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(810) 984-3881 • (800) 553-2427 • www.sc4.edu

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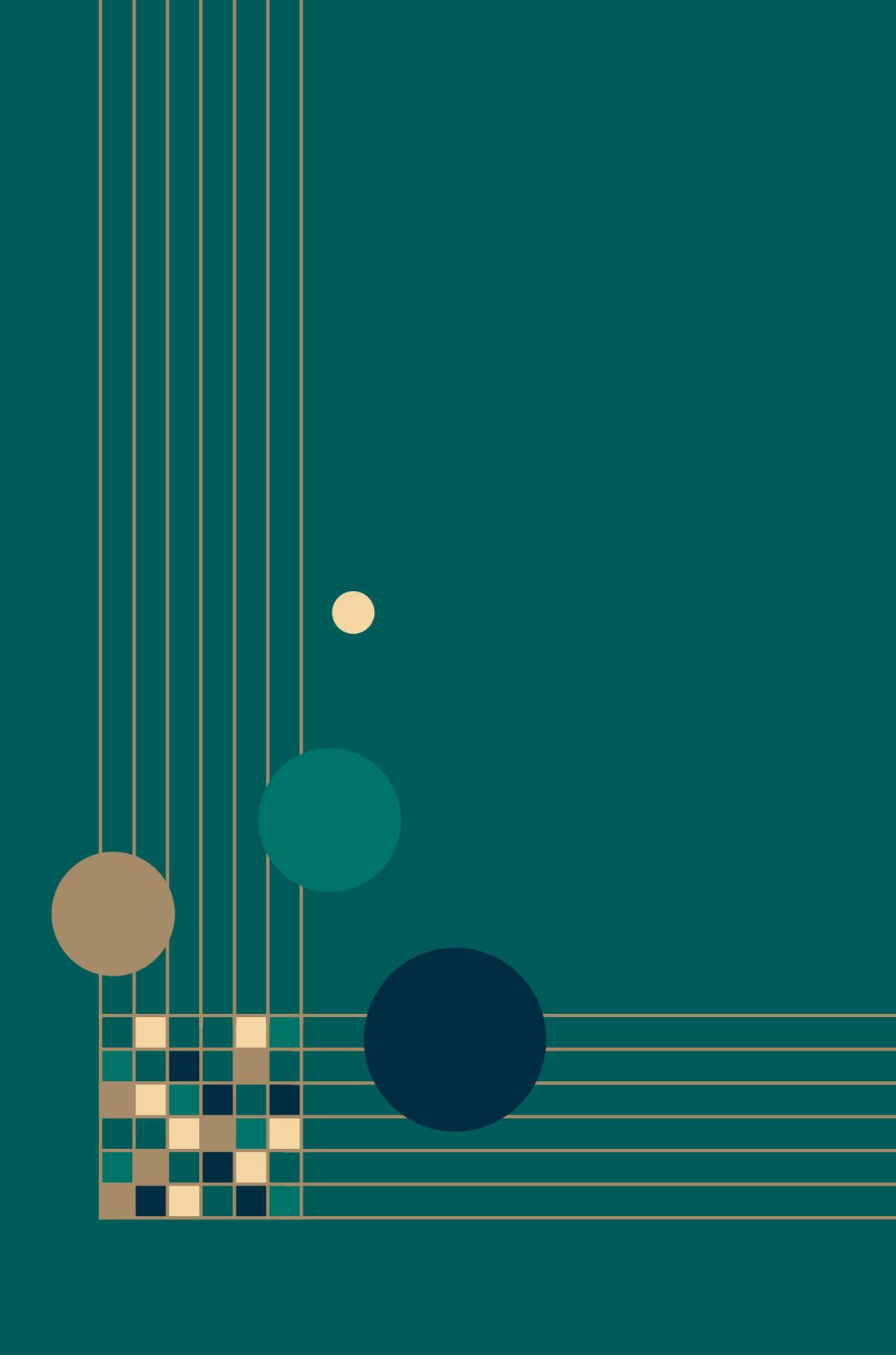
Dr. Deborah Snyder

PATTERNS

63



• 2021 EDITION •





ESSENTIAL WORK

While we were trapped in the social isolation of Covid-19, with our six-foot distancing and our quarantines and our masks, we lost touch. Figuratively, yes, but even literally. According to the National Institutes of Health, study after study across the country showed that rates of anxiety and depression skyrocketed, much of it the result of a lack of hope and an abundance of loneliness.

