



The Ram's Tale

2011

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Poetry

Poetry comes nearer to vital truth than history.
—Plato

the truth

Mia Barraza Martinez

First Prize

because love is bursting from the throat
and tickling the tongue
and rubbing lips together.
irresistible like the exposed
thighs of the poet
to whom time is a concept
she has never grasped
so she can never count her age
in years.
she looks in all directions
breathing in every cockroach running along the baseboard
and the mole in the crook of your pinky.
the spirits yearn to speak to her
and begin to improvise a language
a rosebush leaning forward
into her path
she tries to understand the petals rubbing her teeth
and chews them.
presses a palm against the bark
of the tree outside her bedroom window
or brushes dry grass into a pile
and lights a short-lived fire.
the poet looks in all directions
and sometimes sees
nothing except the back of her own head.
she stands, leaning back,
supported by wind,
allowing her skin to goosebump
her nipples to harden
the hair on her head lifts.
she reaches out to listen
with naked toes
to the crying spirits
with their weak voices.
they hope one of these days
the poet will look at nothing
and finally see everything.

calwa park - one a.m.

Mia Barraza Martinez

Second Prize

I remember the round light of my flashlight
hitting the graffiti wall at calwa park

I remember the clangs and clinks
of the chain link fence as we stuck in our toes
and jumped over.
the yellow lights from the beer warehouse across
the street. the empty immobile swings. I remember
the metal bones of a rocket ship sticking up
out of the ground like a stoic weed.
the naked tree branches and their lonely fingers.
your feet sinking into mud next to mine.
the way you tucked your hands
into the pockets of your black peacoat.
your mustache against my top lip.
each piece of graffiti hitting the eye like
a ghost on acid or a bite of aluminum or
a rainbow twisted out of dali's alphabet.
I remember your cold fingertips
brushing a strand of hair from my forehead
like brushing dust from a painting.
I remember holding my cold fingertips
to spray-painted smoke
on a brick wall.
the crunch of candy wrappers under our sneakers.
the metal skeleton of a breached submarine.
I remember five raindrops soaking into my hair.
the shock in my ankles as we tumbled
back over the fence. I remember the streets washed
in new colors as I sat in your car on the way back
home. the white door of my apartment
pulsating against its frame.

Chronic Pain

Isaac Weil

Third Prize

As I held the waist high fence, looking out over the river valley, light rain pecking at the dried leaves with a sound like a thousand insects, all of their six-thousand little legs crawling, rustling on the dirt, just underneath the sun-tanned skin of the leaves; looking down the softly eroded slope now covered in chlorophyll green grass; over dirt and rocks; over the San Joaquin River; over the water, water that would rush with the coming of heavy rain but at the moment flowed so slowly, had ripples shifting so slightly that its movement seemed like an optical illusion; water divided by a strict linear geometry into shades of grey, mapping the currents below, a division of light and dark beginning in the armpit bend of the river; over oaks on the far bank, wild branches spread close to the ground but with upward growth subdued and slumped, as a man slumps in a room full of people he sees as better than himself; up over the soft mesa forming the other wall of the valley, a flat green plane, providing a flat green horizon line from which the hard grey sky rose; a bird with the oddest call, like the sound Mario makes when he eats a mushroom and grows twice his size, calling across the rain filled sky; thin rain, looking like long sheets of cellophane wrap hanging in the air; the cellophane rain making me zip up my coat; smelling the clinging earth; my mouth wet; I wondered why I felt defeated.

To have a hostile, spreading, clouding pain, in the head, the neck, the chin, the knees, the fingers, the eyelids, the place half way around the torso where so many villains in the movies stick the knife—right behind the ribs—mixed with moments of achievement, intellect, friendship, the pain fundamentally entangled with the moments of life, a creeping sourness in a spoiled yogurt parfait that you've been craving for weeks, so that you just keep eating it even though the sourness attacking your tongue is screaming, "Stop! This yogurt's gone bad;" tonight there will be sweat on your back, burning in your throat, spasms in your stomach as you vomit up the guilty bacteria, and many times the sourness is just too much, you just stop eating but still, even with just a small taste, you know tonight the vomiting will shred your throat. I think I can describe chronic pain best this way.

39 Lines of Burning

Jessica Moreno

Honorable Mention

Can I tell you what you are?
You are the tangible anatomy
of the brightest star I have ever seen.
I need to taste you the way a child must taste
a table, with curiosity and wholeness.
Bring the universe to shudders and a heart

to beating so that as one existence a single heart
can feel and be ignited by the fire of what you are
and at the in and out of exhale a wholeness
will be funneled down and pressured into the meek anatomy
of i. With as much courage as I can gather let me taste
what my only human eyes have ever seen.

I have heard velvet dipped in chocolate and have seen
the way an abandoned lover can hide his heart.
Let me never experience the sullen taste
of a universe without you. Are
there ever forevers in burned out anatomies
of self-contained universes? What wholeness

can there be if left alone? What wholeness
can there be in abandonment? I have seen
the scars that taint your aging anatomy
and I am witness to the hurting heart
that continues to beat. There are
too many lies that I can taste

and too many hurts that I can taste
hindering you to feel the wholeness
that I do. You are
not the skinniest boy that I've ever seen.
You are not the sad tale of a dead heart
and you are not simply an anatomy...

No. You are not just an anatomy.
You are not the taste
of hurt and you are not the broken heart.
You are not the example of failed wholeness
and you are not the most uncoordinated dance I've ever seen.
I can tell you in 39 lines what you are,

You are the self-contained anatomy of wholeness.
The most enduring heart I've ever seen,
the taste of what dreams are.

not tonight

Mia Barraza Martinez

after I read your message
I put my phone down on freshly laundered sheets
I take off the perfume at my wrists,
pour it back in the bottle.

you're in love with my loneliness,
the way it looks at you from each of my breasts.
the way it hooks my skinny leg across your lap.
the way it steals a kiss from you
and quickly pulls away, eyes lowered
in shame.

after I read your message
I put my body down on freshly laundered sheets
pull the mascara from my lashes,

pour it back in the bottle.

terrorisms

Mia Barraza Martinez

“Ain’t nobody feelin’ that war.”
Diddy on the war in Iraq.

videos of wmd’s in a cave
surfaced on youtube.
they said saddam
flew the first plane,
hit the eject button
just in time.
I kept hearing bin laden
sent bush a yellow cake
on his birthday.
remember how the mailboxes
were all packed with anthrax?
we had to fumigate the entire house.
that kid you introduced me to,
soldier, you called him,
wasn’t it weird how he just
started crying?
I was glad you locked him in the closet
along with those pictures
of huddled women
dressed head to toe
in black
their eyes showing too much.
who wants to look at that?

You should write that down

Mia Barraza Martinez

there is a smile on my face

because this morning i made love
to Abbie Hoffman
right before he left for Chicago
and the Democratic Convention of 1968
my fingers tangled
in the knots of his maniac hair.

last Friday
i gave Marilyn the key to my hotel room
and she bit my lips
between giggles and gulps of champagne.

a few days ago
i spent the night at Frida's
she swung my hair over my shoulder
and painted herself naked
on my bare back
the feeling of wet paint
covering me head to toe in goosebumps.

there is a smile on my face

Saturday night at Pod's and Jerry's
low light hovers above dark tables
i'm sitting on Langston's lap,
candlelight flickers across his hand
which rests easy on my thigh.
Billie's voice fills the room
like the warm smell of cinnamon.
sometimes there's sad blues
her voice a smooth hand on the back of my neck
and sometimes there's happy blues.
this one goes out to the two of you.

heads turn to our table in the back.
she nods slow and soft
the diamonds at her ears catch the light
Langston nods back
and whispers
i could take the harlem night and wrap it around you.
i press my lips to his temple
and say against his skin
you should write that down.

My Health

Brand James Gunderson

*How in the hell is your health?
Michael Medrano "Postcard to Ginsberg"*

My health! My health!
My health is dying in the accolades
Of the junky vermin who try
To save it with their degrees
In hard knocks. They stick
Their rusty-used syringes in me
And say, *For your health.*
As the needle slides into
Its chosen vein
Blood envelopes the junk
And I sit back in my chair
And nod out for what
Could be the last time.

My health is suffocating
In the hands of deranged
Psychologists and pushed
To the back burner of
Their crack pot ovens
While they force feed
Me their medications
And make me relive
My disillusioned past.
The cries and screams
That still haunt me
Ravage my defective mind.

My health has been
Brutally raped in
Portable bathroom stalls
Night after night
Until the purgatories

Of its torso bled incessantly
All over the bits of crumpled
Toilet paper on the ground.

So how in the hell is my health?
It's better than it's ever been.
In fact it's dying right over there
Between my hopes and aspirations.

Influx

Jessica Moreno

I could cut myself with these edges,
white glistening diamond edges...
48 eyes and 24 mouths,
a whirling moving frothing ocean
crashing into rocks,
big brown rocks with long eyelashes.
The only thing keeping this mess together
is a frame.
White calcium chalky frame
losing shape
losing strength.
The beach front brown sand I am
in mounds and curves alike
seems to make me wider,
a feeling the chaos fights.
I'm a whirlwind with a great big heart,
waves shattering...
I've got a thousand sides and half are smart.
I'm an ocean with a leak.

