and crunching, cracking under pressure from unwary teeth,
and from fumbling fingers filmed with filth: thy
dangerous dust, thy
perilous powder, these
dirty digits vengefully vied to vary thy velocity
en route to the dark hole of thy acidic immolation,
of a wicked torrent of watery enzymes bane only to thee and thine own.
He who Lays thy figure unto a tongue
has surely misread the cautionary red
marbled upon thy visage,
this orange and yellow not the neon of sour citrus,
but the promising hues of resurrecting embers,
brother to thy saucy, spicy scent, pungent as smoke.

The One That Didn’t Pass
by Tyler Head

A day like any other
on the lake,
the sun not yet unbearable,
a few fish already caught.
The danger of the surrounding water
was almost therapeutic.
The hum of passing vessels
had never raised a hair,
until the one that didn’t pass.
The sound rose behind our backs,
I don’t know why I turned.
Yards turned to feet turned to inches.
A voiceless scream the only siren I could sound.
I know a place that takes me home
where solace greets me at the door
and the walls hold memories of past generations
with a dusty smell of long dead artists.

Perched, in the corner
the warm mahogany-rich
Crosley Lancaster begs
to sing a black record lullaby.

Nothingness until the needle drops
into the platter of vinyl
like the first bite into Granny's apple pie.
A whirlpool of hisses and pops
channels into the river of my soul.

The pure voices of Johnny Cash
and Ray Charles press into the grooves.
Cracking whispers fondle my eardrums
soothing as a kiss upon a child’s scraped knee.
Sweet distorted sounds, the tables have turned.

There’s This Room
by K. Taylor Brown

I approach the seemingly empty house of
my daughter’s in-laws. It’s a typical little
one-story brick house in the suburbs of
Metro Atlanta. I stare at the bricks as I wait
outside. Erosion has taken the uniform
square clay bricks and transformed each one
into its own lumpy shaped and particularly
colored block. One brick is a dull maroon
color while the one beside it is dark brown,
like wet mud. I hear the door click and begin
to squeak open.

“Hey, Quddus,” I say stepping up into
the house to embrace him, eye to eye. He
stands six-foot-tall, and like always he’s
looking raggedy and tacky, with his washed
out blue shirt designed with faded letters,
once black, but now some off gray pencil
lead color, accompanied by his baggy, off
brand, black and red gym shorts. He’s a good
looking white man though with green eyes
and nice marble brown hair. If he styled it
right, he could look nice like Tom Cruise or
Paul Newman in his younger days.

“Hello, Sir,” Quddus, my son-in-law,
replies while the screen door slowly whines
closed in the background like air escaping
from a small hole in a balloon.

“Imma go get Ellen,” he explains and
walks towards the back of the house.

My eyes gaze around the living room
as he exits. The first thing I notice towering
across the room, almost touching the
ceiling, are two wooden bookshelves in
each corner. Closely compacted like loaves
of bread, books of different topics fill each
row. Separating the towers, in sharp contrast
to the old antique look of the bookshelves,
is a 32-inch flat screen television hoisted on
the wall.

A Father’s Place
by Diane Carol George

I look down at the light brown, graham
cracker colored hardwood floor and see
five pairs of different sized shoes blocking
the entrance. I’m an over 300-pound black
man, pecan skinned with my pinstriped
suit, hair freshly permed with fingertip
waves like Super Fly. I ain’t taking off my
shoes; that’s just too much. I glide my oil
black alligator penny loafers over the pile
of shoes and walk into the room. I scan
the room looking for a seat that would
best support my weight. Bypassing the two
mahogany looking rocking chairs, I make
my way towards the futon straight ahead.
The frame of the futon is a sturdy smooth
yellow wood. I almost did not expect the
rough burlap texture of the mattress.

I’ll be fifty this year, and I have wanted
to raise and train up a little girl ever since
I was in kindergarten. I’ll never forget, I
used to tell my friend Bobby Pace all the
time that I was going have a little girl and
her name was going be Ellen-May, after my
sisters Eleanor and May. I remember on
December 22, 1993, right after Ellen-May
was born I demanded the nurse to bring
me the paperwork, and I made sure nobody
was going to get in the way of me naming
my daughter what I wanted to name her.
I signed my name at the bottom in ink
and passed it back. Those nurses thought I
was crazy. I remember going to court to get
full custody of my children, but America
doesn’t want to see a black man raise his
kids, wouldn’t even give me partial custody!
I don’t know why, maybe because I
didn’t see them often, but when I did see
my kids, I felt the need to train and to teach
them. My hands would clash like thunder
with a crack, crack, crack when I hit them together while I prepared them for life. “Good, better, best, never let it rest, till your good gets better and your better gets best,” my children would recite at my command to the rhythm of my claps.

“Hey Dad,” I hear the floor creak and Ellen-May greets me as she sways into the room, shifting her weight side to side, like an elephant. I plunge my two fists into the futon to turn myself around, putting on a big smile and extending my jaw in preparation to say hey to my grandson. To my surprise, he’s not with her. I switch back to my normal smile.

