



energy

An Arkansas Northeastern College Publication
Spring 2009

energy

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Editor's Note:

At the beginning of ninth grade, my English teacher wanted us to work on individual creative projects. I worked on a character portfolio and wrote poetry to supplement. After we finished our projects, she, with our permission, began tacking our creations onto the classroom bulletin board for our class and other students on campus to read. What a difference she made in that classroom and with her students, allowing some of us to be validated as artists and all of us to appreciate the talent of our classmates. Looking back, I recall that it was her first year to teach and my first real publication, with critical commentary and specific words of encouragement telling me to write more. This past Summer, this special teacher passed away at thirty-five after battling cancer. Mrs. Melissa Meeker's annotation on the right side of one of my first poems planted a seed in my mind that maybe I *should* write more. In my six years here at ANC, I have come across many talented writers and artists. Our students have long needed a platform to validate and showcase their work as they stop at ANC while on their personal and educational journeys.

Since this is our initial publication, much thought went into the name. From the campaign and election of President Obama to all of the going green campaigns currently sweeping through the media, we are indeed bombarded by the concept of energy. Locally, we were abruptly reminded of our dependency on energy this past January. But when we are talking about creative energy, the supply is truly limitless.

As artists, we don't choose to create; we have to. And appreciating the arts allows us to identify or escape our reality, to confront our beliefs or challenge our assumptions, and to be entertained. The arts are necessary to the sanity of this world. Every piece of art within these pages is energy, the energy of our creative drive and the process therein. They consist of words and images always transforming, having the potential to transform you. Students submitted over 145 pieces of art for our first issue. The future success of each publication to come hinges on support from the student body. It is my privilege to introduce to you our first literary publication, *energy*.



Julie Pierce

Student's Note:

What is art? This question grows more subjective as more traditional barriers are broken. In the days of classical greats like Shakespeare, Michelangelo and Beethoven, there was a distinctive line between art and attempted art. Today, the relaxed standards have ushered in a great variety of both good and bad works in every type of art. Some works tastefully break the monotony while others encourage the idea of "doing something different for the sake of being different." Needless to say, the latter has been played out to the point that it's a self contradiction.

I have found, in the short time of my artistic endeavors, expression is a key element. Some themes, like love, loss or scandal, are simply part of human existence and are therefore continuously reflected in what artists create. In my opinion, great artists go through great lengths to express their ideas or feelings in explicit detail. So, great work is often measured by the amount of thought involved, not necessarily the classical skill involved in creating it. Skill is the tool to be used, rather than the finished product.

The desire to create can be traced back through the ages. I'm truly convinced without this outlet, man

would be a colder creature. Working to create something often instills emotional attachments to the work such as pride and confidence. Also, the uphill battle of honing one's skills feeds the seemingly insatiable hunger for self improvement that some people face.

The idea that the eyes are the window to the soul is very much expressed through visual art. The artist creates a spectacle that reflects his or her feelings or thoughts in a manner that reaches the deepest parts of certain viewers. Music can be powerful enough to change a person's life. It's often the link between alike thoughts or feelings between otherwise completely different people. Written works can greatly affect perspective. Some works can awaken the reader with brazen details of reality. Other writings can alleviate the woes of daily life through entralling new worlds.

So, answering my question, in my opinion, art is the product of the human condition. It's not the only product, but it could be the greatest. Art often feeds emotional needs in a way that nothing else could. It can encourage both unified and independent thought. Therefore, it should not be limited by traditional or popular ideas.



Matt Pinkard

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Captive Thoughts

By Danielle Davis

So many poetic thoughts fight for my attention.

Fighting for the chance to be released on paper to expose their purpose for living, in the hopes of you understanding what it is they want you to see.

There is too much disturbance.

I cannot even organize what I desperately need to say.

What I need to say must be let go quickly or it will threaten the very life to whom it belongs.

Giving me visions of cutting and bleeding.

Tempting me to do so, and leading me to believe it would be ecstasy to watch the blood from my wrists hit the ground.

Do my miss used thoughts cease to exist?

No, they exist. They lay dormant in a secret passage, only opening with the desire of being set free from their life of confinement.

As they are being held captive, new thoughts try to replace the demented.

Thoughts of loneliness, regret, sorrow, and long lived expectations.

These are things that overwhelm my nights of silence.

Causing tears to descend from my eyes and brush my cheeks until reaching the crevice of my lips.

Stopping to bring a sensation of bitter moisture to my mouth.

Each tear has a purpose... a reason for falling.

Each time, relieving the pain and refreshing the place of thought.

No more confined thoughts of cutting and bleeding, for they are no longer dormant, but have been released onto my wrists.... fulfilling their demise.

And this is what caused the tears to fall in the beginning.

PG.1

By Matt Pinkard

The first line is always so awkward.
Nothing runs quite like clockwork.
Hoping these fine lines, like cogs, will mesh.
I might aspire for writings with flesh.

The etched straights and wobbly curves come from betwixt my fingers.

They can be traced through my cramped palm, past my crooked elbow and up my stiff shoulder,
finding root in the tangled threads of my thoughts.
Tangled as they may be, these deluded lines have but little trouble slipping past my cracked lips.

Rather tripping than slipping.
More so than not,
I find my tongue in knots.
Knots tied tightly around the bitter toes
of the shameful foot,
my mouth will always know.

It is at this point that my lips are stretched to the max.
The cracks are most cracked.
I feel the gaps burning and my teeth cringing.
My tongue is assaulted with the taste sweat.
I've backed into the dragon's lair.
I feel it on my neck.

When it's not turning my face several hues of red my language
is meek and unheard.
I sit in quiet corners, staring out of windows.
Self contained.
Self absorbed.

The tiny metal ball scratches on the bleached morsel of tree.
My head is bleeding.
My thoughts have no where to hide.

Strength

By Sara Rodgers

I watch him drive down the long, narrow road.

Pulling away from my life.

I hear my children crying for daddy.

What will I ever say?

How will I answer their questions?

Do I tell them how I feel; they will hate him forever.

Daddy has broken our family circle

He has found someone new to be happy with.

He has broken my heart and I don't know where to turn.

Do I tell them how he feels; they will hate me forever.

Mommy wasn't good enough

He's still daddy, just not with our family.

He will call and get them on weekends

Mommy didn't try hard enough.

Do I tell them nothing; they will blame themselves.

Should I keep my feelings locked inside and refuse to answer

Let them always wonder what went wrong.

What they did to make daddy leave.

As I gather my emotions, I pray for answers as I walk in the

door.

I simply embrace them with loving arms

I will not let them blame themselves.

I am their mother

I keep them safe

I keep them happy and protected.

No matter what goes on, I am their rock

And when questions come I will have the right answers.