Burning Violin

Mima Wright

Leonard Cohen "Dance Me to the End Of Love"

*Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin
Dance me through the panic 'til I' am gathered safely in
Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove*

June's summer nightfall is stalking
the assiduous streets of my city.
Lavish bass-wood trees are booming
and fruiting by the seconds.
Their sweet, redolent scent is wafting
through the electric atmosphere.
My big, eleventh floor, wide open
window is flirting with the blossoms.
On the opposite side of the street,
many other windows are emitting
the light through the night,
like a hundred rectangle jars
full of fire flies,
stranded in vertical order
on the sullen concrete architecture.
My eyes are randomly snapshooting
into other people's lives—
no, not my style—
fast, I am backing away
and stopping in awe—
a distant resonance of music from
someone else's apartment,
is crisscrossing
the upper layers of the air:
a transparent, mellow, seductive,
soaring sound of the *burning violin*.
Veiled in off-white colored silk tone,
Saint Saen's musical suite
from the Carnival of the Animals,

the Swan, demurely is infusing and
livening up my indigo kitchen.
Gently, like a zephyr,
my hand is turning off the light,
and slowly taking your olive arm,
like a precious gem of jade.
You and I, two summer
silhouettes are dancing away
from the warm reflections of the
rectangle jars full of fire flies,
and the pile of ceramic dishes
waiting patiently in the sink.

Recycling Vigilante

Mima Wright

*For Dorothy and all the ordinary people
who do extraordinary things*

Daybreak over the Fresno City College grounds.
Branches of the centennial trees wind-dancing.
A band of Seven-up, Coca-cola and Pepsi cans
commences its rhapsody of crushed despair.
Speedy recycling vigilante single-handedly
converts recklessness of aluminum junk
into the scholarship gold of rising hope.

Praise her elderly, diligent hand in a cotton glove,
meticulously mining through our ignorance
and turning dark misfortunes into vivid light.

Her calves of a former marathon runner,
among the rows of packed trash containers,
her rushing feet flying like German rockets.
My sleepy ecological conscience at risk.
I move my head sideways and catch the rays
of the morning star smile hovering above
the quiet anarchy of paper cups and wrappers.

Praise her elderly, diligent hand in a cotton glove,
extended to salute you, even if it is too engaged
sorting the rubbish to notice a casual observer.

Insomnia: the images of miniature old lady in
denim shortalls working alone by the fountain
of Fresno City College pride. The silver forest of
her hair swinging in the rhythm of rustling water.
Her back bent over piles of human lack of care.
A thousand students passing by, the young eyes
absorbing only the world they wish to see.

Praise her elderly, diligent hand in a cotton glove.
It belongs to the mind of a retired English teacher,
an eighty-year-old patron-saint of all volunteers.

Greet and indulge Recycling Vigilante.
Her intellect of giving survival is unforeseen.
She is the nexus between our sense of humanity
and the slavery to text messaging and androids.
That distinct and modest creature is you in a
blueprint of the future. She holds the candle for all.
Praise her elderly, diligent hand in a cotton glove.

patent leather streets

Gloria Nazzaretta

wet pavement graffiti.
words spill into gutters.
fragment, run-on, awkward.
puddles slide words.
forever, now.
patch work crosswords,
keep,
friday night.

patent leather streets.
words intersect tire tread.
wet pavement graffiti

friday night,
open mike, coffee, strollers.
together, integrity.

patent leather streets,
puddles slide words
perpendicular to street lights.
forever, now.

the street whispers rain.

I Believe

Gloria Nazzaretta

When I see a golden sunset I believe.
I believe in hair color and oolong tea. My ancestors
carry me. I believe my dreams illuminate. I have
dreams for my friends. Sleep is instructive, as
waking. I believe the human brain is our skin. When
my skin tightens I listen. I believe words are things,
images lodged between subcutaneous layers of
skin. I believe the emperor wears no clothes.
I believe it essential to bless food. I believe I am
protected by Eloheim while I sleep. We are the
unseen. I believe illness can be healed by shiatsu
and Dylan music. I believe shyness can be
overcome.

I believe I love you.

I believe in my mother's prayers and my father's
lineage. I believe in the first day of class reaching
past comfort. Joining. Once beholding Fall's glisten
on a wild rose, I believed. White tree roses
fragrant blooms curl over my south lattice wall
grows beside flowering lavender.

I believe you every time you say, "I'll call."

I believe in love at first sight. I love my astringent
rosemary and flowering aromatic sage. I believe in
cleansing air from negative thoughts when smudging
a fresh batch of sage. I refuse to see what others see and
seek what they don't. At the end of a long day,
when I see a golden sunset, I believe.

White Space

Isaac Weil

White space exists as a body on which we apply the pigments of text. Like a breath and silence between spoken words, white space is not only the body as a canvas, but also the body as a structure. It provides then the border, which text must transcend. In the process of breaking the border, the text gives purpose to white space, and by being the border, white space gives life to text; for text lives on the bridges that span gaps, in the shatter and the bleeding of punctuated separateness.

The Thought That Counts

Isaac Weil

Now we come to an interesting gas station in the middle of god forsaken hot desert nowhere. Thought sleeps on a small cot behind the sticky counter. He sells chips and cigarettes to those who pass through the desert and dig in the dry soil, which wettins faster than you'd expect. In his green stripe gas station, green as fish, in the desert. the old fifties pumps, little rockets to the Moon or Leningrad. Curved and bulging, sleek and fat little thangs. (Write right off that cliff, Louise, write right off that cliff.) In his shit smeared bathrooms and country western music plastic in the speakers, as the floor is plastic on the few lonely boots that pad and clunk by. With the wheezing bellies that accompany them. Like a dog accompanies a boy on his skateboard. On the resonating sidewalk. Leached and yanked. This is where the thought lives. And does he count? He may count the money in the register. He may count the stock of Heineken and Arizona Tea. He may count the wanderers. He may count the potato chips. Who knows if he just counts?

Two-Dimensional Art

“It has been said that art is a tryst, for in the joy of it maker and
beholder meet”
—Kojiro Tomita



Everything is as it Should Be

Kyle Hailey
First Place



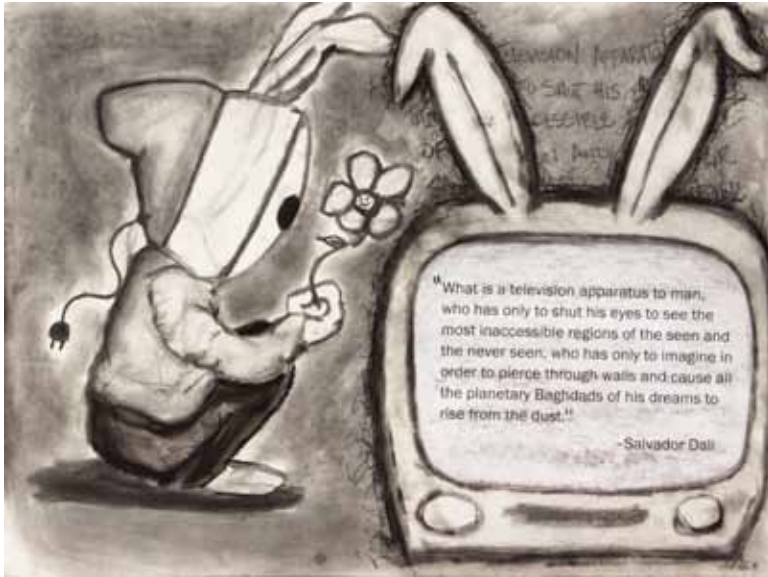
Kaulin

Pamela Denham
Second Place



Young Love

Pamela Denham
Third Place



Dali Vision

Michael Dominguez
Honorable Mention



Together

David Lopez
Honorable Mention



Training My Eye

Michael Dominguez



Kaulin

Sansanee Boonyad



Isolation

Sansanee Boonyad



1/3

Austin Dozier

Lion

Austin Dozier



Richard

Nicholas K. Birkel



Aztec Calendar

Daniel Sanchez

Photography

“While there is perhaps a province in which the photograph can tell us nothing more than what we see with our own eyes, there is another in which it proves to us how little our eyes permit us to see.”

—Dorothea Lange



the path to education is not always the prettiest

Brenda Elena Gomez
First Place



Creative Non-fiction

“The act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike.”

—Ralph Ellison

All Worked Up

Paul Nunez

First Place

Playing in the backyard alone on the side of the house was my idea of a fun time. I would lay in the dirt, cold and smooth, with my little green and tan colored army men, letting my imagination run wild as the green army waged war against the tan. My life was so simple and carefree. I would always take the time to notice my surroundings; the tall trees providing shade for me, the cool late summer breeze that always blew by and reminded me of how lucky I was to be outside, and of course the blue sky as it changed color from its blue hue to an orange pink kind of color. Yes, it was a great day to be outside.

“Boy!” my mother would scream from the back door. I instantly stopped and waited for a second calling, and when it came, I got up and dusted myself off. As I walked to the back door, I kicked objects out of my way. Smiling, I leapt onto the porch. The calling was for dinner, and being a 10-year-old boy, I was always hungry. Chicken and red rice cooked together was my favorite meal, and with a glass full of fruit punch Kool-Aid mixed with grape Kool-Aid, my day was ending on a great note.

Full, and a bit sleepy, I skipped watching television and headed to my room. Isolated from everyone, I then started playing my Nintendo 64. With my only game (Super Mario 64) I could play for hours. I could hear music coming from my sister’s room, which meant she was recording music from the radio onto cassette tapes. As irritating as it was, I tried to ignore it, but it was interfering with my game play. I continued playing and began losing more than usual. My heart beat faster, small sweat beads on my forehead began to form and my eyes started to tear up. I could tell I was getting mad. I began ranting and making so much noise, I didn’t hear my father come home. My father liked it quiet when he was home.

“Boy!” Again I heard the shout of my nickname. This time it was that of my father’s voice. My body stopped in place as if I were frozen. I didn’t want to breathe or move because I thought he would hear me. “Come here!” he stammered. His voice seemed to have stuttered as he shouted. I tried to open my door as quietly as possible, but the hinges on my door made the ugliest noises and caught me off

guard. I flinched and closed my door swiftly. I opened it again. Scared, this time I said the stupidest word a kid could ever shout to a parent, “What?!”