While we've begun to socialize once again, these pages offer another way to break through the ice-jam of isolation: the arts. Human beings have looked to the arts through the ages to find beauty and connection. Whether it's the dagger ending of Makenna Joppisch's poem "Living Room Windows" or the bonds of love shown in her short story "Brother," you will find beauty and connection. Yet leafing through these pages can seem new, too — when was the last time we read or looked at something that did not involve swiping, or game controllers, or clicking an icon?

In a roundabout way, then, the pandemic has taught us the same lesson that art has always given us: beauty is not just "nice," it's necessary, and human connection is not "extra"; it's essential. Thus, the work that appears in the pages that follow is essential work, and the people who've produced it — the artists and writers — are essential workers.



IN MEMORY OF DAVID KORFF

1942-2021

SC4 – as well as the entire Blue Water area, stretching across borders – has lost a pillar of the community with David R. Korff’s death this past year. Over a span of forty-five years, as Chairman of the Art Department at Lambton College, Sarnia, Ontario and later, Chairman of Visual and Performing Arts at SC4, David refused to let art languish in the backwaters of place and time. Instead, he taught us, and he showed us—in his art and work with countless arts organizations—again and again, that art is not a frill or an adornment or a luxury, but is in fact central to living. In a world in which art is often belittled or reduced to commerce, David’s life was nothing short of courageous.

Committed to art as essential to one’s education and well-being, David considered that this arts magazine played a fundamental role in our efforts to accomplish these goals. What he liked to emphasize in conversations about *Patterns* and the student portfolios, as well as shows, is that students often produced work that offered audiences a glimpse of who they really were. By that he meant that they produced work that authentically connected to their origins and original concepts about a subject of their work. David didn’t necessarily think that one left SC4 a fully developed artist and ready to move to New York or Paris. What he did believe is that we find in their works in *Patterns* and in their classes the raw, unvarnished work of gifted individuals.

Often, though a student's work might not be fully realized, David would marvel at that piece's authenticity. His attentiveness to the value of such genuineness contributed to his massive talent as a teacher. He recognized talent and how to nurture it so that students could maximize their ability to realize a project and make it art. What this attentiveness to the whole student did was to create excitement around the activity of making art and nourished the excitement we all have had while working on *Patterns* and preparing for the annual reception.

David was just as committed to the literary arts of *Patterns*. He was instrumental in advising other coordinators when it came to applying for and writing grants to support inviting visiting writers and artists. His encouragement led to the Visiting Artists Forum that lasted for 15 years and brought in nationally recognized artists and writers (a Pulitzer Prize winner among them) to work with students and contribute to *Patterns*. David was a teacher and artist of diverse talents and tastes. When it came to music, the graphic and plastic arts, literature, dance, or theater, he dedicated himself to supporting all of them and seeing them flourish on our campus. Later, when he left the college, he directed his attention to our community and the promotion of public art throughout the region.

As important as David was and is to this magazine, his reach extended well beyond *Patterns*. He nurtured the Thursday noon concert series. He enthusiastically supported the theater arts. He attended to the needs to sustain the SC4 band. He played important roles for Friends of the Arts and the local arts commission in Mount Clemens—the Anton Art Center. He was a judge for arts grants in Michigan and elsewhere. If in our region arts and their programming were on the agenda, David was at that meeting. He led field trips to great art museums in the area, particularly the DIA and the Toledo Art Museum. Whether

it was the Shakespeare festival in Stratford or a concert in Detroit, David was sure to go if he could find a moment to do so. His interests in the arts were wide-ranging, which of course were at the root of his arts advocacy.