Girl in the Pink Hat
By Mone Martinez

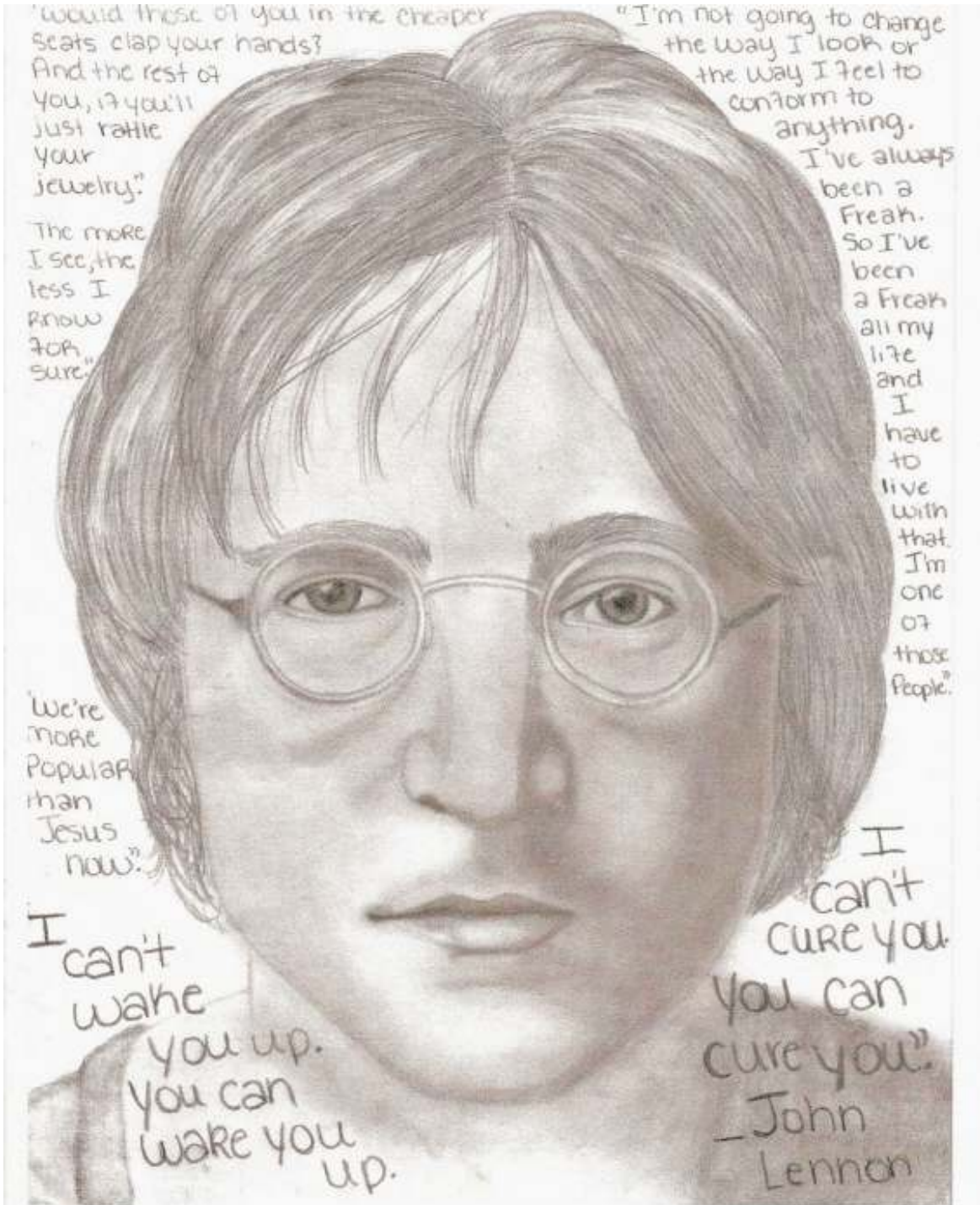


A Poem For Your Eyes

By B.L. Bushong

The lady's eyes are colored blue,
And green, and gray, to form a hue
the likes of which I've never seen,
Surrounded by the whites which gleam
behind her lenses, in their frames,
Eyes like that have been the claims
of many a woman who would walk by,
And flow the tears of those like I,
Who, looking into beauty's pools,
Feel like morons, feel like fools,
For I desp'rately wish to see,
What those eyes observe of me,
When she looks upon my face,
Does her heart begin to race?
Much like mine when I see her?

The lady's eyes are colored blue,
And green, and gray, to form a hue
upon which I could write for years,
Staining papers with my tears,
A volume, lady, to each eye,
Don't let them dull as time goes by,
A volume, then, to search your soul,
When I've found something to suit my goal,
I'll take a slow stroll through your mind,
Still searching, searching, 'til I find,
The formula for eyes like thine,
And read it, learn it, using mine,
To do the thing I want to do,
To find another girl like you,
And spend my time with her.



Imagine
By Janelia Sweatt

Solemn Words for my Soul

By Connie Reese

Comfort me when I'm weary

Softful, soothing words for my soul

Exhausted, disgusted, afraid for my soul

The quiet lull of your words whispers gently across my mind

Feeling loved like the warmth on a summer morning

Knowing I'm loved excites, comforts my soul

Convex Chest Concave

By Matt Pinkard

Be still my blessed heart.

I've found it.

A silhouette,

Matching the inside of my chest.

A fate to intertwine with my own.

How fond of her have I grown.

My marriage to you began in private

By Brandee Roberson

My marriage to you began in private,

No games to play or smiles to wear,

We said our I do's in the comfort of

Each other, together alone.

Our love grows its unique way

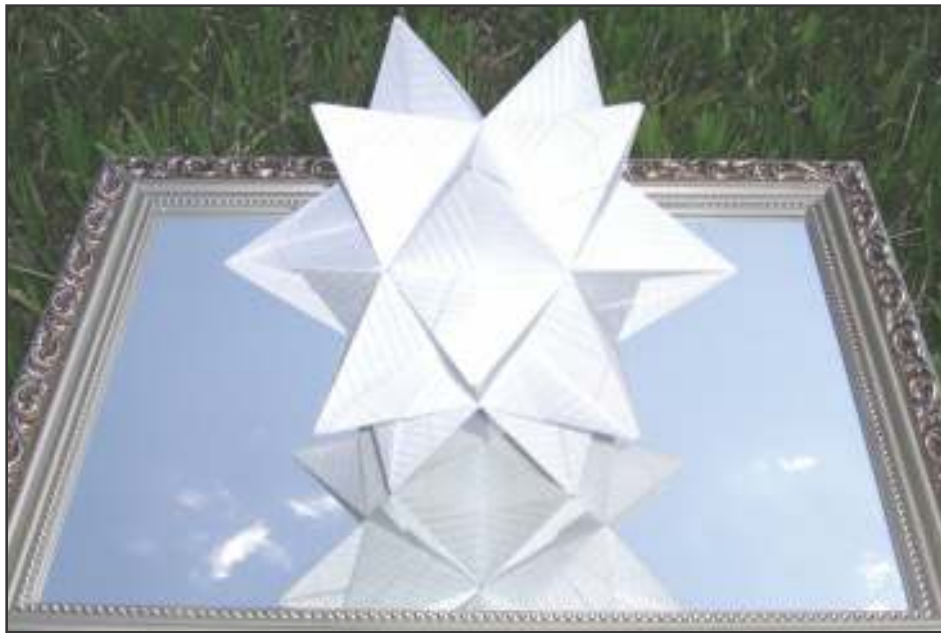
I'm glad we share this

Special Day.

Happy Anniversary,



Self-Portrait
By Lauren Grays



Modular Star Origami
By Josh Godsey

The Journey to Jonas

By Megan King

In my bedroom lies an autographed C.D. by one of my all-time favorite bands, the Jonas Brothers. Now, I realize that I am a 20 year old college student but we all have our guilty pleasures. On December 1st, 2007, three of my closest friends and I embarked on a journey that I'll never forget. We traveled the three hours from our little town of Gosnell, Arkansas to our states capital, Little Rock to see the boys in a free, acoustic show they were holding at a Verizon Wireless store. Like every life journey, ours was not without its obstacles.

It all started with one episode of "Hannah Montana," which is an embarrassing thing to admit, but I plan to be very truthful while I tell my story. That infamous episode introduced me to the fandom and what some may call my "obsession" with those three famous brothers. The moment I saw them on my television I decided it was my destiny meet them and/or marry them, more so the latter. Upon doing a little research, I learned that they were doing a free, acoustic show in Little Rock at the local Verizon store. The next step was to get my friends to actually agree to go which proved to be a lot easier than I thought it would be.

We left the Friday before the concert which was on Saturday and booked a hotel room a few blocks away from where the concert was being held. I thought it would be best to get a hotel room instead of leaving early on Saturday morning because I need to the extra time to become beautiful for my future

husband(s). When we finally arrived in Little Rock we checked in at our hotel and explored the area a little. We decided to go to Wal-Mart to stock up on some supplies (Red Bull, Dr. Pepper, etc.). Then I was struck by a thought, that if we were somehow able to meet them then we would obviously need something for them to sign. So we searched all over the entertainment section of that Wal-Mart for 2 copies of the Jonas Brothers' latest C.D. Right as we were giving up hope of find even one copy, an angel from Heaven placed not one but two copies right in front of us. I took it as a good sign. By the time we finally headed back to our hotel room it was around 1 am. Two of my three friends, Kimberly and Cristina, were asleep before I even laid my bags down. As I held a pack of Red Bulls in my hand, I made a decision that I'm not so proud of. First I should explain a little something about Jonas fans. They can be summed up in one word: Crazy. I guess that is slightly harsh. Determined is a little better term. Knowing that fact, I knew if we wanted any chance in getting a good seat and a wrist band for the meet and greet that followed the concert we have to get there early. 5 in the morning early. So I did a little math in my head and decided that since it was already 1 am and we were set to leave the hotel room at 4, I just didn't sleep. Staying up all night is no fun with oneself so I woke up my partner in crime, Stephanie. We knew we would need a little help with the whole "staying up for 24+ hours" thing so we drunk all of the Red Bull in the room. It proved to not be a good idea on my part. For my readers sake I won't go into all

the gory details. I will say that 2 Red Bulls consumed in a 5 minute period does not bode well with my intestinal track. When we arrived at the Verizon store it was 5 on the dot and there were already at least 20 fans there ranging in age from 14-20. Sitting in the freezing cold on that sidewalk in downtown Little Rock singing Jonas Brothers songs with people I'd never met before was one the most memorable moments of my life. Finally at around 8 am, with a numb butt and frozen fingers, the manager of the event told us all to line up by the store after giving us numbers. He told us that the first 100 in line would get meet and greet passes. I was the 20th in line. At that moment, I felt so much closer to my goal then I could have imagined. After we received our passes, we were instructed to head towards the stage. I've never been much of runner, some may go so far as to say I'm lazy, but I ran like I had never ran before. We were front row and to the right of the stage. My heart was pounding out of my chest. That may have been from all the physical exertion though.

At first I thought the longest part of the day was waiting on the sidewalk like a hobo, but in actuality the longest part of the day and my life was waiting in front of the stage in the freezing cold parking lot waiting for the boys to arrive. It seemed like days had passed when really only very slow hours. I held on to my spot on the rail that was between me and the stage like a baby holds onto his favorite blanket. I was going to let any crazed Jonas fan take my spot. You could feel the excitement and anticipation in

the air. Then a little after noon it happened. A big, black SUV rolled up gangster style. It was adorned with tinted windows and everything. One by one they each stepped out. Kevin first, followed by the youngest brother Nick, and then Joe, my Joe. When they took the stage, the screams of the fans were deafening. I'm sure many of those screams were coming from me. They played three of their most famous hits. It's hard to pinpoint one certain emotion I was feeling while they were singing. It was such a surreal moment for me. When they concluded their performance they headed inside to prepare for the meet and greet. All of us with those beautiful, blue passes lined up outside the store and waited for our turn to go inside to meet our teen idols.