“Now!” he replied. I busted out of my room like a sprinter off the blocks. My mind was racing a mile a minute thinking of everything that could possibly happen to me. Looking at the floor, trying to be sincere and sad before I even knew what I did, I entered the living room. I stood behind the couch looking at my father. His eyes were tired, his movement was unstable and slow, and I could smell the concrete on his clothes. My father worked in a concrete plant on the east side of Fresno. From what I heard, it’s a pretty physical job. I could hear his breathing, heavy and slowed: I couldn’t tell if he was going to beat me or hug me. I just stood there wondering what his next move was going to be. He asked me why I was making so much noise in my room because I should have known he liked the house quiet. I explained to him I was playing my game and I got carried away with it. I told him I was sorry and started to walk away after a long moment of silence. He stopped me and told me to sit on the couch. I could feel a lecture coming on, so I rolled my eyes and looked at my mom who was sitting on the other couch. She looked sad, as if something was wrong. I looked back at my father and as soon as I did, I felt the toughness of his hand strike me across my face. His was voice as loud as I’d ever heard it.

My ears were ringing and face throbbing, trying to understand what the hell just happened. I looked up and I saw my father and mother screaming and pushing each other. I tried to get up, and again, my father hit me. This time, with his fist, hitting the same spot he did the first time. I burst out in tears, breathing heavy and fast. I couldn’t catch my breath. I sat up against the couch and looked at my father yell at and push my mother. I jumped up and charged my father, swinging left and right. I missed every punch I threw. I could hear him laughing as he pushed me away. My waist hit the arm of the couch and I fell to the floor. I knew I wasn’t big enough to stop him from hurting me and my mom alone, but I knew I had to try. So I got up and rushed him, leaping into the air. I swung and hit him in the face, and he stumbled and fell back, knocking over the television.

I moved over to my mother who had a burgundy bruise-like mark on her face, tears in her eyes, and a busted lip. I asked her “What do you want me to do?” She couldn’t tell me. I got up and grabbed the

phone from the kitchen counter. Keeping in mind my father could get up at any minute, I dialed 911. Not knowing what to say, I screamed “Help!” and sat next to my mom. Crying and hoping the police would hurry up, I heard a heavy knock at the door.

Two police officers walked in and noticed the mess in the living room; the television on the floor, my father passed out, and my mother on the couch, crying. I stood by the door as the police carried my father out of our house. As he woke up, I could see the look on his face as if he was proud of me yet ashamed of himself. That was the last time I saw or spoke to my father. After the police had talked to my mom, they wanted to speak to me. I was placed in my room until a detective came and explained that what my father was going through was not my fault and that he was under the influence of alcohol and marijuana. As he was telling me this, I daydreamed of me alongside the house playing, dirt underneath my fingernails, birds chirping and squirrels making that noise they always make. Then I snapped back to reality, face busted, talking to police officers and my mother crying. The only words I spoke to the detective were “Is my mom ok?”

Looking back, I couldn’t tell you why I did what I did. I can only say I was dumb for standing up for myself, but I reacted in a way I was proud of, a way in which I felt like I did the right thing. But at the same time, I feel like I lost my father. Because after that day I’ve never seen him again, and it’s been so long since I even spoken to him. I still have no father figure in my life, only my mom who I am very proud of for raising me, proud that she took on roles in my life that should have taken care of by my father. She is a true single parent. Since that day I’ve grown so much. I still remain independent but I have a brave heart and better soul than I would have had with my father being there. I guess it was a blessing to go through that day. The day my father’s alcohol and drug abuse hurt my pride and changed my life.

Raised by Oscar the Grouch

Nick Cheney
Second Place

Fridays were always the worst days for me when I was just a little boy. Out of all the memories I have stored up in this melon I like to call my head, Fridays were the least of my favorites. On Friday mornings, my father would wake me up especially early to take me to my grandparents'. He would sit up and down on the waterbed shaking it ferociously so when I awoke I thought that I had woken up to an earthquake. He would then carry me to the car still in my pajamas with sleep still caked in my eyes. The hand off was done so slick; just like every other day he took me to my grandparents'. He carried me inside and planted me down on my grandpa's favorite fake leather recliner. He would then tell me that he was going to get a cup of coffee, and then he would sneak out the back of the house. This was the routine everyday, but on Fridays he never came back to pick me up after work. I was stuck at my grandparents' house all day.

The mornings were usually the hardest. After an hour or so of crying and screaming as if I had just lost another parent, my grandma would calm me down and make something to eat, what I had come to know as an authentic Mexican breakfast of scrambled eggs and hot dog weenies. After eating, she would take me back to my grandpa's recliner and turn on the television. My morning shows were coming on, three hours of uninterrupted pleasure for me as well as my grandma. The first of the three shows were *Hey You Guys*, and then followed by my favorite show *Sesame Street*, and bringing up the rear was the *Reading Rainbow*. The *Reading Rainbow* and *Hey You Guys*, I just watched to waste time, but when *Sesame Street* was on, I got really involved, from the opening theme song to the closing credits. I would sing so loud sometimes that my grandma would scream in Spanish from the kitchen to shut up, "Cierra la boca!"

Sesame Street offered a little bit of everything a kid needed to help propel them forward in life. On Fridays my favorite characters, which were the Cookie Monster and Count Dracula, had their own little segment of spelling and counting. Every time the Count would speak, he would say, "Repeat after me, one cookie, two cookie, three cookie." Before he got to the fourth cookie, the Cookie Monster had eaten the

first three, and the count would have to start all over again. Then the Cookie Monster would sing songs with different letters of the alphabet and when he got to the letter “C” he would sing, “C is for cookie and that’s good enough for me. Every other letter represented a different flavor or shape of a cookie; “A, is for apple flavored cookies and B, is for banana flavored cookies, and D is for diamond shaped cookies.” By the end of first segment, I knew how to count to five, I knew my alphabets from A through F, and I knew some colors and shapes. When Bert and Ernie came on, I knew the importance of hygiene, and how to keep clean. Big Bird and Mr. Snuffleupagus were best friends, and it seemed that there was always something wrong with Mr. Snuffleupagus. Big Bird was always trying to find the cause of his best friend’s problems, and to make him feel better about himself. Oscar the Grouch was a dirty, green, moody puppet that lived in a trashcan right outside of Big Bird’s house. Because he was always moody and grouchy, he reminded me of my grandpa and how he would act from time to time when he was home. I would catch myself day dreaming sometimes about living on *Sesame Street* when I got older. Having a giant yellow bird and a woolly mammoth for neighbors would be kind of cool.

Trying to pry myself off the recliner would be difficult; after a couple of hours of sitting, I became one with the recliner. From another view point, one would say that I looked like a mouse stuck on a sticky trap, struggling to break free from its inevitable death. From the living room, I smelled the aromas of authentic Mexican cuisine again billowing out from the kitchen. My grandma was making her specialty; rice, beans, and spam for lunch. She called out from the kitchen and asked if I was hungry, “Mijo, tiene hambre?” She called out a couple of more times before she peeked down the hallway, and saw that I was stuck. It took most of her strength to pull me away from the recliner’s death grip. The sound that my skin made as I was being pulled away from the recliner was of paper being torn into pieces. The sensation stung my skin, and I began to cry a little. Every day I sat on that recliner and every day my grandma pulled me away. After numerous times of being pulled from the recliner, I would think that I would learn a lesson, but I never did.

My grandpa came home every day for lunch, but on Fridays he usually stayed home and didn’t go back to work. After lunch he would go to the backyard and take care of the garden he made so many years

back. If I was lucky I would get to go back into the living room, and watch more television; that day, I was not. He grabbed me by the hand and said, “Vamanos, we’re going to do some jard work,” his English needed some improvement, but I was too scared to correct him. I threw a tantrum that was quickly extinguished just by one look from my grandpa. I knew there was no point arguing. If I did, my grandpa would just put a belt to my backside, and I would still have to go outside anyway. While outside my grandfather would pick me up and educate me in the different types of citrus trees he had; oranges, lemons, grapefruits, and tangerines.

“I hate tangerines,” I proclaimed loudly.

“Y yo tambien,” my grandpa replied, “Dey have mucho semillas.”

He would then put me down and let me run around while he chased me with the watering bucket, like one of the last scenes from the Godfather movie. We spent a couple of hours outside before we went back in the house where my grandma had some ice tea ready for us. “Go back to da libing room and wash la tele,” my grandpa would say. Before thinking twice, I was already running down the hallway.

Running in the house wasn’t always a wise decision. Not because it bothered my grandparents, but because of the dull green shag carpeting that lay upon the entire house. Sometimes if I wasn’t careful, the carpet would reach up and bring me down right on my face. This was one of those times. Watching the whole event from the kitchen, my grandpa started laughing loudly; it was the kind of laugh where one would like to join in even if one didn’t know what one was laughing at. His laugh was so loud and boisterous, that I started laughing as well. “Levanto my hijo,” my grandpa said, “Why you lying in da hall? La tele is in da libing room.” I got up without crying and walked the rest of the distance to the living room. Once again I climbed up on the recliner, and shut my eyes just for a little bit.