He left his mark on us and our communities. If you've seen sculpture in downtown Port Huron in the past ten years, or if you've walked through the galleries of the Fine Arts Building or studied the art in any edition of *Patterns* magazine over the past thirty years, you've seen David's influence. If you've taken a class with David, you've felt his influence. If you've listened to The International Symphony, you've heard his influence. The Port Huron Museum, the Community Foundation, the Port Huron Art Initiative – there is no part of our community connected to the arts that has not, in some way, been touched by David's presence. It is his lasting gift to us. His work with colleges in Sarnia and Port Huron combined with his contributions to the community foundation have left an indelible mark on Port Huron.

His retirement was an incalculable loss to the college. His death touches the whole community. These few paragraphs in this edition of *Patterns* hardly encompass his range and contributions to our well-being when it comes to the arts. In the coming year, we will have additional opportunities to appreciate his contributions. For now, after a tumultuous year, let's pause for a moment and consider all that this remarkable man has accomplished and be thankful for his life and works.

IN MEMORY OF ALFRED GAY

1953 – 2020

Alfred taught at St. Clair County Community College in the Visual and Performing Arts for over ten years, and held a reputation of respect and admiration from the students and colleagues that worked with him. He inspired his students with his compassion, love of art, life experiences, and with his bi-annual field trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts, Flint Institute of Arts, and Toledo Art Museum.

Alfred specialized in printmaking, drawing and painting. His work can be described as stylistically abstract, with energetic brushstrokes and high-contrast colors.

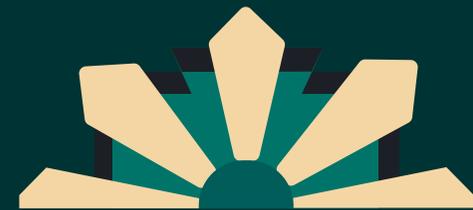
Born in Osnabrueck Germany, Alfred immigrated to California, and settled in Seattle as a boy. He received his Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts degrees from the University of Washington in Seattle, and took additional courses at the Goethe-Institut in Germany. Shortly after moving to Michigan, Alfred began teaching at SC4, instructing in studio art, art history, and German. Alfred was a committed Christian and long-time elder at Faith Lutheran Church in Port Huron.

Alfred is survived by his wife Kathy Gay—to whom he was married for nearly forty-five years—his children Alex (Susie) Gay and Helen (Josh) Zoerhof, mother Anne Gay, and an extended family in the United States, and in Germany.



THANK YOU

The following people have contributed to help make *Patterns* a celebrated event each year. Thank you to all of our judges, donors, and committee members. A special thank you to the SC4 Friends of the Arts; a committed group of businesses, community members and SC4 faculty and staff that support the arts at SC4, including music, theatre, creative writing and visual arts.



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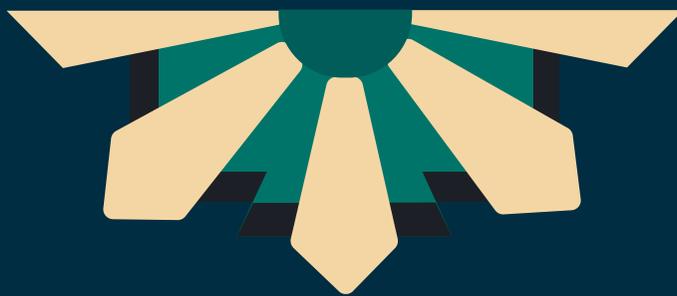
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AWARD WINNERS



AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

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18 **Patrick Bourke Award:** Brandi Schmitz
-