When I walked in the store and got my first up close glance at those three glorious boys I was sure they could hear my heart beating. I can't even put to words how nervous I was feeling. All that stood between me and the boys of my dreams was a little table and maybe a few bodyguards but I try to block that part out. When it was finally my turn to get my autograph and introduce myself the conversation went a little something like this:

"Hi, I'm Kevin," the oldest brother said as he took my hand, "Thanks for coming out. What's your name?"

"Meganlejkaldj." That was indeed my answer to his question. I'm very aware it's not a name much less even a word, but I swore to be honest in my tale. Kevin looked at me with confusion and amusement, smiled and passed my C.D. along to his brother, Nick, who was next

for me to meet.

"Hi, I'm Nick." He said as he put his signature on my C.D. with his silver sharpie. We didn't shake hands because he was preoccupied with the signing part but I didn't mind. I was satisfied with just being that close to them. Following suit, Nick then passed my C.D. to my future husband, Joe Jonas.

"Joe." He only said his name but it was enough to secure my reasons for why we should one day marry and become the next Duggar family (the famous family from the TLC show "17 and Counting." Yes, they have 17 children). After our introductions and the signing, my friends and I headed back to the car to head home after one of the most exciting days of my entire life. As soon as we reached my car I could feel my entire body shutting down. I

did the math and realized I had been up for 30 straight hours. I had obviously been running off adrenaline all day, but I shut down as soon as it was all over. My story is one that I tell with great pride. Some may think my actions are certifiable, but I beg to differ. Not only did my journey lead me to meeting with one of my most favorite musicians in the world but it also brought me closer with my friends, friends that I am now for ever indebted to. It was hectic, loud, stressful, exciting, and every other adjective in the English speaking language, but it was also the most amazing experience of my entire life. There isn't a thing about that day that I would change, except for maybe the whole throwing up thing. Other than that it was perfect.

My Broken Reality

By Robert Truelove

Broken fingers.
Crowned jewels.
All because
My love for you.
A broken heart.
Distorted face.
Yet still all fails
To take your place.
My life mauled.
A killer thrill.
Is all I need
For blood to spill.
The king decrees
"Forgive the debts."
But his debt
Has caused my death.
Bury my body.
Crumble the bones.
The pain I feel
Only 2 know.
How hot it is
Here in darkness.
Now my life
Seems like a mess.
Come in now.
Clear my room.
Because I need
This to be your home.
Clean me up.
Wash me out.
I know you love me
Without a doubt.

Ode to the Icy Apocalypse

By Matt Pinkard

The clear pool was backed by soft glowing white. It encircled a stark black line that lead to a transparent puff encased by a faint blue semicircle, matched with the hot yellow tip. I had been sitting in the cold leather chair for some time, allowing myself to be so entranced with this primitive marvel, I almost forgot my disposition of living with six other people and nine dogs. I looked just beyond the flame at my mother. She sat on the couch nestled beneath the black fuzzy Star Wars blanket with three Chihuahuas in her lap. In one arm she held a fourth Chihuahua pregnant with more reason to develop an allergy to dander. The other arm was craned holding a police scanner to her ear.

My father sat in a stretched relaxation next to my mother. His dark hands were sitting atop his head. Fingers interlocking with their opposite but equally hairy. His hair was the typical side swept mess of black and gray strands taking root only God knows where. His thick eyebrow etched down to the scarring around his eye that tells the tale of motorcycle death peril. His fleshy nose sloped out subtly and dove back to his upper lip with a soft apology. His mouth wore his endurance like an encoded badge.

The silence then was broken by the single vibrating pulse of my younger brother's cell phone. He sat in the darkest corner of the room, softly rocking in a rocking chair. His chin was pinned to his chest as the abrasive white screen illuminated his face. His hair was a curly mess that rested above soft features. Eighteen years old, this boy was mutating. It still seems

so far fetched that he'll soon be a man, or that I am a man.

The propane fireplace, enclosed by red bricks, radiated more than one kind of comfort. On one corner of its base was a friendly Scottish terrier in much need of a de-rastafying hair cut. Next to him was a grossly overweight beagle. She laid on her near perfectly cylindrical stomach, cutting down entire forests as she slept with her dwarfish front legs tucked beneath her nose. Finally there was Abby, the other Scottish terrier. We've had her the longest. Having her in the house reminded me of earlier times, less complicated times. What's funny is earlier times always seem like less complicated times. My older brother and his wife sat together in their corner, whispering quaintly. It must have been nice for him to get away from the steel coils in the factory.

A door clicked at the back of the hall and soft footsteps muffled by thick cotton socks approached and faded into the dining room to the left. A riotous roar crossed three different surfaces before the black leather office chair parked next to me. My wife had returned from retrieving various this-n-that's from the back bedroom. She sat down tossing her thick hair out of her face. The cool breeze decadently topped with her scent smacked me right between the eyes. I caught myself staring at her again like a kid with a crush. Swooning over her lively blue eyes. Gasping at her soft pink lips. Sighing at her freckled perfection. My hand trembled as I reached to rub her shoulder. I was truly convinced I didn't deserve her when she threw me look that begged me to stay with her forever. I leaned back in my chair

wondering how the other two dogs were fairing in the colder parts of the house.

Despite the wreckage, I could not resist reverting back to the "snow day" mentality early that morning. My wife and I awoke to a pane of the cleanest of whites. My body nearly trembled with a giddiness that was not becoming of me, when the phone of my work place seemed to be cursed with

no answer. So, the four of us, my two brothers, my wife and I, donned our ice battling and proceeded into the familiar unknown. We punched branches like looters shattering store windows. Elongated icicles were our swords and politics didn't matter. But, at sundown I returned to my olden ways with the realization that those days are over.

In the Land of Silicon

By B.L. Bushong

On the lands of plastic,
In between the rubber trees,
In the land of Silicon,
We live our lives at ease,

And though you will get cancer
From the toxins in the breeze,
We love our land of Silicon,
And live our lives of ease,

You'll never see the starlight,
And you'll never drink the rain,
The water's filled with acid
That will tear your throat in twain,

In our little bubble,
If you'll harbour our disease,
We'll welcome you to Silicon,
To live your life with "ease",

And we've flattened God's creation,
And we've harvested the trees,
We valued not sensation,
Only what we thought would please,

But if you can take pity
On the world we built to please,
Then hurry back to Silicon!
And please, bring us the trees.

No Lights

By Daniel Prince

I'm going on seven full days with no power,
the silence echoes off the wall perpetually every hour.

Gas-powered water heater, so I've got a warm shower.
But it's chilly as I lay awake, and hear wind-blowing.

So I've got uneasy thoughts and I'm restless knowing
that thousands are out there without water that's safe
and the ones that do find it too cold to bathe.

The cell-phone just died, so no I'm cold AND lonely
and I'm wishing for someone to be here to hold me, and

my lips are chapped and my skin is dry,
the few spots that are warm come from the tears-I-cry.

But I'll give this one more shot, take one last try
and pour myself and all my dreams into the night.

And I can see that I love you even though I got no lights.

And you can see I want you though you got no lights.

And we can feel the power, but still no lights.

And I can hear your lovely voice, I don't need no lights.

And I know your eyes sparkle, I don't need no lights.

And for at least this moment, I don't want any lights.



Strike at Midnight
By Lance Nettles



Meeting Place
Both works by Hamzah Goodson

I, Too, am a Muslim

I, too, am a Muslim.
I also worship Allah.
My appearance and my language are
That of my countrymen.
My name does not imprison me,
When it is read from my passport.
I, too, have pledged allegiance to the flag
And worn a uniform in defense of it.
They say,
I am un-american.
But, I see aggression through the fog,
Of patriotism.
I have witnessed the coming of an age.
A War with no end and no clear enemy.
Jungle boots from the 60s make a
Reappearance,
In the sandy deserts.
Terrorism.
A word whose sole purpose is to inflict
fear,

Into the hearts of the feeble.
You believe them when they tell you,
"He hates you for your freedom".
But I, too, am a Muslim,
In the land of the free.
Soon,
God willing, I will no longer be
demonized,
I will be forgotten.
I will be folded away with the Japanese
internment camps,
Laid neatly atop a noose still damp from
the innocent's blood.
America will find a new war!
A new war with a new enemy more
frightening even, than myself.
Then,
I will blend back in,
Until it is my turn to be hated once
again.
But, until that time, I will not sit silent,
I will speak out for the children,
Murdered in their beds after being
covered
With the illusional blanket of democracy.
And, for their Mothers who are raped
And, for their Fathers who are
humiliated and pain stricken.
They are an appendage of my body,
An extension of my soul.
Should I not grieve when they grieve?
Or cry when they cry?
After all,
I, too, am a Muslim.