The overwhelming odor of my grandpa’s generic form of Ben Gay woke me from my slumber. He had removed me from the recliner and had placed me on the sofa. The day had turned into night without my notice, and the digital clock that sat on top of the old International Radio box read 7:30. This was why Friday’s were difficult for me. Usually my dad had picked me up about this time. On Fridays he coached football for the local high school, and I had to stay the night at my grandparents. No matter how well the day had gone with my grandparents, if my father was not there to pick me up, I was going to throw

one hell of a fit. My grandparents expected it many times before, and no matter how they tried to cushion the situation, they knew that they were in for at least one hour of screaming and crying. It was my grandpa that comforted me the most out of these situations; maybe just the sound of his voice was all that was needed. “Mirar a mi hijo. Todo va a estar bien,” my grandpa would say in Spanish that everything is going to be okay. “Cuando te levantas por la mañana, estará con su papa,” he says, when I wake up in the morning, I will be with my father. Just to hear my grandpa say those words was all I needed to stop crying. For the remainder of the night, I would sit next to Oscar the Grouch and we watched replays of old boxing matches until I fell asleep on his lap, and just as he told me the night before, I would wake up in my room at my house. As if the whole day before was just a dream.

Fiction

*“Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me
the glint of light on broken glass.”*

—Anton Chekhov

Who You Tryin' To Be? Fresno Loca?

Mia Barraza Martinez

First Place

She likes to shower with the door open. She steps out of the bathroom, into her room and walks a slow circle, the graying vertical blinds straining to keep out the golden light of early evening and late spring. She didn't wash her hair and she feels like it hangs better this way, a little tangled from last night. She walks back to the bathroom mirror and gets bored after applying a little concealer, thinking about girls with thick layers of eye shadow like cake fondant, and decides to pack a quick bowl. As she takes the first hit, she clicks the play button on her cd player with her toe. She sings one of the last songs on this album out loud; the words "you wanted a hit, [pause] well, this is how we do hits" come out with smoke as she walks back to the mirror.

"Why do I even fucken do this?" she asks herself, pulling a mascara wand through her lashes. She thinks about a possible title to a poem: Mascara Is Best Applied Sober. She decides it's a bad title, grabs a safety pin lying on the corner of the sink, and starts to separate her lashes. Almost as an afterthought, she grabs some black eyeliner and smudges it along her lash line with her pinky. She thinks it makes her look a little tired. She takes another hit, this time in front of the mirror, watching herself pull in her cheeks, and blows smoke straight into her reflection, thinking what she's been thinking lately.

"Who you tryin to be?" he says, looking me up and down, from my crisp white tank top and visible black bra straps, down to my ankles chocked in black skinny jeans, as I slide in a pair of my favorite big silver hoop earrings. "Sad Girl? Lil Puppet? Fresno Loca?"

"Whatever. Lil Puppet is a boy name, I think. And who are you trying to be, the Mexican Carlton Banks?" I respond, pulling on his slim baby blue argyle sweater until I can almost feel the thick knit of his sweater through the thin fabric of my wifebeater and his lips move toward mine.

Her cell phone rings and she scoops up her keys and black sandals, trying to ignore the hoops sitting quietly on her vanity, stuffs a few dollars in her pocket, unplugs the cd player and heads out the door as she answers her phone, "I'm on my way out."

Isaac's car is parked out in the street, engine rumbling softly, and she drops down into the passenger seat. "Hey, yo."

“Sup, chick?”

He pulls off from the curb while she stretches the seatbelt across her chest, not liking how it feels between her breasts.

“Who’s all gonna be there?” she asks, tossing her shoes down and leaning forward to slide her feet in them and buckle the ankle strap on her sandals.

“The usual suspects, some hipsters, of course, couple homeless dudes and their dogs. . .idk, man, you know how it is, whoever.”

“Whoever,” she repeats, tossing the word around the cavity of her skull. “Cool.”

After a few blocks they hit a red light and Isaac turns his limited edition Ray Bans on her.

“Where you been at?”

“Hibernation,” she says to her own reflection in his shades. She thinks she looks too small, smaller than she usually feels, sitting cradled in the car seat.

“You shoulda brought shades, your eyes are mad bloodshot. Stoner.” Green light and he turns his twin mirrors back on the road in front of him.

“I got eye drops,” she grumbles, reaching into her pocket.

“I gotta meet the guys at The Cafe. I’ll drop you off at The Studio.”

“Cool,” she says.

“What happened with whoever it is that you disappeared off the face of the earth for this winter? And I’m pretty sure I know who it is.”

“I.D.K.” she blurts out, not in the mood to hear his name. She doesn’t try to contest his dramatic statement. “We used to see each other everyday.”

“For real?”

“Every day.” She nodded her head and nodded her head. “Almost every day. Practically.”

“For how long?”

“Four months.”

His voice goes up an octave. “Four months?”

She nods. Shrugs.

“There were some rumors going around. . .” his voice stops in the air in front of his face.

“But no one knew. Not really. Neither one of us ever said anything. If anything, we straight up denied it.”

He’s quiet as he switches lanes. He turns left onto a street with side-

walks cracked by thick elm tree roots. Pulling up next to the curb, he says, "You know he'll be here."

"Not for sure." Her shoulders twitch and she touches the door handle, clicks off her seat belt, and taps each foot on the clear plastic floor mat once.

"So, what is this, your triumphant return?"

"Possibly." She runs her finger across the smooth, rounded edge of her cell phone.

"Dude, just come with us to The Cafe. He won't be there tonight."

"OMG. It ain't like...you know...a big deal," she says, prodding his side and laughing.

"Alright," he nods his chin once, reaching over and grabbing a fistful of her hair and tugging lightly. "You gonna Bob Marley my car before I say peace out?"

"You know it," she says, finally smiling big and honest.

After they've passed his pipe back and forth a few times, she jumps out of his car and waves goodbye as he pulls back from the curb. Walking past a few front yards with sun-faded toys, she imagines picking up the was-bright orange Dora the Explorer kid's jeep and watching eyeless bugs drip from its tires, wriggling in confusion in the dying light. As she turns the corner, she looks down at her hands. They have turned a faint electric blue from the light of the sign above the liquor store across the street. The long shadows are gone now and night has fallen across Fresno Street.

She can feel the pulse behind her eyes as she walks into a familiar front yard that sits in front of a tall, crooked house with windows of all different sizes, some dark, some lit up in yellow, red, green, and blue light. She walks straight into a crew of what looks like eighteen year olds out on the front steps. They, all skinny boys in tight jeans and paper-thin V-necks, move out from under her blank stare, push up against each other to let her through and she never hesitates a step.

She reaches forward to pull open the front door. As her hand grips the door knob, it feels warm and as she pushes the door in, it feels heavier than usual.

The hair on her arm stands up like she's looking over a too tall building, right over the edge, and gravity is pulling her down. At first she's facing a red wall and the door frame is no longer a door frame but a rectangular hole in the floor and her eyeballs lean forward in her sockets and the skin of her cheeks is pulling away from the bones in

her face and her right foot moves forward on its own and, like a roller coaster drop, she's sucked into this breathing red wall that breaks into sharp, jagged pieces of noise noise noise, red light, moving bodies, the skin of drums roaring their throats raw. Her eyes jump to the hands reaching towards her. She looks up beyond the hands, up to the extended arms, across the open laughing mouths, some look familiar and she lets herself be pulled in, her hips already joining other hips in drum slap smooth movements. Beyond the moving bodies are drums in an outer circle and it is only boys with drums between their legs, big and small drums, somewhere a flute, a shakin' tambourine, a stick being struck and scraped across the open, gleaming white jaw bone of a long-gone donkey. She sees only girl hip movements and the eyes of the outside circle sucking it all in. The noise is slowing down and the girls fall against each other, against her, in giggles that sound as loud as the breathing walls. Her eyes are on the open mouth smiles and she opens her mouth and smiles back, mimics their noises. The banging starts again, rolling closer like thunder and she keeps smiling smiling and meets eyes that are red at the corners and shies away from hands reaching for her waist. Pushing past bodies, more bodies and a familiar face floats up to hers.

"Some air," she manages to blurt out like they are the only two words she knows.

The familiar face has a hand that grabs at her shoulder and a shot of panic hits her in the chest and exists through her back. She turns her shoulder out the hand's grip and hurries around two girls with identically complicated-looking haircuts and matching bad postures that evil-eye her pale, sweaty face.

She bounces up stairs that are set against the back of the living room and walks through a small room painted green with a giant glassless window through which a single lemon tree branch reaches inside. She takes a deep calming breath as a gust of wind pushes her through to the next room that she has to edge into, her back and palms flat against the wall, feeling underneath her fingertips the old band posters, newspaper clippings with pictures of the ninth ward after the hurricane; the first plane lodged in the first tower; a child with a mouth twisted into a black hole of pain, running from her own burning clothes; the big brush strokes of cheap black paint slapped across it all. She can feel chunks of paint missing as she watches black-clothed limbs flail about, moshers pushing up against each other,

pushing back, jumping up, lurching toward a three-piece band in the corner. She can't see the band from the wall and the music sounds like waves crashing against obsidian stones and cymbals smash and a pitiful yell escapes from the seething pit.

She feels someone grab her left wrist firmly, gently pulling her forward into a group of tall boys, all with long limp hair under Fidel Castro black caps.

"Where's your drink, lady?" He has greedy-for-trouble black elf eyes and the easiest grin she's ever seen, seeming to run all the way down his long, lanky frame.

She shakes her head, holding up her empty hands and leaning closer to him. He holds the mouth of a beer bottle right up to her lips and she grabs the bottle neck, swings the bottom up to his devilish eyes. Hands with long, black nails filed to sharp points pull the bottle back and some suds dribble down her chin. As she wipes them off, she smiles sickly-sweet at the girl she hadn't noticed standing next to him. The girl doesn't smile back.

"They call me 'The Intoxicator,'" his voice is so clear above the noise that she feels like his lips are right up next to her ear. The girl hands the bottle back. After Neli takes another long drink, she looks down at the glass bottle and notices it has no label. She tries and fails to remember what its insides tasted like. She looks at him with the question in her eyes.