“Hey Ellen-May, how are you?” I ask.

“Tired,” she responds with a yawn.

She looks a hot mess, her hair disturbing, hands holding on to the edges and her eyes wide open like a lemur, hair like coiled disreputable stuff.

“Ellen,” calls Quddus from the back.

“Ellen-May greets me as she sways into the room to the rhythm of my claps. “Tired,” she responds with a yawn. She looks a hot mess, her hair disturbing, hands holding on to the edges and her eyes wide open like a lemur, hair like coiled disreputable stuff. She gets up saying, “I’ll be right back,” as she hurriedly walks to the back rooms.

Ellen-May is 22 now. She asked my permission to marry Quddus three years ago, and I gave my consent, and now they have a beautiful, I mean beautiful, baby boy. I try to schedule a visit about twice a month to see my grandson. We sometimes go to lunch, and if I have it, I’ll leave Ellen-May a few dollars. I remember her wedding; it was embarrassing. I was looking sharp. I had on my all white tuxedo with a red rose in my front jacket pocket. What was embarrassing about it was that I’m supposed to be a pastor, and my own daughter didn’t let me walk her down the aisle or preside over her wedding. Now what kind of pastor am I if I can’t even get my own children to show me any kind of respect? She didn’t have any of the traditional wedding observance, no bridesmaids, no clergy, no veil. I didn’t know what to tell folks. The only thing they did do was say some prayers and eat food; it was over 100 people in attendance, and the ceremony was no more than fifteen minutes long.

I can hear them whispering in the back, and before I can make out what they are saying, like bass drums their footsteps come pulsating from the back room into the living rooms where I am waiting. Ellen-May, who seems to have more energy, enters first, followed by Quddus, and in his arms, eyes wide open like a lemur, hair like coiled balloon ribbons, and in a pure snow white onesie is my grandson staring right at me. I can tell already that he is an intelligent baby. He’s four months old now, and I tell Ellen-May that I expect for him to be crawling at six months and walking by nine and nothing less.

I push my hands into the couch and begin to wriggle forward to hold the baby. By the time I look back up Quddus is taking the baby out the door. I only see the baby for a few seconds. Something is going on. I snap my finger to get Quddus’ attention.

“The baby is a little grumpy so Quddus is taking him for a walk,” Ellen-May informs.

She knows I don’t play that kind of disrespectful stuff.

“Oh,” I comment as I relax back into the futon. My eyebrow muscles remain furrowed. This visit is not going the way I expected. I take a deep breath and let out a heavy sigh to calm myself.

“So, what has been going on in your life?” I ask.

“Nothing much, just been real busy and tired,” says Ellen-May. She’s always busy. I got to schedule an appointment just to stop buy.

“You ain’t pregnant, are you?” doesn’t like when I ask questions like this, but I’m her daddy, and I want to know.

“No,” she quickly replies.

“Well, you know what I always say, have them while you are young,” I add. “Yea, yea,” she jokingly responds. She knows I’m crazy.

This was supposed to be a quick visit. I got folks out in the car, and I got to get back to work.

“How’s Quddus?” I ask. I’m getting tired of waiting. I’ve been here for about 20 minutes already.

“There’s another thing…” says, Ellen-May.

She’s on the edge of her chair with her hands holding on to the edges and her eyes glaring towards the floor.

“I had my suspicions, but now I know something is up. What could it be now it’s always something. Ever since they got married, I have not received the appropriate amount of respect! I should have walked my only daughter down the aisle, I should be allowed to put my grandson’s picture on my Facebook page, and we should be in Texas right now visiting my dying sister. Ellen-May’s namesake! But no, Quddus and Ellen-May have to control everything. I sometimes think they are embarrassed by their baby. They don’t want to take him anywhere or put him on the Facebook, nothing. Let me calm down and compose myself. I scoot back in my chair, calmly take a breath, interlock my hands, rest them on my belly, and prepare for the next blow.

“I’m listening,” I explain, ready, like the Trojan wall.

“Well, Dad,” starts Ellen-May. She raises her head, stares me in the eye and continues, “You smell like cigarettes, and Quddus and I have recently decided that the baby cannot be allowed to be in smoke-filled environments or be held by people who smoke while his lungs are still developing. That’s the real reason Quddus took the baby outside.”

This is embarrassing. I come all this way on my lunch break, and I can’t even hold my own infant. I got people out in the car waiting for me to come out and introduce my family, and they are waiting for nothing.

“What am I supposed to do? I rode with my co-worker, and he smokes,” I ask Ellen-May.

“Sorry, Dad. You don’t usually smell like smoke. That’s why I didn’t warn you before you got here, but Quddus and I have been talking about this for a while, and he feels
really strongly about the health and welfare of the baby. You were a new father once. Please try to understand,” says Ellen-May.

This is the last straw. I usually don’t confront Quddus, but he is arrogant, and today is the day where I will no longer hold my tongue. I firmly look at Ellen-May and demand, “Go outside and tell Quddus to come here.”