The Sherrif of Mayberry

By Jarred Martin

Black. That's how these things always start. The black fades into gray, the gray into color as everything slowly swims into focus. The Blue Woman, my guide, stands statue-still waiting for me. She stands in the green Technicolor grass, the colors are so bright they hurt my eyes. The sky is more blue than I could ever imagine. Everything has this violent tint that my eyes were never meant to see. The inside of my head burns like fire. She is standing by a crystal-clear sea. Her colors bleeding into the background, dissolving into a bright corona. She holds her mouth in the palm of her left hand. It's full of teeth like shiny knives. She raises it to her face.

"will you see?" she asks. I nod. Her right arm makes a sweeping gesture toward the sea. The transparent waters instantly turn black and begin to boil. I see infants drowning in an ocean of rolling, opaque, blackness. Their screams vibrate in my skull, like the shrill voices of long forgotten birds, calling out as they are sucked down into a pitch-black abyss. I rush to save them. Stumbling, tumbling, I flip over on my back to watch the bright sun be eclipsed by the ink-black wings of a creature with the body of a lion, and head and wings of an eagle. I watch this dark chimera dive into the roiling sea emerging with screaming, flailing, children in his grasp. Viscous oil drips from his body as he rises toward the sun. Motionless, I can only be a silent observer to this horror. I feel screams trying to escape my lips, but I'm screaming in a vacuum. If only A.....

RRRRIIIIINNNNGGGG.....

RRRRIIIIIIINNNNGGGG

...RRRRIIIIINGGGGGG... My eyes fly open like spring loaded traps. I am hurled back into consciousness by the sound of bells. A thousand bells ringing simultaneously, splitting my head in two. I feel the split growing with each moment of awareness. Where am I? I take a precursory look around. Dark room. I'm lying flat on a naked mattress. This seems familiar. Blinding double vision as I look up at a television broadcasting static. BBBBRRRIIINNGGGG..... BBBBRRRIIINNGG.... the screaming of the bells propels the chasm between the two halves of my head further still. In this moment I regain complete cognicence. It must th....BBBBRRRRRINGGGGGG.....

"Hello" I mutter, tonelessly into the phone receiver.

"Hello, Fife?"

"This is Barney Fife. Go ahead"

"We got a situation"

"Don't tell me, Otis puked in the park fountain again. what? Is he passed out in the middle of Main?" "I swear to God if he is I'll beat his last two gin-soaked brain cells right out of his hydrocephalic head."

"No sir, somthin' worse than that, God awful worse."

My hand grips the receiver tighter, the ghosts of bells still haunt my head. Moments of silence pass. In them I see grief stricken fathers embracing weeping mothers: a tiny pine box, the buds of roses wilting, turning black and falling from green stems.

"Jane Doe. Between five and seven years of age. Partial mutilation. Down by the crick."

"Gomer, don't touch anything; I'll be down ASAP." I hang up.

I sit on the edge of the

bed, head in hands, index fingers rubbing tight, hard, circles in my temples. I scan the nightstand: overturned pill bottle with pills scattered haphazardly, three-quarter empty bottle of Jameson, a loaded .44, and an alarm clock eternally blinking 12:00. The giant red numbers sear reverse images behind my eyes and I can feel the tissue start to smolder. A few seconds later and I'm looking at the shattered remnants of man's attempt to document infinity. Shards of black plastic litter the floor. Maybe this act of defiance has brought the destruction of time itself. I revel in the image of a world where light itself is frozen; my movements cast no shadow. I alone am left to gaze upon the paralyzed figures of humanity; forever frozen in whatever pain or pleasure or ennui they experienced at the moment time dissolved like the rotted husk of great chess masters crumbling before the pieces.

Staring down into the depths of the toilet bowl. I've just painted the porcelain and some of the floor with the pitiful contents of my stomach. I admire the every-color dullness of my insides as I'm gripped by another wave of nausea. I taste bitter acid in my mouth. Shaking, I manage to put my feet beneath me and stagger back to the nightstand. I grab the pill bottle and hold it close to my eyes. I stare at the label for several seconds before the tiny letters come into focus. MAXALT, (rizatriptan benzoate) I dump countless little white pills into my mouth and chase them with the whisky. I search the darkness for my uniform. Finding it crumbled on the floor I put it on facing the

dresser mirror. My reflection is a grim specter of a man dying of some unspeakable plague. Frail. Malnourished. The growth of ten-day stubble on my cheeks. My skin is wax. My face, an ill-fitting mask with dark, vacant, pools for eyes. A string of vomit lingers on my chin. I can't remember the last time I've seen the sun.

My badge is on the dresser next to a shattered picture frame. I pick it up. While I gaze at the picture my fingers sweep over the spider web of cracked glass. Andy...

Three weeks ago they found Sheriff Andy Taylor up in Raleigh; stuffed in a garbage can with his throat slit. No suspects. No motives. All the post mortem could determine was that in addition to the two ounces of blow he had on his person; he had four grams cruising around in his bloodstream. That's a lot even for Andy. No prints. Not even partials. Whoever did it must have been a pro. My mind reels trying to imagine the stealth required to catch that man off guard. With all that ching in his system he would have been so far in the red he could hear the whispers of a cat's paws as it stalked silent insects across the night asphalt. God knows Andy had enemies. Every two-bit punk and lowlife Andy ever took down vowed revenge in some way or other. I loved him. I was his deputy for twenty three years. After he died the town made me the new sheriff. I haven't been away from my room at Mayberry Hotel since the funeral. To say my heart broke when I heard about what happened to him wouldn't be enough. There are no words to describe the longing and hurt, utter emptiness that I feel. My

hands are starting to shake. I can't look at this picture anymore. I have work to do.

I feel an acute apprehension towards opening the door. As if the moment the seal is broken some unseen force will pull me into the gaping maw of horrors I can only begin to imagine. Things that crack the bones of sanity to suck the marrow. I don't know what's on the other side of this door, but I know it's there. I can feel it waiting for me. When I close my eyes I see fire. Smoke. Skin melting like wax, dripping from bone. I can see that it's me burning. I feel warmer already.

Driving the beat up black and white through town; I can't help but feel the landscape has changed in some unidentifiable way. Like the terrain has in some way shifted to accommodate a menacing and alien atmosphere. The trees and grass are all dead. The paint on every building is cracked and peeling. On the street the lights that aren't busted are flickering like they are in the throes of death. Lights that want more than anything to shine but can only do so in short spastic bursts. All around me this whole town is rotting. Maybe it has been here all along pushing towards the surface. The only resistance it met took the form of Andy Taylor. Now that he's gone the veneer has split and this cancer comes spilling through the cracks, washing over the town like water through a neglected dam. I take the final turn onto some nameless dirt road that runs parallel to the creek. In the distance I can just make out the silhouette of newly deputized Gomer Pyle drinking coffee and poking what I can only assume is the corpse of a young

girl with a stick.

Gomer is wearing a lemon yellow tank top, worn denim cutoffs with long, frayed, threads hanging down, and cowboy boots. We haven't gotten him a uniform yet. I park the car one hundred yards away and walk towards him.

"Crows been at her" he says hiding the stick behind his back. I take my place next to him and kneel down to examine the body.

Pretty, young girl. Maybe five or six. Her blonde hair is matted with mud and thick dried blood. Little white flower print sundress ripped and torn in various places; obvious signs of a struggle. She's facedown in the dirt. The back of her head has been smashed in with a blunt instrument and it looks like her brain has been crudely removed; likely by hand. There is a rock next to her covered in blood and skull fragments. A probable murder weapon. Two sets of footprints, tiny barefoot ones, hers and one right print of a shoe, roughly size thirteen, and one large, naked, print of the left foot. The prints twist and turn in the dirt as if they were dancing.

I look up at Gomer, "do we have an I.D. yet?"

"No sir, I couldn't imagine no one cruel enough to do something like this."

"I mean the girl, Gomer, do we know who she is?"

Gomer stares at me for a moment with a confused, dumb, look on his face before answering "Oh, Sarah, on dispatch, called a few minuets before you got here. She said Don and Sharon Cullum's little girl, Becky Sue, went down to the crick yesterday afternoon and never come home. Do you think this might be her?"

I scratch my chin and pretend

to think, "you know, you just might have something there, Gomer." Gomer beams proudly and I let him congratulate himself on his police work. "Now, help me flip her over and lets see what's behind door number two."

When we finally rotate the body onto her back, the first thing I notice is that there are several chunks of flesh missing from her eyebrows up. I also notice bruising around her forearms. Defensive wounds no doubt.

"That's strange", I mutter.

"what?"

" These abrasions, near the top of her head. They look like teeth marks, like someone tried to chew clean through her skull."

"well, what do you think happened, sheriff?"

"what I can guess is: this little girl was playing down by the creek, here, and someone comes up, grabs her, they struggle for a bit, he pins her down and tries to bite through her head, he can't do it, he lets her go to get something to hit her with, she runs for a few yards, he grabs her again over here, from behind, and proceeds to smash in her head with this rock, and absconds with her brains in tow. Now, you can tell by the prints that she didn't initially try to run away. This tells us that maybe the assailant was someone she knew. That sound about right to you?"

That dumb, puzzled, look spreads itself across Gomer's face; for all I know it never left, "What does absconds mean?"