"You have a good night," he says in a voice that sounds like he's saying "run along now, sweetie", grinning wickedly with his entire body. She likes his voice and the sarcastic smile in his eyes and she hesitates to step away but the eyes of the girl, winged in inch-thick black eye-liner, push her into the next room.

In this other room thick candles drip in carved wooden candlesticks and bodies lay on lush Persian rugs. The bodies slurp up heaps of steaming pad thai noodles on porcelain dinner plates and she hears the sound of running river water but she can't find the source. A hand reaches out and she falls into a lap. She turns to see Luis's Buddha smile and she crawls onto the empty overstuffed pillow next to him, sinking into the glass of blood-red wine that comes floating up to her. A smattering of applause has just ended and Luis leans towards her.

"You know you're up next, right? That's what you get for falling off the face of the earth," he whispers. She rolls her eyes at him, stands up and, with a strong voice recites to the golden walls:

He Freestyles

I'm glued to the floor
Like a mouth to a neck
Trying to empty my mind
Of his mic check mic check.

There is some clapping and grunts of approval around mouthfuls of pad thai,

She stays to hear a few more poets before feeling the rugs float a few inches off the floor. It makes her dizzy and she climbs off and walks through another door.

"The kitchen?" She's so surprised to step into the yellow room that she says it out loud. The white cabinets, the bland beige linoleum, the pink-flowered hand towels hanging from the oven door handle, all calm.

"Yes, the kitchen!" a voice answers.

To her right stands Maggie, a big yellow mixing bowl cradled in her left arm, her right arm stirring a thick pink paste furiously.

"Hi Maggie," she says, standing on her tiptoes to plant her lips on Maggie's cheek. She looks around Maggie and waves to everyone sitting at the big white table. Everyone sits on a different pastel colored chair with a different pastel colored bowl in front of them.

"Been gone so long you don't remember that this room is called a kitchen?" she asks, shaking out her long blonde hair.

"Baking party?"

"Baking party," everyone choruses back. Something wooshes past her face and lands SPLAT on the window on the far wall. She turns to see a thick chocolate paste sliding down the glass.

"Hey, you almost hit me with that!" she accuses Josh with her finger and everyone laughs and keeps mixing.

"Next time," Josh assures her, pointing back at her with a big, white, chocolate-dripping spoon.

She walks towards the paste and sticks a finger in it.

"Mmm," she says to herself as she licks off the paste. The thick chocolate is a little grainy. A timer dings behind her and she turns around and watches Maggie open the oven and, with two of the pink-flowered towels she pulls out a tray of chocolate cupcakes.

"Mmm," she says out loud.

"They're too hot," Maggie says. "Have one of these."

She grabs a pink-frosted cupcake from the tray that was already lay-

ing on the counter, next to an ounce of herb ready to be cooked into cannabutter. Wrapped around it is a pink ribbon with tiny words at the end. She holds it up close to her face and sees that someone has used a typewriter to stamp on the words “eat me” in black ink.

“You got it,” she whispers to the cupcake and takes the biggest bite she can.

“What?” Maggie asks.

“Nufin,” she tries to say, spitting out a few crumbs. “Sowly,” she tries to say, spitting out a few more crumbs.

“Never mind,” Maggie says, looking grossed-out.

She chews the half of the cupcake and it tastes like chocolate and raspberry sherbet and something green.

“Theese-r-gooood,” she says without spitting anything out.

“We’re pros just in case you’ve forgotten,” Josh says from the table.

She stuffs the rest in her mouth and turns to grab another cupcake but Maggie catches her.

“No way, Jose. You shouldn’t have eaten that one so fast. They’re really strong.”

“Alright,” she says, wanting to pout.

Everyone at the table keeps mixing and they start talking about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. She waits a split second as she makes sure everyone’s hands are busy in their different colored bowls and, like lightning, her arm reaches out in a flash and grabs a cupcake and walks out the door.

“Thanks so much,” she calls over her shoulder.

She turns down a narrow white hallway lined with portraits. Evan told her once that all of those people in black and white were found at yard sales and second-hand stores. Like adopted family, he said. She wondered what it must be like to sit in a stranger’s hallway in your best clothes, neatly set hair, pearls, bow ties, stiff smile, sharp chin, warm eyes, baby bonnet, being stared at by other strangers. The hall ends too quickly. She pushes open the door and finds herself back in the front room of the house. There is no air in this room and it smells like bodies sweating out alcohol and too much perfume and pheromones and hormones and suspect weed and so much Want that it drenches her skin in a fine mist. It’s too strong for her stomach to handle and she knows she’s gotta get out. Eyes and toxic blue cell phone lights swim out of the darkness. She’s hit with cold, dead looks from hipster chicks and their boyfriends in Urban-Outfitter-decided outfits as

they upswing 32oz. bottles of Miller High Life. Her eyes go black with every blink and hands that were up are now down, face expressions change too quickly and she feels like she's ten seconds behind. At this time of the night there is no more feigning politeness as bodies move around each other fluidly, as hands gently move her around, one on her shoulder, at her waist, high up on the middle of her back. There is the door, the door, finally. Down steps. She walks forward without much thought to where her feet are moving, she feels herself grow taller, her head has more space outside to fill up the sky. There are pointy black lace-up boots, wingtips, Hush Puppies, standing in green grass that she pushes aside and releases. Tastes like a pizza and orange juice smoothie. She feels their eyes, looks up, shrugs her shoulder, kicking dirt over her vomit. They join her and laugh. Someone passes a blunt and she inhales gratefully. The house behind her feels like a breathing person, huffing and puffing and creaking jealousy. So much so that it feels like the windows are watching them pass the Swisher back and forth like angry eyes.

"You boys keep it real," she tells them.

They laugh, someone squeezes her arm in reassurance and the door-knob is so small and the door is so much taller than she is. It opens and in she goes.

Somehow, she finds the line for the bathroom and somehow, she's in front of the sink, cupping water in her palms, swishing it around in her mouth, spit, repeat, spit, repeat. Opens cabinet below sink, "where where where...?" she asks the plumbing and finds the bottle, pour some in the top and swirls it around her mouth, feels good, likes the almost-clean burn of peppermint mouthwash, spits and smiles at herself, big. Gets up close to the mirror, her eyes squinting, face flushed, hair in her face, eyeliner smudged even more, like slept-in makeup. Pops in more eye drops that she digs out of her pocket, moves eyes beneath lids, mops up fake tears, bares her teeth at her reflection.

She's in another room, walking against the wall. Everyone is dancing, grinding against each other, tightly packed into the small room. She recognizes the thumping Dr. Dre beat and slides down against the wall and crouches next to a skinny, sucked-in looking man wearing a dirty sports coat and missing chunks of grey hair.

"You came to look for him," he says and nods his head.

"Did not."

"Bullshit. I seen how you used to run around after him." Shadow

looks at her with his clear, blue eyes. “Left you high and dry, did he? That why you got that crazy look in your eye?”

“He was nice about it,” she admits.

“So, have you see him yet?”

“No.”

“You scared to?” he asks softly and she’s surprised she can hear him over the music. Her head is still swimming. She looks past the bump-and-grinding dancers and into her memory. She smells Joaquín’s cologne and feels the buttons of his jacket like he’s standing in front of her. She feels the corner of her lip twitch.

“Well, I’m all kinds of intoxicated, Shadow, but I’m not scared anymore.”

“Good girl. Now get outta this noise, your eyes look like they’re about to pop out of your head. The next room is quiet; if you don’t mind some dull conversation.”

She smiles and taps the leg of a guy standing nearby. When he turns around, she holds out her hands up to him. He reaches down and pulls her up to her feet. She thanks him, pulls out the dollars she had stuffed in her pocket and hands them to Shadow. He nods his thanks and she walks up two stairs into a room she has never seen before and climbs up, floating into an engulfing blue. The walls, ceiling and floor, are painted a brilliant royal blue. In the corner there is a group of people laying on their backs and lounging on orange velvet chairs craning their toward a small record player with noises splashing out like sounds of a forest in outer space and the voice of a short girl singing into a long corridor with no doors. Above Neli there is only sky, the floor sloping slowly downward into the drain in the middle of the room. She walks over to the corner and sits next to a vase of wildflowers on the floor. She’s far enough of away from the group that she doesn’t have to talk to anyone but she can still hear their conversation. They are saying that the song really gets at the desperate, ancient struggle of man versus nature. She gets bored but doesn’t mind it because the flowers she’s sitting next to are so pretty. She picks the vase up and puts it in her lap.

She sees his plaid button-down shirt in the doorway first, the one with the thin red stripes and big grey squares and darker grey squares. He looks at her and their eyes bounce off of each other like ripples of water. And she remembers the last time she saw him.

“I do understand.” And I did.

"I didn't really know how I felt until I got so close to her. I didn't know. Even after I told you I didn't want a girlfriend. I wasn't lying to you, Neli."

"You really don't need to explain it," I respond in a monotone.

We spend two hours sitting on my bed, twelve inches away from each other. I understand that the Heart can't always be understood. I understand that I wasn't good enough to be his girlfriend and she is. He's sorry and I understand that too.

I walk him downstairs after we've said all that we could think to say. I hug him goodbye and he holds on too long. I look up at the tree behind him, a riot of green leaves, and white blossoms ready to fall. He finally lets go and a strand of my hair reaches out to touch him. I tuck it behind my ear. My eyes are screaming in big gospel voices. Howling heroin blues in tear-thick ranchera melodies. He says he'll call me later. He didn't and didn't and didn't.