POETRY

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24 **Second Place:** Makenna Joppich
"Living Room Windows"
25 **Third Place:** Patricia Jo Bowman
"Eli"

ESSAY

- 38 **Kathleen Nickerson Award:** Thomas Short
"A Father's Love: Rejection from the Beloved"
45 **Second Place:** Samantha Kicinski
"Another Day at the Office"
49 **Third Place:** Rebekah Delmedico
"Advertisements and Persuasion: Manipulating
our Wants into Needs"

SHORT STORY

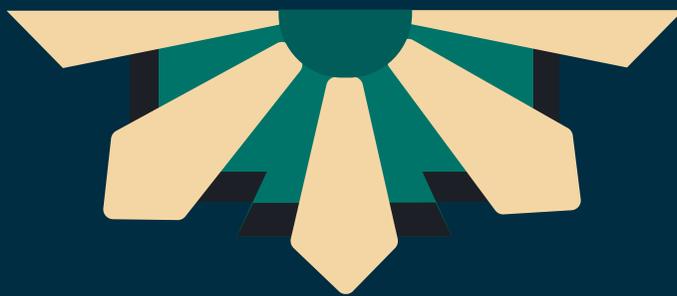
- 57 **Richard Colwell Award:** Emily Kean
"Pareidolia"
71 **Second Place:** Natalya Reid
"She Strings the Beads to Make a Brighter Day"
79 **Third Place:** Makenna Joppich
"Brother"
-

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- 99 **First Place:** Skylar Aleman
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ELEANOR & PATRICK
MATHEWS & BOURKE

AWARDS

Each year five special awards are given, named for past faculty members who made extraordinary contributions to the arts and literature on campus and to *Patterns* in particular. The Patrick Bourke and Eleanor Mathews Awards are awards of distinction that recognize students who have done exceptional work overall in art and literature.

The Blanche Redman, Richard Colwell and Kathleen Nickerson Awards are given for the highest quality submissions for each year in poetry, fiction and essay writing, respectively.



BRANDI SCHMITZ

PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art or design student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual arts disciplines and has been an advocate and emissary for art at St. Clair County Community College. This year we honor Brandi Schmitz.

Brandi is a prospective 2022 graduate seeking her Graphic Design Associate Degree, with plans to continue her studies in Graphic Design at Wayne State University.

Brandi's work is thoughtful, and requires the viewer to question meaning. She sees and understands visual ideas in a seemingly natural and instinctive way. She is also proactive, and serious in her commitment to her professional and educational goals. This includes applying for scholarships, competitions, freelance work, and more, while still managing a bevy of personal responsibilities. She does all of this, yet manages to be incredibly successful with her coursework. Her drive, commitment to the arts, and exceptional talent makes her worthy of this highly competitive award of distinction in the field of fine and applied arts. It is with pleasure that we honor her excellence at SC4.



MAKENNA JOPPICH
ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

Last year, we introduced the 62nd edition with a note that “art is hard work.” A popular conception is that art is for those who are naturally talented. Certainly, talent matters as it does in all human activities. However, the success of our pursuits is not merely the product of talent but also arises from hard work. Makenna Joppich, this year’s Eleanor Mathews Award winner, displays that rare combination of talent and a productive work ethic.

Makenna exemplifies the dedication to art that we hope our writers and artists strive for. In the 62nd and 63rd editions of *Patterns*, Makenna worked diligently and quickly with the editors for fiction and poetry to prepare her pieces for publication. Often, she would reply with revisions the day she would get a response from us. Her attentiveness to detail, to line, to stanza and paragraph is exceptional.

Her stories and poems touch on family matters as well as subjects that deal with larger, national themes. Her range is remarkable. Makenna’s political and historical interests are clear in poems such as “Marred Sky” and “Living Room Windows.” She addresses social concerns related to the justices and injustices of small town life in her stories “Remember the Name” and “Brother.” Her ability to connect the personal to contemporary social issues is a welcome surprise.