"Exactly, now we should search the scene for further evidence. You start over there by those trees and I'll meet you halfway. If you see anything unusual don't touch it, just call me."

I watch deputy Pyle walk off into the distance. When he gets to his desired destination he gets down on all fours and puts his face to the ground like a bloodhound. I stare off into the setting afternoon sun and think about what Andy would make of all this. Suddenly the air is sucked from my lungs. All sound fades from the world except for the rushing wind. It is deafening. Every color converges into one fine point on the ground. Bright like the sun. I can see the Blue Woman. Her hair twists in the wind. She is standing over the blinding place on the ground and she beckons me over. She whispers "The skin of the eye" as she holds the light out to me. I understand immediately and I take the light from her and put it in my pocket.

I'm lying on the ground and I see Gomer standing over me. From this angle I have an excellent view up his cutoffs. My head is throbbing.

"We got to get you a uniform" I say.

"Sheriff, are you all right? There's blood."

I wipe the back of my hand across my nose and look at it. More blood than I expected. "I'm fine Gomer, I just need to sit here a minuet." feeling around in my pockets I dig out however many pills and dry swallow them. I feel something else in my pocket, (the skin of the eye) something cold, and smooth, and familiar.

"Gosh sheriff, you was having a seizure or something. I was looking for something to put in your mouth so you wouldn't swallow your tongue.

"Thanks Gomer. I think we're about done out here. I need you

to do a couple of things for me, o.k.?"

"Sure Sheriff, Whatever you want."

"First thing; get Sarah on the dispatch and tell her to get in touch with Charlottesville. We need forensics out here, and have them haul the body back for autopsy. Second; go tell the Cullums we may have found their daughter and they need to make an I.D. if it turns out this is her then you'll have to ask them some questions. Get more details. You understand?"

"Sure sheriff right away. But, what are you gonna do?"

"I just remembered I need to talk to an old friend of mine."

As I watch Gomer speed off, sirens blazing, I pull the object out of my coat; an empty pint sized bottle of whisky. *Ole Dixie Whisky*. I need to find Otis.

Otis is the town drunk. A fat waste of a man who gave up without ever trying. Rumor has it he came from money, had a family up north, rich daddy with a generous trust fund. He was never in want for anything more than trying to drown himself from the inside out. A captain sailing on his own ocean of booze. They say he came to Mayberry in a sort of exile. Guess his rich daddy got fed up, wrote him one final cashier's check, and sent him packing. I have no respect or remorse for a man like that. Like he decided he just wasn't going to be a part of this world anymore but didn't have the nuts to open a vein.

I look for Otis like someone searching for a lost dog. I check under porches, deserted back alleyways, and any place that could provide shelter for a stray. This won't take long. Everyplace

he's been he leaves a trail. I can smell it. That acrid smell of cheap booze and vomit mixed with his own rotting stink. I follow that stink to a dilapidated shed and peer through the broken window. I see him sitting on an old twin mattress humming/gurgling atonally. It's either *The Old Rugged Cross*, or *Camptown Ladies*. I shine my flashlight on him. He's holding a brown paper bag and a can of spray paint in either hand. His mouth and nose are painted red and there is a thick strand of pink drool hanging from the corner of his mouth.

"Went a little heavy on the lipstick today did we, friend?" I ask. There is a flicker of recognition in his eyes, and he offers me the bag and can. I decline and he shrugs and sprays the can into the bag, puts it to his mouth and inhales. "I got something of yours, something you left last night by the creek, does this look familiar?" I show him the empty whisky bottle. He flashes me a big red smile and makes drinking motions putting his hand to his lips. I smile back at him and lightning-quick fire the bottle at his head. It connects just over his left eyebrow splitting the skin. The bottle bounces off his head and he doesn't even blink. I kick him a while but get little satisfaction. He's too stoned to feel any of this and I'm just wasting my energy. I would get the same feeling punishing a bag of laundry. No, now is not the time for this.

"You're coming with me, Otis. You are officially under arrest. Anything you say will make no difference, and as soon as you sober up I'm apt to beat the life right out of you." I slap the cuffs

on him extra tight and shove him into the back of the black and white. On the ride back I glance at him through the rear-view. He's looking back at me as if he finally understands the gravity of this situation. I hope he's terrified.

He licks paint off of his lips and says "Do you believe in ghosts, Sheriff?"

"I believe you'll be a ghost soon enough."

"I'm serious, Barney. I know you aint gonna' believe me, but that girl...I seen what happened to her. It weren't me that done it and you know that."

I'm getting tired of his chatter already. "No, Otis I don't know that. But if you didn't kill that little girl then who did?"

"You aint gonna believe me, Sheriff but, it was ghost did it, honest. I seen him. He held that girl down and..." Otis breaks of into silence and I can see tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Otis, I advise you to shut your mouth and enjoy the scenery. This is probably the last time you're going to see the outside for a long while. If you live long enough to have the opportunity, I mean."

"The dead walk. He ate her, Barney, he ate the brains right out of her skull. It was Andy. He's come back to feast on the living." I slam on the brakes hard. Otis flies into the metal divider with enough force for me to hear the satisfying crunch of bone slamming against the hard steel. After that he doesn't feel like talking anymore. Which is fine because I sure don't feel like listening.

When we get back to the station I drag Otis' unconscious body into the back room and cuff him to

a sturdy, metal chair leaving one hand free. While I wait for him to come to, I lay a series of twisted paper clips and open safety pins on the table between us. I hope you're hungry Otis.

Pica is an eating disorder characterized by the consuming of non-food substances. Otis has a very specific form of pica known as hyalophagia. This means he has an appetite for glass and metal. The compulsion can be exacerbated in situations of extreme duress.

Now, all I have to do is wait. I stare at the shiny metal, reflecting light from the halogens above. I imagine the journey these little guys are about to take. Tearing tiny holes down his throat. Puncturing his stomach and ripping apart his bowels. I almost feel sorry. That is, until I remind myself of what he's done. Not just to that little girl, but to this town. Otis is a festering boil on the face of this community. When I look at him I see everything Andy and I have worked so hard to prevent.

I sit awhile, just staring at him, slumped over and drooling. I'm patient. And for my patience I will be rewarded. Finally, I notice him stir. He opens one eye, then the other. Otis looks around confused. He looks at me then he looks down at the table. His eyes widen with horror. They're so big I can see myself reflected in them. When I'm absolutely sure he understands my intentions, I smile and say "good morning, Otis, I hope you don't mind but while you were having visions of sugarplums dance in your head I took the liberty of preparing your last meal."

"Don't do this, please. I wouldn't ever hurt nobody. You

know me, you know I wouldn't."

"No, the only thing I know is that you are a sickness. A plague. You are an infectious disease, corrupting this whole town. Do you know how they cure disease?"

"Barney, please, I don't understand what you're sayin'."

"Needles. Tiny little needles. They deliver the medicine. You want to take your medicine, don't you?"

He just sits there. Sweat pouring down his face mixes with tears. Clearly he needs motivation. That's fine. We could all use some motivation. I pull the .44 from it's holster and pull the hammer back slow so he can hear every click as it falls into its grooves. I only have to fire it once. Then big Otis is shoving pins and paperclips down his face so fast I have to tell him to slow down. I know I shouldn't be enjoying this so much; watching his mouth move up and down, working like machinery as he chews and swallows little slivers of metal. Now his mouth is full of blood, running down his chin, some parts of his lips and cheeks have little pins sticking out and I think how he looks like a big pussy cat with funny little metal whiskers. I laugh so hard I can't breathe.

I hear the front door bang open hard and Gomer rushes in out of breath.

"Sheriff, you gotta' come with me there's... what in the world happened to him?"

"Drunk and disorderly, you know Otis."

We both stare at Otis picking at the last of the pins, trying to get a grip on a particularly difficult one. I tell Gomer that Otis has a medical condition.

"Well, never mind that, sheriff, we got a big problem"

"How's that?"

"Across town. Me and them boys you said to call from Charlottesville. They come and took pictures and put down little cards all around her body and took some more pictures. I asked if they knowed who done it to her and they was laughing an sayin' how it was a no brainer. I didn't understand. But they loaded her up and took her away for an autopsy. Then I went and talk to Don and Sharon like you told me to."

"What did they have to say?"

"Well, nothing we didn't suspect. They was cryin' and holdin' each other, and sayin' that's my baby, that's our little girl. I cried some too, I guess. Anyways, when I was drivin' back I saw the van them Charlottesville boys was drivin' stopped on the side of the road. I pulled over to see what the trouble was and... well, you better come see for yourself."

When we finally arrive I see a dark blue van parked to the side of the road at an awkward angle. Like it was pulled over suddenly. Almost recklessly. All the windows are broken, there are perfectly round holes all along the sides. Bullet holes. The ground is covered in shell casings. The driver and passenger are dead in the front seats. The driver is slumped over against the steering wheel. The passenger died while fumbling with his seat belt. Both have multiple gunshot wounds to the head and upper body. The entire front area of the van is covered in partially congealed blood. Flies are buzzing around the puddles. The back doors are wide open and I can see this is

where a third man made his escape. He is lying about fifteen feet away, facedown on the gravel road. I can tell this boy got the worst of it. Looks like they unloaded on him with buckshot.