He walks towards her as the last few weeks settle down on her shoulders. She feels weak and finally lets her mind just lay back and float on water.

"Joaquín," she mouths his name and smiles in spite of herself. He sits down next to her.

"Hey."

"Hey," he responds quietly. "I've never been up here before."

"Me either. I think only the enlightened ones hang out here."

He laughs out loud and gets some dirty looks from the group in the corner.

They talk.

"How can you be vegan? Carne asada!"

"It was part of Mayan resurrection philosophy. The ability to conquer death."

"I've been writing again. A story."

"They have the best food. They Tweet their location, like a futuristic taco truck. They move around town."

And somewhere in the middle of it he says, "Sofia and I called it quits a little ago." It doesn't stop the conversation. They talk about the woman who was just elected president of Brazil, about the new mural the Fresno Brown Berets are gonna put up. They talk about the Black Keys's new album. Neli and Joaquín lean into each other when they laugh. Their legs feel comfortable stretched out next to each other.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" Joaquín asks.

“Just class in the morning.”

“Wanna hang out after?”

Out of the corner of her eye she sees the short stubble on his chin and cheeks. The curve of his nose. The hair on his knuckles. The window on the east side of the room begins to fill with soft light, splashes gold against the blue walls and Joaquín and Neli’s legs. The group in the corner is lying against each other, breathing as deeply and quietly as the record player. She puts her face in the flowers in her lap, feeling the petals and leaves against her cheeks and says, so only he can hear, “Sure.”

A Truck Screams Red Around the Corner

Isaac Weil

Second Place

Do you mind if I tell you about the day I had an idea for a novel? But before I tell you that, I need to tell you a story about the Shroud of Turin.

In the 15th century, as it happens, a scrap of molten silver landed on the Shroud of Turin and ignited. A host of nuns dowsed it in water, rushing to put it out, but even though most of the Shroud was saved, the fire charred the edges, and because the shroud was folded, the flames burned symmetrical patterns around the image of Jesus.

A few years ago, the artist Jeffrey Valance flew to Italy to study the Shroud of Turin. The Catholic Church granted Mr. Valance six months to study it.

He couldn't stop looking at the fire-damaged areas. The patterns entranced him. He saw faces—clown faces. (Look online at the Shroud yourself. Those faces really do leer from the charcoaled, Rorschach edges.) After his six months were up, he flew back to L.A. and painted the Clowns of the Shroud of Turin and showed them. The Catholic Church was outraged. Since medieval times, the Church considered clowns to be demonic. Evil. How could Mr. Valance put clowns on the fabric that cradled the body of their lord and savior? So they put him on the Catholic watch list, a of kind enemies list.

Mr. Valance wrote them. He said: I did not put the clowns on the Shroud of Turin. Think about this logically. Who, in the whole of creation, would most like to burn an artifact of Jesus? The Devil. So the Devil must have sent his hellfire to destroy the Shroud in the 15th century. When the nuns thwarted him, the Devil scorched his image into the Shroud as a final effort to deface it. I did not put clowns on the Shroud of Turin, the Devil did. I only found them.

The Catholic Church was contrite. Of course, they said, that makes complete sense, and took Mr. Valance off their list.

I was walking one morning, sweating in the sun, when I had an idea: I should write a novel about the Shroud of Turin's caretaker in the 15th century, an Italian monk. In my novel, the clowns will talk to him, tempt him, drive him crazy and make him doubt. Whether

the Devil really speaks through the clowns, or if the whole thing is in the monk's imagination I'll leave unclear. The philosophy of Kierkegaard will drive the monk's actions, motivate him. The decision to join a monastery, after all, is an intensely religious choice, a commitment to a life devoted to God and his teachings. The clowns will tempt the monk with the philosophy of Nietzsche, with his claim that religion is fascist, with his attack on God. Nietzsche was an isolated person, so the clowns will isolate the monk—and make him strange. The clowns should be alluring and intelligent.

I thought these things—and I tell you about this day because no one else will listen. Walking my neighborhood street, I thought these things, when a screaming came around the corner.

A truck zeroed in on me, its dented body flitting up and down on thick coils of suspension—a butterfly trapped in a jar fluttering for oxygen or a breeze. The body found its center, adjusted to the abrupt switch of momentum and squatted back on its hind wheels. It kicked forward—the butterfly squeezing against the cold wall of the jar and darting for the glass across, either to pierce through or pulp its head into crunchy exoskeleton and juices.

I kept walking forward. I did not step aside.

The truck blipped its horn. As it zoomed closer the blips came rabid, filled out, and merged into one solid blare which dopplered high in pitch.

My head sagged.

On these morning walks, I usually begin in vigor, head held up, back straight, arms swinging one two, full of purpose, like a chubby kid looking to lose his belly fat. This morning I ambled. My chin bobbed to my chest and I noticed the intricate shadows cast in the leaves, twigs and branches that blocked the sun overhead. The shadows lifted off the asphalt. Thick and slender, they stuck to my eyes, and the light shafted through a few bright openings framed by black negatives of leaves and branches.

I heard a T.V. through an open window, a woodpecker pecking at a telephone pole, kids splashing in a pool, steady steps. Swallowed into the background heat, they grayed away: the T.V. and kids, the static of drumsticks on a high hat, the woodpecking a hollow tom and my feet the resonate pluck of a twisted cord of a base.

I was itching.

I was hungry.

I was lonely.

No matter, I told myself. Keep my boxers riding up my thighs, keep the chafing, keep the sweat, keep the itching. Body, you can have them.

Draped on my eyes, the twig and branch shadows tilted. They penetrated my skull. Humming in my brain, like squid-ink in ocean, the shadows bloomed into twisting shrubs. Electric impulses no longer shot through my muscles and fibers, but scampered along the leafy twists and tangles, the hairpin turns of the mental shadows. They zipped to dark clusters; the shocks burst ideas: a silversmith pounding a candelabrum with a hammer, the fire in the furnace behind rushing the high vaulted cellar, a pill of silver sailing away from the collision of hammer and anvil into the dark, nestling in a fold of a shroud. It smoldered and ignited.

Another illuminated clowns on a cloth: sentinels mocking the layered hands and modest frame of Jesus Christ. Another illuminated thoughts of research: the history of the Catholic Church, Italian churches during the 15th century, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Another bloomed breakfast: oatmeal and dates.

The truck shone heat. It looked massive. Done scampering in the shadows, the electric impulses coalesced into a thick paste, sparks dampened. They were trapped, so how could I step aside? But the truck swerved leftwise, tilting and sinking low on its suspension. It skidded. Thrash Metal, and the door opened.

Pale arms slung out, flexed and stretched; their hands popped into fists. A leg hooked out of the door, and onto the side of the seat the other leg swung. The Thrash Metal blew away. Hands fingered jeans. The limbs tensed (a final jolt to clear away a dream) and bounced out the red door, stringing a body behind them.

“You goddamn [something or other]!” he said.

The words drifted like soot sloughed on the air.

“Do you want to get some breakfast?” I said.

He walked and flung his arms around his head in sweeps. His chin waggled, and his feet slipped over the asphalt.

“What in hell [blah blah blah blah]!” he said.

“I’ve got a great idea for a novel. I really want to talk to you about it. But first, let’s get a bear claw or something.”

He said, “Fuck you [gobbledygook or something of the kind]!”

We could be sitting in a cafe sharing an apricot tart, I thought.

I told him, “Kierkegaard and Nietzsche go great with coffee and breakfast.”

His nose was close, his skin grey and suggestive. He palmed my ears and blasted my head with a pop. Under water jackhammers pounded. My eyes watered as his eyes bulged with the barbed wire fence enclosing Dachau, thin plowed dirt, gravel ringing brick and wood warehouses, stinking with bodies, thin as matches on the floor, as grey and white as the soot on the walls and the fire burning their heads, ribs, eye-sockets, and hips. It crackled down my leg and tensed. My underwear chevroned apart my thighs. Rocks, stuck firm, pressed my belly. The wind rustled leaves. A kid screamed and splashed in a pool. A woodpecker pecked. A butterfly fluttered. A clown laughed. With a sleeve I wiped the red crisscrosses from my eyes, curled a knee, rolled sideways away from the pain in my rib, shook my head, bent slow at my hip, and stood to see the truck screaming red around the corner.

Stowaways

Matthew Spach

Third Place

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. -Chinese Proverb

Perrie does his artwork with the slugs on the back porch. “One more year,” he told himself as the moon took the stage with a marvelous introduction of orange and purple in the western sky. “And I’ll have my masterpiece.”

The night air was thick and warm. Perrie removed his gray knit cap and rested it on the porch rail, next to the iron ashtray. Then he wiped the sawdust from his fleshy beak, and leaned over to reach into his pocket for a piece of chewing gum. It was the fourth day in the month of July. Perrie’s last hours had been spent mastering the wrinkles on the delighted face of an Uncle Sam portrait he’d been working on for his father; one of those immigrant patriotic types.

The birds were singing. They’d all settled comfortably in their northern homes for the summer, and they finally felt at rest here. So many different sounds. He wondered what level of communication those sounds are really attempting, and how much is successful. There must be an infinite amount of noises they’re able to make, and each chime sounded far more detached from the rest than the blabbering of a foreigner. The tweet, the cluck, the hiss, the caw, and the scream. How annoying those metronomic squawks must be to the childish tunes of a winged choir. A blue jay had once stowed all the way to San Francisco inside the trunk of Perrie’s Chevrolet. There’s no knowing how it got in there, but he encountered quite a scare when he keyed it open upon his arrival.

The sliding glass door screamed open, and Launa peeked her bubbly eyes out into the air.

“What are you doing?”