Makenna has stated that writing, “revisioning,” revising, and finally proofing are all steps that have given her confidence in her works and to embark on new projects. Soon, she hopes to transfer and continue her writing while at a university. To conclude, we should add that as Makenna continues to write and contribute to the arts, we ought to remember her name and look forward to what she has to share with us.



POETRY
SELECTIONS



BLANCHE REDMAN AWARD
RAINY DAY VILLANELLE
Lindsey Sobkowski

Droplets drape themselves along the roof,
the rusted gutter being their captor.
Drowsiness comforted, *pitter patter*.

A book lies on the worn rug, not in use
by loose fingers. Paper creased mid chapter.
Droplets drape themselves along the roof.

Wind bends wood frames, creating creaks and croons
Yet sleep is too great, the noise does not factor.
Drowsiness comforted, *pitter patter*.

As her chamomile's warmth is reduced,
the knits and fleece give her more soon after.
Droplets drape themselves along the roof,

into crooks and crannies closer they move.
Drops trickle down to envelope, wrap her.
Drowsiness comforted, *pitter patter*.

The drops turn into puddles, pools soon after.
Blustering frigid wind overtakes, still air replaced.
Droplets draped themselves along the roof,
drowsiness comforted, *pitter patter*,



POETRY

LIVING ROOM WINDOWS

Makenna Joppich

They climb out of the rising tide
As the rain lashed down
While they crossed the crimson sand
With the hope of the world
Weighing heavy on their shoulders
A constellation of smoke spread
And artillery shells erupted
Into shrapnel galaxies
That shook the earth
Down to its core
Bullets rained from ahead
Whizzing past terrified ears
Boys
Have become heroes
But later
In the drizzling rain
They would become
Thousands of glittering golden stars
That were scattered back home
In living room windows



POETRY

ELI

Patricia Jo Bowman

Imagination takes flight, boyhood the aviator.
Precarious thoughts stream from a mouth
missing one front tooth.
He sprints away faster than a roller coaster.
A piece of paper and marker calm the whirlwind
while colorful dreams are sketched.
Discernment drags behind him like a trailer
hitched to abandon. His eyes a lighthouse,
fixed just beneath a tidy brown haircut,
guide the storm-tossed weary home again.
His heart sings deep, a sweet melodic ring
varied and vast as sonatas penned for piano.



SELECTION OF MERIT
CADES COVE BARN
Heather Brassfield

SELECTION OF MERIT
AUTUMN LEAVES
Zachary Kerhoulas

Fall arrives and the sky is filled
with warm hues of autumn's leaves.

They take time as the wind
Pushes past the pile each tree leaves.

Settling on the windowsill, they catch her eye.
She sighs, "Honey, can you rake the leaves?"

He tightens his laces and grabs the rake.
Her gaze locks on the door as he leaves.

The door is shut, she clutches her side.
She moans from the bruises he leaves

.
She hurries to the bedroom and packs a bag,
all the while, he rakes the leaves.

She grabs the keys and starts the car.
He won't catch up to her after she leaves.

He hears the car, and shortly, sirens wail
All is lost, that is, all except autumn's leaves.



SELECTION OF MERIT
DAYDREAMER
Vera Klimovich

SELECTION OF MERIT
ESPRESSO EXPRESS
Avery Westbrook

I drink black coffee
In the morning.
Strong,
*(caffeinate,
contemplate)*
Like my feelings for you.

Gazing out the window,
I catch a glimpse of my own reflection
In the smudged glass.
Observing the landscape,
I see growth in everything that breathes.

Still sleepy,
I let my mind wander,
Taking a tour
Through what I've felt,
(and what I'm feeling now).

I look around me as the speed increases
*(waking up,
slowly, slowly).*
I'm quickly remembering
The railway we've traveled
To make it here,
Together.

Strapped in tightly,
I have energy for the first time in a while
With no sleep
At all.