"Aint much left of his head is there?" Gomer asks as we stand looking down at a dead body lying in the dirt for the second time that day. "He was the one takin' pictures."

My head is swimming. How can this be happening here? This isn't my town anymore. Somehow between the time when Andy died and today our community turned sour. Spoiled like milk in the sun. I walk over to the van and look in the back. I realize two things: Otis could not have done this, and the girl's body is missing.

"Gomer, when you first got here did you notice if the girls body was in the back of the van?"

"No, I can't say that it was, sheriff."

"Jesus. Gomer, it looks like someone pulled this van over and unloaded I don't know how many rounds out of I don't know how many weapons just to steal a corpse. I can't make any sense out of it. What was so important about that dead little girl that these boys here needed to die? I've never in all my years seen anything even close to something like this."

Its getting dark. I'm pummeled by waves of frustration. None of this makes sense. So many questions and I don't have a single answer. I have to find the blue lady.

"Gomer, I need you to clean this up. Get this van somewhere where no one can find it. Hide it. And don't you breath a word of this to anyone."

"Yes sir, but what are you

gonna' do?"

"I don't know. I need... I need to think"

She comes to me in sleep, to guide me in my dreams. I'm lying on my mattress, arms folded over my chest. Staring at the brown spot on the ceiling. If I look long enough I can see it expand, like it will keep growing until it consumes the entire room. I try to sleep, to dream, but sleep eludes me. This is getting me nowhere. I get out of bed and pull my clothes back on. Head out the door.

I pull the black and white into the parking lot of Floyd's. Floyd's used to be a barbershop until it went belly up in some forgotten era when haircuts stopped being a necessity. Floyd turned it into a bar a few months later and business has never slowed. I push open the doors and walk inside. I'm immediately enclosed by the blanket of conversation from the crowd. I catch beginnings, ends, words, a never-ending assault of words fired like arrows from cruel mouths.heard that he murdered.....little girl...ghosts... sheriff Taylor....and then he ate her...murder...Ghost...beat to death with...messages written in blood... and then everything goes quiet. Heads turn to stare at me. I calmly walk through the crowd and up to the bar. I order my first drink and drift away from consciousness.

I am hurled violently back into reality. I'm sitting at a table near the back with Floyd, the former barber, Emmett, the local handyman who runs Emmett's Fix It shop, and Reverend Tucker from All Souls. I look down at my naked wrist to check the time. How long have I been here? What did

I say? My vision is blurred and my stomach burns. I'm holding a pink drink with a parasol. When I raise it to my lips I poke myself in the eye with the little yellow umbrella. Everyone at the table is staring at me, I must have been talking to them about something but I cant remember what.

"What was I talking about?" I slur. It feels like my tongue is wrapped in cotton.

Emmett looks at me then down at his drink. "To tell the truth Barn, you really wasn't making a whole lot of sense. Something about Andy and curing disease."

"How long have I been here?"

"What do you mean? you've been here all night. Did you really mean what you said about Otis?"

I give them all a weak smile and say " No, I was only joking."

I sit and talk for a little while, but everyone is acting strange in a way I can't really identify. When Floyd raises his glass I notice a bandage on his hand.

"What happened to your hand?"

Floyd gives me a weird smile and says "cut myself shaving."

Reverend Tucker stares at me for a long time and says "Barney, don't take this the wrong way but you really look like shit. Maybe you should go home and get some rest."

"Rest. Yeah, I think you're right."

"We know that you've had a particular rough time dealing with Andy's passing and I don't think anyone here can blame you. Maybe you ought to take some more time off from work. Hell, Gomer can handle it. You know nothing ever happens in this little town."

"Yeah, nothing. You all are right. I really should sleep this

off."

I get up to go and Emmett says goodbye and gives me a little wave. I notice his hand is bandaged too. I stagger out the door, find my car and lean against it searching for my keys. When I find them they won't fit in the keyhole. I try for several minuets and only manage to scratch up the paint around the lock.

A voice from behind me says "You need some help?"

I turn around and see Thelma Lou standing in the pink neon light of the bar's sign.

"Are you here to help me?" I ask.

"I've been waiting out here for half an hour. You told me to meet you out by your car. Said you would take me back to your hotel room."

"I don't remember."

"Like heck you don't remember. You told me you loved me. You told me you would reign down upon me all the heavenly pleasures deserving of the goddess trapped within my mortal shell"

"That sounds like something I would say."

She takes the keys and tells me she can drive. I can't tell which one of us is more drunk. As far as I can tell we're both in a dead heat. When we get inside Thelma takes a napkin from her pocket and unfolds it in front of me. It's a bad sketch of the thing from my dreams. The flying lion thing that eats the children.

"I remember what its called now, if you care."

"What is it?"

"Its called a Griffin."

Something about that word makes me shudder. Like a cold wind blowing through me.

"Put it away."

Thelma Lou puts her hand on my

knee and slides it up to my crotch, firmly closing her hand. "What are you going to do if I don't, you gonna' arrest me?" Her breath is hot in my ear. Her hot breath collides with the cold chills from the griffin to create an unusual storm of desire inside me. We kiss each other hard and my hands move over her breasts through her shirt. She eventually pushes me off of her and puts the car in gear.

We're on a nightmare journey through Mayberry, swerving dangerously on the roads. She plows into mailboxes and digs deep ruts into lawns. Once or twice she sideswipes parked cars along the street that act to even her out like those bumpers that kids use at the bowling ally. I don't even want to look at the speedometer. I cant say I'm unafraid but I know I will not be harmed. A thunderous crash of metal striking wood so loud and so brief that no sound seems to exist afterward. My head strikes the windshield and we come to a violent halt. Dullness originates from the top of my head and spreads itself through my entire body. Then sound. Ringing deep inside my head. Then pain. Brilliant and white. My world is full of stars. I can hear the horn blaring and blood is flowing into my eyes. I look over at Thelma Lou and she's laughing like an idiot. Even though the car will never go anywhere again she puts it in park and starts laughing even harder. We get out and I reach under the crumpled hood and disconnect the battery to stop the horn. The car has been smashed into a giant oak tree on someone's lawn.

Thelma looks at the tree and says "How in hell did I miss that?"

"You didn't." Then we're both

laughing like idiots.

Someone in the house opens the door and asks us if we're all right. Thelma picks up a piece of the headlight and throws it at him shouting "Mind your own." We both start to walk the few remaining blocks to the hotel. Thelma says "You know what I hate? Goddamn rubbernecks like that guy back there. Always wanting to see an accident. Its positively morbid."

"Yeah, you got a point there."

We arrive at the hotel and I carry Thelma Lou across the threshold and throw her onto the bed. While I'm in the bathroom cleaning the blood off of my face I hear her singing in the next room. It's the song about the daisies and the tandem bicycle. For some reason I imagine a robot voice singing it in slow motion. When I'm done I come out and she's turned the light in the bedroom off. I fall over the nightstand but still manage to land on the bed.

She doesn't waste any time, pouncing on me like some depraved cat. I move my tongue around hers and we're both pulling each others clothes off. There we are. Merged into one writhing horny beast. Moving together in unison. My hips thrust to the savage jungle drum rhythm of my heart while she gyrates aggressively against me. I don't know why, but my mind keeps focusing on Andy. Here, now, I'm leaning forward to taste the sweat of her neck. In my mind I'm with Andy jumping on a trampoline with our clothes off. Her mouth taste like cherries and cigarettes. Andy and I both fall off the trampoline and roll around on the damp grass. Here in the dark, I feel the warmth of her flesh and smell our sweat mixing together. In my mind, black and white images of me and Andy

at the circus. We're taking our shirts off and feeding peanuts to an elephant. My mind alternates between perceiving this physical experience and the secret black and white images of my memories so fast they blur together. Faster and faster like two different decks of cards being shuffled together. Then it happens. We both come together in a starburst of orgasm. Then for a moment nothing. My mind is blank and I'm born again. Sleepy.

I'm floating in the blackness. I'm an astronaut hovering in the nothing of space. Then the colors wash over me. So bright. Colors sting my eyes like angry bees. I'm lying in the green green grass like Dorothy in Oz. I'm next to the clear sea. Then I see her. Brighter than anything; like a blazing blue torch.

The Blue Woman lifts the knifey mouth of her hand to her face. "Will you see for the last time. For the first time?"

I tell her yes.

The smooth motion of her arm. She moves as if she is underwater. The sea once again boils violently and turns to black oil. I see the drowning children again and I'm compelled to save them. She holds me back. I cover my ears against their horrible screams but I can't block out the noise. I hear the sound of wings. The screech of the griffin. It dives down and snatches children from the loathsome sea. She tells me to look and I do. At first I don't understand what I'm seeing. The griffin has the face of Andy. I turn away because I don't want to see. I can't see. I won't. She makes me look again and I can see the griffin has chains around it.

On the ground, holding the chains, I see three men with bloody hands. Each trying to pull the Andy Griffin back to earth. It looks like they're flying some awful kite. I look away and tell the Blue Woman that I can't watch anymore. I want to wake up. I start to click my heels together "there's no place like home. No place like home." I grab the Blue Woman and shake her. "It's not true. You lie." my hands turn to fists and I start to beat her. I don't stop until my hands are covered in her blue blood.