“The same,” he said, meaning art in general, but she took it to mean the ten foot willow tree he’d been designing for almost a year now. It still lay in a cluttered mess of scraps and pieces, but he had a plan for it all.

“You’re still working on this? I thought we gave up on that a long time ago.”

“Do you need something?” he answered. After a moment he turned

his neck to meet her gaze, and the look he received back was one of all seriousness.

“I need your help. Candy’s in the attic.”

“Alright,” but he didn’t make an effort to get up at first.

“I mean now.” She backed inside as he stood up. A snail crushed under his sneaker as he made his way to the door. One of them had once stowed its way inside aboard a broken ashtray and was found the next morning stuck to a fork in the sink. He bent down to give Launa a soft kiss as he passed.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take care of it.” Perrie had three serious relationships under his belt on the day he met Launa. The first was a girl who lived down Milford Street where his house had been for a few years. She was a blonde with a small chiseled smile, and a predatory stare more captivating than a Spanish Dancer. She rode her bicycle gracefully in winding circles around their neighborhood at all hours, and once they kissed as they swam together but never talked about it. Then Perrie moved and joined Kindergarten. The second was a girl who is still a mystery to him. She loved his music and art, even though he didn’t think it moved her at all. She just liked everything about him. They’d had fantasies about each other for years before actually becoming friends. She was his best friend’s little sister, and she was frighteningly beautiful. He held his breath to get a head rush of courage before dialing her phone number. The couple hardly said a word when they were together but he just saw it in her eyes that she was happy. They often told each other they were in love even though both knew it wasn’t true. In the end he left her there in a crying fit for a step up in the social ladder. Someone older, more fashionable, more exciting, more sexual, and she was a goddess. She wasn’t strikingly beautiful in a physical way but Perrie swore to himself she must have been glowing the minute he first set eyes on her. Her energy was so sweet and wild. She was the most emotionally attractive person to look at, and hear, and touch, and love. She may have been an angel or the mother of a new messiah. He was eighteen and she was his first. They had a half love relations, like high school sweethearts. But just as they all do, she got a terrible case of disenchantment and broke it off early on. So you could say Perrie had loved three times, but never been in love before.

“When was the last time you shaved, Pear?” Launa asked as he entered the hallway. Perrie had begun shaving at the age of thirteen, because that’s when his brothers had started. The monthly scraping of

skin made his feet feel bigger and his voice twice as deep. Now some years later, he normally shaved every morning.

“A while, hon, not too long. Did I scratch you?” he called back.

“More often please, Love.”

“I like the face hair. It suits me, don’t you think?”

“Don’t start.”

Perrie entered the bedroom, and the conversation could be dragged on no longer. From there he continued to the closet, a magnificent room, where he’d always wanted to put his ping pong table, but was never able to convince Launa of the idea. Hanging clothes covered the right and left walls, and wooden storage boxes lined the floor beneath them, holding a plethora of belongings like photo albums and art supplies, a sewing machine and linens and waste, Candy’s first pair of shoes, a five-foot doll named Pierce and a broken record player. The walls, like most of everything in the closet, were pale white. The ceiling looked as if it were a miniscule smudge out of a Monet that had been blown up to fill the room. Directly above Perrie’s head was a rectangular hole dispersing rays of darkness into the lit room.

“Candy?” he said quietly, and then repeated it in a more sing song call. “Candy.” But there was again no answer.

Perrie removed two trunks from atop a pile and took a seat on one of them in the middle of the room. He reached into his coat pocket to withdraw a small bag and placed it on the other trunk with a small puff of dust. It contained a Ziploc bag of filters, a pack of wimpy papers, a cigarette roller and about an eighth of a pound of Brazilian tobacco. He loaded the roller canal lightly with the brown leaves, and slipped a filter into one end. Snapping the ingredients together, he gently placed a paper into the crevice, gave the belt a spin, licked the adhesive strip, turned a few more revolutions, pounded the filter end gently against his open palm, and clicked the roller open to unearth a perfect cigarette.

“Candy, are you up there? We’re about to have dessert?” There was no reply. “Come on, Candy. You need to answer me now. What’re you doing up there?”

“I’m Pener Pam,” came a screechy voice through the hole, barely loud enough to hear.

“What, buddy?”

“I’m Pener Pam.”

“Well Peter, it’s time to come down now. Captain Hook is here.”

“No! I can’t come down, now,” Candy screamed. “I know he’s here.”

I saw him.”

“It’s all going to be alright, buddy,” he lowered to a calming motherly tone. But he could hear the boy crying now. “I promise.”

“You always promise.”

“I’m right here. Just lower the ladder, it’ll be okay.”

“No! I don’t have my sword.”

“I know where it is, you want it?”

“What?”

“Your Peter Pan sword. Come down. I’ll show you.”

This time Candy screamed as loud as his lungs could muster. “No!”

Why did the boy hate him so much? Perrie raised a lighter to his mouth and lit the cigarette. He didn’t inhale the first drag, but spewed it breathlessly through the opening overhead.

“What are you doing, Pop?”

“I think there’s a fire, Cameron, you’d better come down,” Perrie said as he continued to blow smoke into the attic.

“I don’t care. I’m staying here.”

The trick didn’t work, but he still finished the cigarette.

“Listen Buddy, this isn’t a joke. Do you want your mother to come in here? I don’t think so. So if I were you I’d come down. Don’t you smell the fire?”

The boy didn’t answer, so Perrie raised his voice this time. “Give me the ladder.” When, once again he received no response other than a coughing fit, Perrie resorted to stacking up six boxes in a stair-like arrangement to replace the ladder that had stowed it’s way into the child’s little game.

“Don’t you come up here!” was Candy’s desperate attempt to prolong his visit to the dark of the attic. He hadn’t done this for over a year, and Perrie had forgotten how dramatically exhausting the event could be. Perrie hoisted his waist up onto the ledge and he was above the ceiling now. He listened for a breath or twitch as he stared into nothing. It seemed that Candy had ceased to breathe and the room was just as void of life or energy as it was of light. So, he began searching. The attic had no floor. He had to crawl around supported by cross-hatching 2x4s, careful not to slip and make a hole through the deteriorated ceiling. He called out the boy’s name but continued to hear nothing but the slow churn of the microwave sucking life out of Launa’s tea water. He searched with his hands, for his eyes had no power here. But he was good with his hands, dancing across the keyboard, carving a perfect curve, mastering foreplay in the most ani-

malistic way, and finding the light switch at the latest hour of night. He discovered Candy sprawled out with his head bent crookedly against the far corner, one foot resting on a weak ceiling panel. After quick consideration, Perrie hoisted the body onto his back and turned back toward the hatch with some difficulty. The body hung there, motionless, with every bit of weight on Perrie's four shaking limbs.

"Candy?" and this time he knew something was wrong. There was no air leaving Candy's mouth and no heat coming from his paralyzed chest. When they were back on solid ground Perrie hoisted the child's lifeless body into a half-fetal position, hanging from his two bent arms, and carried him to his bedroom, careful not to be seen by the woman of the house.

And on the race-car blanket he gently laid his son down, and performed CPR as well as he knew. It felt so intimate and fatherly. He had doubted his impact on the boy's life up to that point. He had never been the father he had wanted to be. He had never seen his Cameron come of age, or create a master piece.

After minutes of desperate attempts to awaken him, Perrie sat down on the maple rocking chair at the foot of the bed. There he sat and prayed for the first time in a solid seven months. He didn't ask for forgiveness or blessings or miracles. He had never been one to speak casually with the lord. This is what he said:

"Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

He'd learned that one in rehab. It was the only prayer he remembered anymore.

Launa cracked the door open and peeked her head in.

"What are you doing?" she said.

"Just thinking."

"Is he okay?" Just as she finished the sentence, Perrie's peripherals detected a sight that could very well have changed his answer, but didn't. There, under the black metal bed frame, was an empty bottle of Nyquil that had been safely stowed away in the cupboard, unopened, when he had left for work that morning.

"I don't know," he answered. "We'll talk about it in the morning, alright? I'll be out in a minute."

"Okay." She left the scene and shut the door behind her. One tear trailed down Perrie's blushed cheek as he continued to comb the depths of his mind for the secret compassion to bring the boy back.

He decided he had to try one more time, so he returned to the bedside and knelt down. With the first forced breath, Candy's eyes flew open, and he awoke with a cough. It was a reaction you'd expect from someone who'd nearly drowned and was spewing water from their throat. But what came from his mouth was a thin cloud of black smoke followed by a gushing stream of thin red liquid. It was the most intense feeling of relief Perrie would ever feel.

"I'm so glad you're awake, Candy," he said, and fell down onto the bed next to the boy. "I'm sorry. I mean Peter Pan."

"No, I'm not Peter Pan. I'm just a guy," Candy said, and Perrie could tell the cough medicine was still in effect due to the more than usual slur in the child's speech, but he couldn't help but smile to himself at these words.

"Well, I'm glad you're awake anyway," he said. "Do you feel like you need to throw up again?"

"No."

"Do you feel like you *could* throw up again?"

"No."

"Good. I love you buddy."

"I love you too, Dad."

Candy had always called Perrie Daddy, and it was the first time he'd ever been addressed as Dad. It seemed so official to him, and so fake. He had to work hard to stop himself from crying again. He sang Candy an improvised bedtime story called *The Wizard Who Stole the Wrong Juice*, and kissed him on the forehead. As he left the room, Perrie stopped and looked back where Candy lay in darkness again. He thought the boy was asleep, but he said, "Goodnight, little guy."

"No," was Candy's quick reply. "I'm not just a guy. I'm Batman."

"Right. Batman."