Before I look ahead to see
What we'll approach next,
Come aboard.
Join me
And side by side,
Our still-dreaming eyes reaching towards the future,
We'll look together.



SELECTION OF MERIT

MARRIED SKY

Makenna Joppich

Smoke marred the sky
And ash fell like rain
People ran in the streets
Some stood
With trauma frozen
On their faces
While their bodies quaked
Others felt anger bubble up inside them
As they desperately awaited answers
While they watched metal tumble down
With a horrific scream
And a
Groan
And to escape the wicked flames
People jumped
From broken windows
Their deaths playing out
While millions watched
People began to weep
As more concrete and steel began to crash down
And smoke and dust
Weaved through the streets



SELECTION OF MERIT
MORNING AT
40TH STREET POND
Hannah Buckley

SELECTION OF MERIT
MORNING COFFEE
William Patterson

Five a.m. sun on the horizon.
Burner on, tea kettle over coil.
Heat rises like the sun's crimson glow.
Water boils, steam wafts like morning fog.
The kettle screams like an alarm clock.
The French press filled with morning dirt.
Water over grounds, black storm clouds appear.
Bold, smoky scents fill the air.
Strainer in, sifting the grains.
Liquid black as my soul.
The black gold pours,
Like holy water into a stoup.
Dark roast, black and no cream.
I rise like a victor, goblet in hand.
Coffee, the black essence.
Hot steam rises from the cup,
I don my jacket, shoes, and backpack.
Destined for my morning, coffee mug in hand.
I close the door; the day has just begun.



SELECTION OF MERIT
WAGON WHEEL
Miranda Benner

SELECTION OF MERIT
DINNER BELL
Stacy Nichols

Grandma has a dinner bell
That hangs from a post
Near her garden, but a close reach from her back door.
The bell is old and rusty orange,
Especially around the rim
The paint is chipped off like the polish on my toes.
Little yellow dandelions wreath the base of the post
Vines slither up it, like green snakes
That try to strike the bell.
A sickly rusty eagle proudly sits atop
With his iron wings stretched far
Ready to take flight,
His beak open wide,
As if ready to strike his prey.
The tongue of the bell plays peekaboo
With all those who observe.

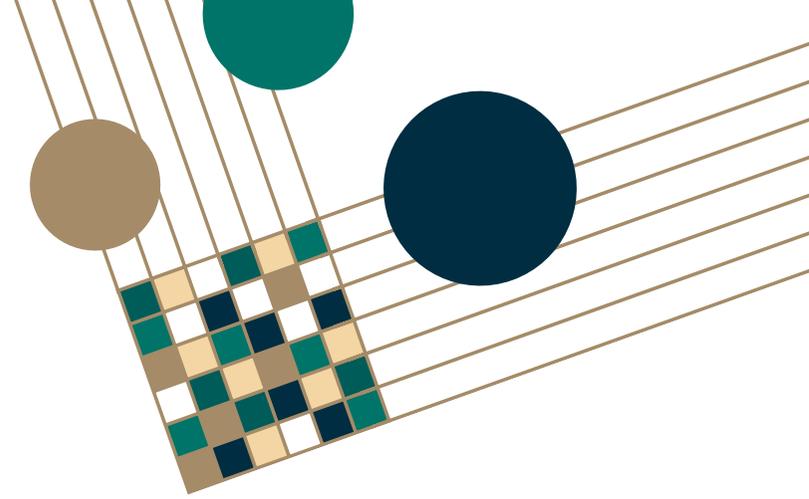
Attached to the clapper is an old frayed rope
Covered in fuzz that will make your hand itch.
When rung, the bell makes a beautiful ding
Loud enough to be heard by all around.
When Grandma strikes the bell,
everyone comes running.
Except the startled butterfly
that takes off in a fright.