When I wake up, I'm on my mattress. Sitting up on my knees. There is a warm sticky heap lying below me. Oh no, what have I done? I turn on the light to see what I already know is there. Thelma Lou beaten to a pulp.

"Thelma, honey, I'm so sorry. Just breathe. Okay? Please breathe."

She's dead. I look over her body crying. Suddenly her fist smashes into my nose. The wound on my forehead has opened and I can't see for the blood running into my eyes. I hear her scramble off the bed and into the kitchen.

"Thelma Lou, I never meant to hurt you."

I hear drawers in the kitchen being thrown to the ground. "I'm going to kill you, Barney! I'm gonna' castrate you, you goddamn pig! Cut you open like a hog!"

I run into the kitchen after her. I see her going through the silverware scattered on the floor.

"Baby, I'm so sorry, it was an accident."

"So is this!"

She shoves a steak knife into my abdomen up to the handle. I'm bleeding all over the black and

white checkered linoleum. Lying in a pool of my own blood. I watch her walk outside and slam the door.

I get up and pull the knife out slowly. Blood squirts onto the wall and I'm getting lightheaded. I have to hurry. I stagger into the bathroom trying to hold the rushing blood in with my hands. I don't have alcohol or bandages so I disinfect the wound with Lysol and use silver duct tape and a couple wash cloths to make a bandage.

I grab my 44. off the floor and rush outside. I'm running as fast as I can naked and covered in blood. I feel pain in my bare feet as they slap the asphalt. I run until I see a car coming. Standing in the middle of the street I fire a round into the car and immediately hear the radiator start to hiss. This was probably a bad idea but it does the job and the car screeches to a halt. Behind the wheel is someone's sweet grandmother; probably on her way to church.

"Why sheriff, you aint got no pants..."

I smash the butt of the gun into her face and pull her out of the car. As soon as she's out of the car it begins to roll forward. She left it in gear like she's never been carjacked before. I chase the vehicle down and jump inside. Slam the pedal down and tear through town. I'm barely riding the edge of conciseness and what I have to do next is going to take a lot of concentration.

The town flies past me so fast its all one big blur. Finally, I see my destination. The former home of Andy Taylor. I turn sharp into his driveway and I can't slow down. The car crashes into his porch sending huge pieces of wood

flying into the air. I'm dazed only for a moment then I exit the car. I rush in through the open door and I'm immediately overcome with the stench of decay. I search every room and find nothing. I know they're here. When I walk into the kitchen I see little Opie and Aunt Bea dead and slumped over the table. Bodies both black and blue, swollen and bloated. They've been here for weeks. To my horror I see that the backs of their skulls have been smashed open and their brains removed. I vomit on the floor and its mostly blood. That can't be good. that's when the lights go out.

My vision is hazy. Dim around the edges. Almost like I'm dreaming. I know I'm not because I'm in too much pain. First I hear voices.

"He's waking up."

I already know who these voices belong to. Floyd the barber, Emmett, and Reverend Tucker.

"You picked a hell of a week to start being a cop, Fife."

"Where's Andy, you sick sons of bitches. What did you do to him?"

Floyd leans close to me and says, "All in good time sheriff, first tell us who else knows about this."

"Everyone."

They all converge on me at once. Beating me. I'm too weak to fight back. I realize I left my gun in that old lady's car. I'm probably going to die here.

"Okay, I didn't tell anyone. That's the truth." I think I swallowed one of my teeth.

Emmett this time "How did you find out."

"I didn't, not really. I'm not entirely sure what's going on here but I know that Andy isn't dead.

And somehow you made him kill that little girl. Probably his son and aunt Bea too."

Reverend Tucker sighs "I suppose we did. But you have to understand we didn't intend for any of this to happen. It was a mistake."

"Tell me. Tell me what you did to him."

"You have to realize that Andy was the only thing keeping this community together. After he died... We knew this town wouldn't last without him. You see for yourself what kind of filth and degradation is possible in his absence. We had to bring him back. For the town. He was our savior."

During my years as a missionary in Haiti I witnessed firsthand that the dead could rise. To walk the earth again. I know now that as well as a miracle it is also a curse. So we brought him back. We stole his body after the funeral. There were certain... rituals we each had to perform. The last was the giving of our blood so that he may live. That's why you see the bandages we wear. We buried him again so that he could be reborn from the soil. When he came back he wasn't the same. There was nothing left of the Andy Taylor we knew. Just a mindless body with an insatiable hunger. We let him come home and he killed Opie and Bea as you have seen."

"You monsters. You just let him come back. What the hell did you think would happen? That Andy would get better? He was dead!"

"Yes, as I've said it was a mistake. But we couldn't kill him again. We chained him up in the root cellar for his own protection, and I studied the Haitian incantations hoping for a way to bring back his soul as

well as his body. He got loose and killed the little girl a few days ago. Before we could cover it up you were already well on your way playing detective. We waited until the out of town forensic unit was taking her away and we retrieved the body before prints could be taken off of it. We left the mess for you to find in order to keep you distracted."

"Take me to him. I want to see him for the last time. After that I don't care what happens to me. I'm already dying."

"As you wish."

They help me into the root cellar and I see him chained to the wall. Andy. I hear the door close behind me and lock. Everyone is gone.

"Just you and me now, sheriff." I look into his eyes. Blank and milky white. Those eyes have seen eternity. "I don't know how long I have left, but I'm glad I get to spend it with you, sir." Andy's face is a mass of rotten flesh with huge chunks missing. I can see maggots pulsing beneath his putrid skin. "I know they think I'm just going to lie down and let them get away with this but they don't understand Barney Fife doesn't lie down for anyone."

Andy rattles his chains and moans something that sounds like brains but I know what he's really saying is I love you Barney Fife.

"I love you too Sheriff Taylor."

I move quick and use the last ounce of my strength moving a dusty armoire in front of the cellar door. Then I search the shelves until I find a five gallon can of gasoline and some matches. I dump the gas all over the ground and walls and use the remaining bit to pour on Andy and myself. This is Fife's last stand. I light

the match and throw it to the ground. Instantly flames rise all around me. I move over to Andy and do what I've always wanted to do to him. I put my lips on his mouth and embrace him. He bites down hard on my lips and thrashes his head violently. That's okay, I hold him even tighter. I just wish we had a trampoline.

The End.



Pears By Kelsey Staggs

One More Down

By Jared Bland

Another man gone
Another day at war
Bullets buzz around
One more down

Behind a rock
Another day at war
Yelling all around
One more down

Fear in the air
Smoke scented hair
Tears hit the ground
One more down

A letter sent home
A knock on the door
To the other side They're bound
"I'm sorry miss,
One more down"



Twister By Chris Cloninger

Black Coffee Jig



Man-Eating Bird
Both works by Matt Pinkard



The Soulless Abominations

By Cody Newton

There was a day
A long time ago
When people could laugh
People could show
Their joy
love
and affection
But oh boy
Those days are long gone
cause after the war
was over and done
the true hell
had just begun

Can you see the creatures
coming in the distance
Their eyes absent
of feelings
morals
and emotions
Their bodies twisted
By death and starvation
These aren't just any evil
These are the Soulless
Abominations

Can you feel
The cold, dead fingers
as they wrap
around your throat
You try to scream
but are silenced
by your selfish lies
These are the Soulless
Abominations

If you try to run
don't you fall
Cause if you do
they'll kill you all

The screams of the mutilated
dead and dying
The little children dead
Their mothers crying
All this and more
is music to the ears
of the Soulless Abominations

God almighty
have mercy on us
We know we've sinned
But do we really deserve
this?

Still they march
Spreading death and decay
throughout the land
all the way
Abolishing anything
that stands in their way
Fear the Soulless
Abominations. . .

Is there any hope
left for the world?
Mankind's been beaten
Are they defeated?
Only time will tell
if man can stop
the Soulless Abominations

Hear them coming. . .
the thunderous sound
People are dying. . .
the hallow shells
the bleeding eyes. . .
The grotesque creatures
Maybe one day
they'll disappear
Or maybe they'll just
remain on the earth
causing pain and torture
no matter the consequences. . .

Ordinary Day

By Janella Sweatt

It was one of those days,

You know the kind.

Your hair frizzes up and those keys you just can't find!
My uniform was dirty from saying "yeah, I'll wash it later."

Always forgetting I'm a procrastinator.

I banged my head on the shower caddy,
switching my mood from mellow to crabby.

I went to work at my low paying job,
waiting on every Tom, Dick, and Snob.

Then the doors flew open, He walked in the door,
The next thing I knew, my mouth fell to the floor.
He went to my school, the invader of all my thoughts,
and the way he smiled mad my stomach start to flip-flop.

My head began to swirl, and I started to see
a world of possibilities from the way he looked at me.

He just stood there and stared at the look on my face

I started to panic, what should I say?

He started to lean in, closer to me
my heart skipped a beat, those blue eyes went as deep as the sea!

He opened his mouth, and I knew then and there
my whole world was shaken, this quickly I swear!

And then I heard his voice deep in growl. . .

"Dude, will you kindly take my order now?"