Avoiding Launa for the time being, Perrie headed straight outside and smoked another cigarette. There he stared at the pile of rubble that would one day be his willow tree, his masterpiece. Finally, he knew how to finish it. He flicked the butt over the porch rail into the dirt. Then he walked straight to the bathroom, marveled at the shape of his aging face in the antique mirror, and then took a bottle of shaving cream from the cabinet.

Ed's Grab 'n' Go

James Babb

Honorable Mention

As I drove behind the shallow tunnel of light projected damply by the headlights of my Monte Carlo, I wondered quietly what motley crew I might soon encounter. After all, “Ed’s Grab ‘n’ Go” is the kind of place I only ever go when persuaded by the forced hand of either sheer desperation or gross laziness (not necessarily in that order).

I pulled into the pitted asphalt driveway with purpose, insisting to myself that the brevity of the trip would be its justification. And after I had unclipped my seatbelt and wrestled the grey polyester strap from that uncomfortable area of my neck now permanently scarred from the inside out with seatbelt rash, I was greeted familiarly by a black and white dog tied to the cement bollard gratuitously protecting a phone booth clearly out of service since the early seventies. Despite his drab surroundings and drabber owner – a filthy, disheveled, grey-haired man who appeared as if he had just come from an audition for the part of “homeless drifter” – the dog, a medium-sized herding breed as unkempt as its owner, seemed content to the point of bliss. Its tail thrashed around, and its tongue rhythmically slapped the man’s filthy pant leg as he emerged from within, a bottle peering out the top of a fresh paper sack.

“Drifter. Let’s go, buddy.” He spoke as though forcing his words through a mound of gravel as he untied the flailing animal. I couldn’t help but marvel at the irony. Drifter. Wonderful.

The man’s eyes managed to sniff me out but only in passing. His face told me I was by far the least of his concerns; and after our initial greeting, it was clear that the dog couldn’t have cared less about me anymore either.

To my left, as I passed through a grimy set of double doors adorned with scores of sun-yellowed cardboard beer and liquor propaganda pieces aglow from the weighty fluorescent store front lighting, stood three middle-aged men who, judging by their dialogue and mannerisms, seemed collectively convinced that most – if not all – of the proverbial “them” had been out from the beginning of time to get what had belonged to these three men. I had arrived in the middle of some considerable belly-aching.

“—Yeah, man. I’m tired of it,” cried one of the men, voice gradually building, “Who’s money is it, man? What do I even go to work for anymore? My wife acts like I don’t bring home no bacon no more.” Pause. “And she’s f—kin’ right! I don’t. But it ain’t ‘cause I’m out f—kin’ drinkin’—”

“—Nah, man. You’re workin’ like the rest of us,” chimed in a man who appeared to be slightly more in control of his emotions. “But, we’re gonna get ours – what they been takin’ off our tables. I’m sick of buyin’ Uncle Sam T-bones and then – and then – and then suckin’ the gristle off his bones. You know what I’m sayin’?”

This conversation appeared to represent a long tradition between these three men whose bond seemed to be in that tradition alone. And I couldn’t help but identify with them on some level, having bought Uncle Sam a few T-bones myself. Ironically, though, they didn’t appear to be the kind of men who either *had* much or had a *right* to much of anything. As I casually observed them, passing from a solid ten feet away, I was assaulted by day-old body odor mixed with the distinct muddied scent of soiled motor oil. Hiding a twisted wince, I entered the liquor store to the sound of jingling bells beating against the glass store front door.

It was the kind of place where fictional Koreans are often robbed at gunpoint in Hollywood adaptations of South-Central Los Angeles. The aged linoleum was sticky from neglect, and there were vast, downward-protruding mildew stains, accompanied by the smell of wet mold, in the ceiling tiles indicating where roof repairs had been desperately needed but ignored in the interest of replenishing the floor-to-ceiling sea of sizes, shapes, and colors behind the crusty countertop which saddled the outdated push-button cash register. I tried to remember when I had ever seen that amount or variety of liquor in that confined of an area. I couldn’t recall.

Against the audible backdrop of rubber soles sticking to linoleum along with some faint, indistinguishable variety of Middle Eastern music, I headed past the check-out counter to my right, the impulse-buy-oriented end-cap arrangements of cashews, dried fruits, and other items no one actually buys to my left, and directly for the cooler. Past the glare of fluorescent lights on the glass, I could see the neatly stacked plastic baby-blue-labeled half-gallon cartons of 2% milk as they approached. In ten minutes, I thought with an accidental grin, I would be at home, sitting on a soft leather sofa, watching two-and-a-

half seconds of every program on television, and savoring bite after bite of about a million chocolate chip cookies soaked in cool, creamy 2 per cent. I deserved this, didn't I? Well, of course I did.

I walked, shoes squeaking as if walking down a set of basement steps in the dark of midnight, to the register and placed on the counter the carton, wet with condensation brought on by the store's oppressive over-heating. The gracious, smiling Middle Eastern man behind the counter, smiling tightly and briefly, patiently searched out the bar code printed on the carton's label, scanned it, and read my total. \$3.68. He was an older man in his early 60's, with a long grey beard suffocating a thin strip of faded black nestled down its very center. His head was wrapped tightly and neatly in an off-white bun-like turban, which extended downward to roundly cover his ears, framing his face triangularly from the forehead. The way his eyes hung tiredly toward his cheeks, sagging in the middle like a cocker-spaniel's, told me that he had worked honestly and vigorously during his sixty-some-odd years – there was no question about this. An honest man. A hard-working man.

“Boy, milk sure has gotten expensive,” I said, having no real recollection of the historic cost curve of milk and no real idea why I had just said that. He responded graciously by uttering something just completely unintelligible to which I nodded politely.

As I reached into my back pocket to retrieve what I had just arbitrarily decided to be the unreasonable amount of \$3.68, I was startled to stillness by something subtle, something muffled by the glass door through which I had entered moments ago. I was pretty sure I was overhearing someone standing at the storefront, maybe 10 feet from the entrance, telling a joke. The only thing I could clearly make out, though, was that it was an awful joke if it was a joke at all. I stood there with my hand in my back pocket for what seemed like an hour – but what was probably more like twenty seconds – having become completely unaware of the kind Middle Eastern man, trying to filter out the ambient noise from inside the liquor store (coffee machine gurgling, that strange middle eastern music droning on, coolers and freezers clicking and humming) in order to more clearly decipher the conversation outside. I was now almost desperate for the punch line to what I was beginning to hope on hope was a joke, since, from what pieces I was able to put together, it appeared to be a joke about some store clerk choking on poison while some guys robbed him as he lay

fighting to keep from choking to death on his own vomit.

As it struck me that the gracious clerk may too be within earshot of this “joke,” he violently clutched his chest with a fleshy-sounding thud dampened by the cloth of his cleanly ironed white pearl-buttoned shirt. Then a small spot of a foamy white substance peeked out of the very corner of his mouth and began dancing like sea foam as he inhaled and exhaled. The man’s jovial, kind smile was now a twisted downward expression of terror. His eyes drooped while his gaze turned blankly toward the ceiling. As he collapsed behind the counter, he writhed like a dead animal animated only by nerve impulses and began alternating fits of coughing, choking, gurgling, and gasping. Definitely *not* a joke, I thought to myself, suddenly panicking yet somehow suspended in time with the same hand in the same pocket digging for the same change as before.

I flashed a look toward the store front. Entering like gangsters through the double doors were the three smelly men. They were coming in for the take, and I was a dead man unless I could manage to unfreeze. With one adrenaline-fueled leap, I found myself on the other side of the counter with the now clearly incapacitated Middle Eastern man.

“Wow,” I thought to myself, “Look at all that liquor.” Even with certain death looming, it was impressive.

Looking up from the floor, where I was now huddling next to a frothing, writhing aged liquor store clerk, I noticed that the cash drawer was wide open. These smelly guys really knew what they were doing, I judged. Impeccable timing, no doubt. One of them, a thin-lipped, red-haired, freckled individual, wearing a navy-colored automotive-style work short with the name, Chaz, embroidered to the left breast above the pocket, was now walking around the counter with long intentional gaits while the other two stood watch at the door. I couldn’t believe he was wearing a nametag to an attempted murder-robbery! To my surprise and delight, he approached the register without paying me any mind at all, in all likelihood unaware of my presence altogether. He had been feverishly grabbing fistfuls of fives, tens, and twenties when the two men outside began screaming and waving their arms.

“Cops!”

“We gotta go!”

“Move it! Move it!”

Chaz, who had just been frantically cramming wads of bills into his work-weathered hands, now clearly terrified, dropped every dollar to the ground next to where I had been playing dead as if to avoid a mountain lion attack. He ran out the double doors and disappeared, along with the two others. I couldn't move. Although I was almost certain now that the three smelly men had been completely unarmed, the shock, terror, and desperation of the situation was overwhelming, especially in the face of this foaming mess of a man I was now pretty much lying on top of in order to remain invisible.

After a few moments, I regained my composure, grabbed some stray bills which had landed on the linoleum next to where I had been huddled, stood up slowly, and began putting bills carefully back into the register. The poor Middle Eastern man on the ground needed help, sure. But I didn't know what to do for him. I might as well return his money, I thought. I was there, after all, and the bad people were gone, I reasoned. I'd surely be hailed as a hero either way.

So I stood there, completely composed, towering over a quivering, nearly dead liquor store clerk holding two fists-full of cold, hard cash when several gun-wielding police officers entered violently through the grimy double doors adorned with scores of sun-yellowed cardboard beer and liquor propaganda pieces.

At that moment, cookies and milk had never sounded so good.

"Freeze!" screamed one officer.

"Don't move!" screeched another.

"On the ground!" came one more.

Then "Holy Cow, Johnson! Look at all that liquor!"

Colophon

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