“You seem upset. Would you like for me to trade spots with Quddus so that the baby is not exposed to anger?” asks Ellen-May.

“No,” I reply, “go and get Quddus.” I want them both to hear what I have to say.

Ellen-May gets up and walks towards the front door. The door squeaks when she opens it, and she yells for Quddus. She turns around and begins to walk back to her seat.

“I don’t see Quddus, and I’m not about to walk around outside looking for him,” says Ellen-May.

Just then I hear the door whining open, and there at the entrance stands Quddus holding my grandson.

“We need to have a talk,” I say.

“Well, the room smells, so you will have to step outside, and I will be happy to listen to you,” responds Quddus.

I push my hands into the seat rolling myself up until I am standing on both feet, and I head towards the front door like a lion closing in on its prey. When I get outside, Quddus is waiting for me at the corner of the yard. As I open the door I turn toward Quddus. He does not know who he is messing with, disregarding a man of God. I begin to warn him, “God is going to...” I stop my warning when I see the baby stop his gurgling and look up at me with a big toothless grin. “Never mind,” I say. I squeeze into the car and slam the door. I pull off up the street determined never to return.

“Quddus is just a modern slave master. He can rot in hell,” I exclaim to my coworker as we pull off. Before I get too far I look in my rearview mirror at the little raggedy family, and I see my grandson in his pure white onesie. My grip on the steering loosens. I love my grandson. I keep checking back in the mirror, and I see my coworkers, and I see my coworker as we pull off. Before I get

acknowledging any of my previous statement.

“You know what, Quddus? You are disrespectful. I hope you and your wife have a happy life. I hope the baby grows well, but I can’t stand to be here another second. It seems like I am not needed here, so I won’t be coming back,” I say as I turn around and head to my car, the red Nissan Altima parked in the front of the yard. As I open the door I turn toward Quddus.

“Quddus, you need to make sure that your family has a place to live that’s not your parent’s house. When I was married to Ellen-May’s mom, she had two houses, and I always made sure she looked well-kept and groomed. You should not have your wife looking like that. I explain motioning my hands towards Ellen-May, who is sitting outside watching us like we are a boring sports channel, checking her phone on occasion. She probably came outside to make sure I did not get out of hand like I used to when she was younger when her mother’s family would often call the police on me.

“I’m sorry, Quddus, but this is some bullshit,” I say. I am not going to let him disrespect me any longer.

“Excuse me, sir. can you please control your language around the baby?” replies Quddus.

Oh, hell no, there he is again trying to tell me what I’m supposed to be doing. I am the elder here. He needs to listen to what I’m telling him. I have years of experience, and I did not like smoke around my kids either, but Ellen-May’s mom’s entire family smokes, and there is no way to interact with the family and avoid smoke at the same time without severing ties. Stuff like this is why Ellen-May’s maternal family stays away. I can speak however I choose to speak, but I look at the baby. His face is radiant, and he is gurgling spit bubbles until the spit collects at the bottom of the bubble, and the bubbles pop sending spit falling downward leaving their gray shadow colored circles on the concrete. I’ll watch my language this time, but I don’t have to put up with this.

“You a handsome, intelligent white man. You are supposed to be making at least six figures a year. You need to get a job, and you need to make sure that your family has a place to live that’s not your parent’s house. When I was married to Ellen-May’s mom, she had two houses, and I always made sure she looked well-kept and groomed. You should not have your wife looking like that.”

Quddus is just a modern slave master. He can rot in hell,” I exclaim to my coworker as we pull off. Before I get too far I look in my rearview mirror at the little raggedy family, and I see my grandson in his pure white onesie. My grip on the steering loosens. I love my grandson. I keep checking back in the rear-view mirror. I let out a sigh. I know I’ll be back to that little house with the tacky bricks.

Of course, my coworker is curious as to what happened, so I rant to him as we drive along the road. He responds with statements like, “Wow, man, that’s crazy.”

By the time we pull onto the highway and catch up with the Atlanta traffic, the excitement has died down. My eyes water as I remember that toothless grin and those enchanting spit bubbles and their gray shadows on the concrete. I hope I did not ruin my chances of seeing my grandson again.

Meditations on a Sky in November

by Robert Abbott

Rippling, bulging patches of gold and gray line the expanse, trapping us beneath our ceiling on this cold earth.

And here we are today, stagnant beneath this thickly-threaded blanket we are run aground, searching for the North Star and the way to get home as the stars marvel at the chaos in our lives.

From my hole down here I can see a tattered Caribbean map detailing each of the seven thousand islands.

In time they are strewn again into obscure, bloated shapes of fish and turtles swimming by.

Light bleeds through a gashed wound in the iridescent sky as the sun breathes its last and dips below the horizon.
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"A Scene Unseen," by Darryl Page, page 9

Photography
"Tiny Rainbows," by Antoine Williams, page 18-19

Art
"Self Portrait," by Amber Nobles, page 20

Short Fiction
"Secondhand Smoke," by Angel Bachiller, page 23
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