Today

By Princess Houston

Today was a hectic day
I was stressed, took a little longer to dress, and didn't meet the day
well

I lost my keys, pleaded with my kids
Please oh Please

Don't cry for that piece of candy or that bottle I almost have ready
Let mommy write one more sentence on that research paper that is on
her mind so heavy
Please oh Please

I was late to work, luckily my boss was not a jerk
Oh Thank You Oh Thank You

I left work late, hopefully my fiance can wait
Hopefully, Hopefully

Today is not over, with a sigh I must say, but
Luckily, Luckily
I can say I saw Today

Check Yo-self

By Dustin Carter

With razor sharp swords they cut down everything, leaving
nothing.

VIOLENCE. DISARRAY. DESTRUCTION.

With open hands the hands of thieves.

stolen is all that's

good from us.

We stand overlooking- (the sight sends shivers down my back)
-the wreckage beneath our feet.

Cities in shambles of their former states.

this won't be subtle.

ready to ignite?

BOY YOU LOOK SURPRIZED!

With faith as bold as lions.

Money

By Brandon Elliott

There she is sitting teasing me; laughing
saying hey baby you're cute but you can't
get me. Why are you so cruel over there
standing like a most beautiful jewel?
Why can't we just get along, sing a song,
and live in a world where no one was wrong
and the economy was just right? A world
where a child doesn't have to work all day
and night, for them just to get a bite.
That world would be sweet just like honey
all for the love of money.



St. Mary's Bridge By Brooke McHaffey



Stubbed Toe By Lauren Grays

Caught

By Danielle Davis

Caught between decisions.

Caught between highs.

Caught between the choices.

Caught between the lies.

Lost in all the confusion.

Blinded inside a haze.

Stuck in all the passages that go their separate ways.

How did I get here?

So, lonely and afraid.

There is no one here to find me....

Maybe, there is no one here to save.

Caught between the decisions.

Caught between your highs.

Caught between my choices.

Caught between your lies.

Lost in my confusion.

Blinded by your haze.

Stuck in all your passages, as we go our separate ways.

How did you get me here?

You've left me so lonely and afraid.

You never came back to save me....

Maybe I was here to never be saved.

Pain

By Bethany Bell

Pain is not prejudice
Though it may seem so.

She cares not whether you are rich or poor,
Before she comes knocking at your door.
No king, nor housewife, nor stableboy,
can stop cruel pain from coming in.

Nay, indeed she will do her will,
with glee the blood of princes spill.

She cares not whether you be alone,
with little hope left at all.

she will steal it from thy heart,

Thou cannot stop her cleverness, she has made cruelty her art.

With driving force she makes strong men weak,
with no remorse she makes mothers weep.

With no regret, she treads upon us all,
she breaks our backs, and makes us crawl.

No palace guard can withstand her fury,
no bedchamber can lock her out.

Nay, never can she be denied,
she feasts on deceit, and poverty, and lies.

If you have not yet felt her sting,
be sure one day you will.

For her feet are swift, and her bite is sure
None can stop her reckless gore.

Be careful lest she cripple you,
let her not take away your will to live.

For if she has success in this,
You will become miserable, and the cause of her bliss

So let her have her way, and then,
mend your heart together again.

For the more she doth try to break through,
the stronger and wiser she will leave you.



The Sad Clown

The Heart of a Clown

Both works by Robert James Phelps

I am a clown with no joy of my own.
These jokes I tell are at my expense.
What you think is my smile is all that
remains of laughter.
There is no peace, and this smile is only paint.
It has been years since I have slept in silence.
Screams of sorrow awaken me and linger
throughout the day.
While I slept, I told myself a joke,
A joke where life was the punch-line.
As time goes on my laughter continues to fade,
Because. . .well, that joke just isn't funny
Anymore.

For the Love of Mike!

By Sally Brock

Right up front, let me say, I don't know how you feel. Here you are either experiencing the first hand effect of the most devastating phenomena of this or any lifetime as a carrier of the HIV virus or as the family or friend of someone who is, and no one, not anyone knows exactly how you feel. Sure, thousands upon thousands have walked the same path, have heard the same words, thoughts, your reactions, your fears.

Only I know how I felt when my dear Mike told me had THE DISEASE. My heart sank, my head swam, my mind rebelled, and I giggled! Yes, giggled! A nervous, little girl giggle of "come on now, you can say it's not so!" But he never did say "it's not so". He just got sick.

In the months since my world with Mike in it turned upside down, I've read, I've studied, I've listened and I've prayed. And you know what, all the printed information I've found has been just so much mush. It's either been so clinical that, while it's proved useful knowledge, it's been of no comfort; or it's been so slanted that I know the writer could not possibly have known or loved anyone with AIDS. Somewhere between the bigotry and the ambiguity has got to be not only truth, but comfort and peace.

It didn't take me long to learn that you can't tell just everybody that you know someone with AIDS. Wow! People have looked at me like I had it, or was going to give it to them, just because I know someone who has IT. Baloney! Makes you

want to say "get a grip . . . AIDS is a disease not unlike many other illnesses traditionally known to be terminal." So what do you do? Make up something to blame Mike's illness on, or pick one of the opportunistic diseases that feed on the weakened body just to give some social acceptance to your deep concern for your Mike? "Mike has cancer" sounds a lot more acceptable than "Mike has AIDS". I've tried both lines - the sympathy for the cancer victim is only surpassed by the morbid curiosity and fear of the AIDS patient . . . and, me . . . me, I was caught in the middle wanting to help him, but not wanting to be alienated from the rest of the "normal" world! But you know, it doesn't matter one whit what the "normal" world thinks - there's lots of them to choose from and only one sweet Mike to love to the fullest for the time left to us! So, if your friends don't understand, you may need new friends - after all, there are lots of US in the "normal" world who have a Mike in our lives.

So, the big deal is, the disease has a bad rap. Its origins are uncertain, but where it's living now is certain. It's pretty obvious that at some point your Mike made a poor choice or choices. Enough said, let's get on with the matter at hand - Mike is ill, and I want to make him feel better. Mike is ill, and I want to make me feel better!

Nowhere have I read how you should respond when told about AIDS. NOWHERE! Somehow saying, "What did you say?" or giggling seems all wrong, but what is right?

Part of my problem when I hear "the news" came from my training as a child to be polite. Yes, be polite! Though Mike had known about his diagnosis for a while, he was relatively strong physically, and was still in a state of disbelief himself. So, he couldn't bring himself to say the word AIDS, even though he wanted me to know, he was only able to say "I have THE DISEASE." Well, being raised to be a Southern lady, I didn't want to pry . . . God, I wish I had pried. He wanted to tell me, if I wanted to know, I wanted to know, if he wanted to tell me, and we were both too dang polite to talk about the one thing we wanted to talk about! I didn't want to believe that what he was talking about was really AIDS, so I just asked, "is it terminal?" "It doesn't have to be," was his response. There, there it was, confirmation that he probably was talking about some other terrible disease. Yes, that was it! He must have been talking about cancer, or muscular dystrophy. Sure, those are terrible, life changing diseases . . . must be, because he said "it doesn't have to be (terminal)". But deep inside of me, I knew it was AIDS. Why, who ever heard of anyone calling cancer THE DISEASE? I held out hope against hope watching Mike grow weaker and weaker. Until we both could no longer pretend, think, ignore the fact . . . until my politeness left me and I talked to him about IT. And finally THE DISEASE let go of some of its morbid grip on both of us - its victims.

There are so many things to learn about being an AIDS family. First, it's OK to hold an AIDS

victim's hand. It's OK to kiss your Mike's forehead or cheek. It's OK to eat with the same dishes or utensils and bathe where he or she bathes. What's not OK is to assume that you won't be infected by not having sex or shooting up with a shared needle. You must have the good sense not to expose wounds or sores to any body fluid that the patient expels. It is necessary to be aware of sanitizing commonly used items that touch personal areas of your body. Chlorine bleach may become your best friend, as it appears to be the most effective cleaning agent for deactivating the HIV virus.

What to do differently? Well, the answer to what to say to the news of AIDS is as different as the individual who gives or receives the news. But, my reaction, with the knowledge I've acquired and the good sense that seems to be settling in, would be to take Mike in my arms and hug him for all I'm worth. To hold his face in my hands and say, "you're not alone, I love you. I loved you when you were making the choices you made, I loved you when you were not infected, I love you now - only I love you with an understanding that we must make time count, and pray for resolutions to this situation that will make it OK."

And I'd ask, "Mike are you right with God? Do you know that no matter what you've done, God will forgive you? Do you know that you can be forgiven, that Heaven will not be denied you if you ask for forgiveness, and truly and honestly receive that grace and mercy? Do you know, oh, Mike do you know?"

The bottom line is: LOVE MIKE
. . . LOVE MIKE. . . LOVE MIKE, use
common sense in his or her care,
talk frankly and openly about his
or her fears and needs, about your
fears and needs, touch Mike, hold
Mike, comfort Mike, and LOVE MIKE
. . . LOVE MIKE. . . MOVE MIKE!

For the love of Mike! . . . Let's
not let an entire generation
of people perish for lack of
knowledge!



Abandoned Sidewalk By Lance Nettles