ESSAY SELECTIONS



**KATHLEEN
NICKERSON AWARD**
**A FATHER'S LOVE:
REJECTION FROM
THE BELOVED**
Thomas Short



How often was it most of us awakened with a warm roof over our head or brushed our teeth with toothpaste that our parents had bought? How often was it that we showered with water that seemed free and endless because of our parents? How many times have most of us filled our bellies with food purchased not by us but by our parents? Most of us have played with toys that our parents had bought and worn clothes that appeared in our dresser drawers seemingly magically. Most of us have spent countless hours hiding from the snow in a warm house with a plowed driveway.

However, most of us never thought about how hard it is to keep a home warm, food on the table, or clothes on our family's back, let alone folded in dresser drawers. Nevertheless, as children, we have an obligation to our parents, which oftentimes remains unfulfilled because by nature we lack the maturity to comprehend the burden we owe our parents. But still, sadly, we often come to realize what our parents sacrificed to raise us, and we want to thank them. However, more times than not, it is too late to do so. This is the suggestion of a beautifully written poem by author Robert Hayden called "Those Winter Sundays." We could not possibly know at such a young age how bittersweet love is; it is not until we have grown and experienced love's pains and pleasures that we can truly understand and appreciate love.

In this poem, the speaker is looking back at his life, and he comes to realize that money was a scarcity for his father. I am almost sure the speaker's father performed manual labor for too many hours with too little pay, hence the "blueblack cold," on "Sundays too." But still, the speaker's already exhausted and aching father had to keep the house warm, even after working his fingers to the bone performing manual labor throughout the week. Growing up, my family did not have natural gas, central air conditioning, or, for that matter, running water half the time. There was an old wood stove that sat next to every room, or so it seemed. More times than not, I would hear my father downstairs banging and cursing as he tried to get that damned thing lit early in the morning before work to produce heat for his family. It was so cold in the old house where I lived that the water pipes would freeze and burst. I can still remember the time when my cousin, my friend, and I went downstairs to my father's heated waterbed because it was the only part of the house that was not frozen by the "blueblack cold." And there, we all three lay under the covers shivering for what felt like an ice age. Yet somehow my father was able to rise before his family every day in the "blueblack cold," readying us for the day to come. Like my own father, the speaker's father was probably struggling to make ends meet, as the house where he grew up was hard to maintain. However, as a child,

it seemed natural for one to hold a hand out screaming for money that they did not know how to earn, nor did they comprehend how hard cash was to make because they could not possibly understand the ramifications of what their parents endured every day. And they cannot possibly be mature enough to fathom the despair until they have grown and faced such disparities themselves. Eventually, my father moved in with my aunt, and he passed his house down to me. And just as the boy in the poem could not realize the nature of his father's love, I could not realize why my father would rather be at work or do work around that old house than spend time with his son that is, until I had to do that work myself.

The speaker's father wanted to protect the boy from the harsh realities of nature and also the nature of the sometimes harsh world itself as the father did not ask the boy to get out of bed or help to gather wood or clean the stove and take out the old ashes from the last fire. The father would instead shout for the boy to rise after the house had started to warm. And of course, the boy would slowly rise and dress because he was not old enough to know better. I put a new furnace in that old house thinking that it would eliminate my father's senseless struggles but left the old wood stove in its place. One morning I awoke with what felt like frostbite because the furnace decided not to work, as did many other things in that old house. I immediately went to that old stove that I hated ever so much, and I struggled and struggled to get that damned thing lit, while kicking the new furnace that I had paid good money to purchase. Then, as I sat distraught with fire finally ablaze, my family came downstairs and huddled by that fire I had built, and they started soaking in its flare; it was only then that I truly understood that old stove. The boy could not possibly understand why the house was not always warm or what the big hurry was to get out of bed early because the boy did not have a family to feed or rent to pay. The speaker, now as an adult, seems to realize that his father had polished his good shoes, warmed the house before calling to him, and worked until his fingers were cracked, all so the boy would not have to face the "blueblack cold" because he loved him the only way that he knew how. That damned stove

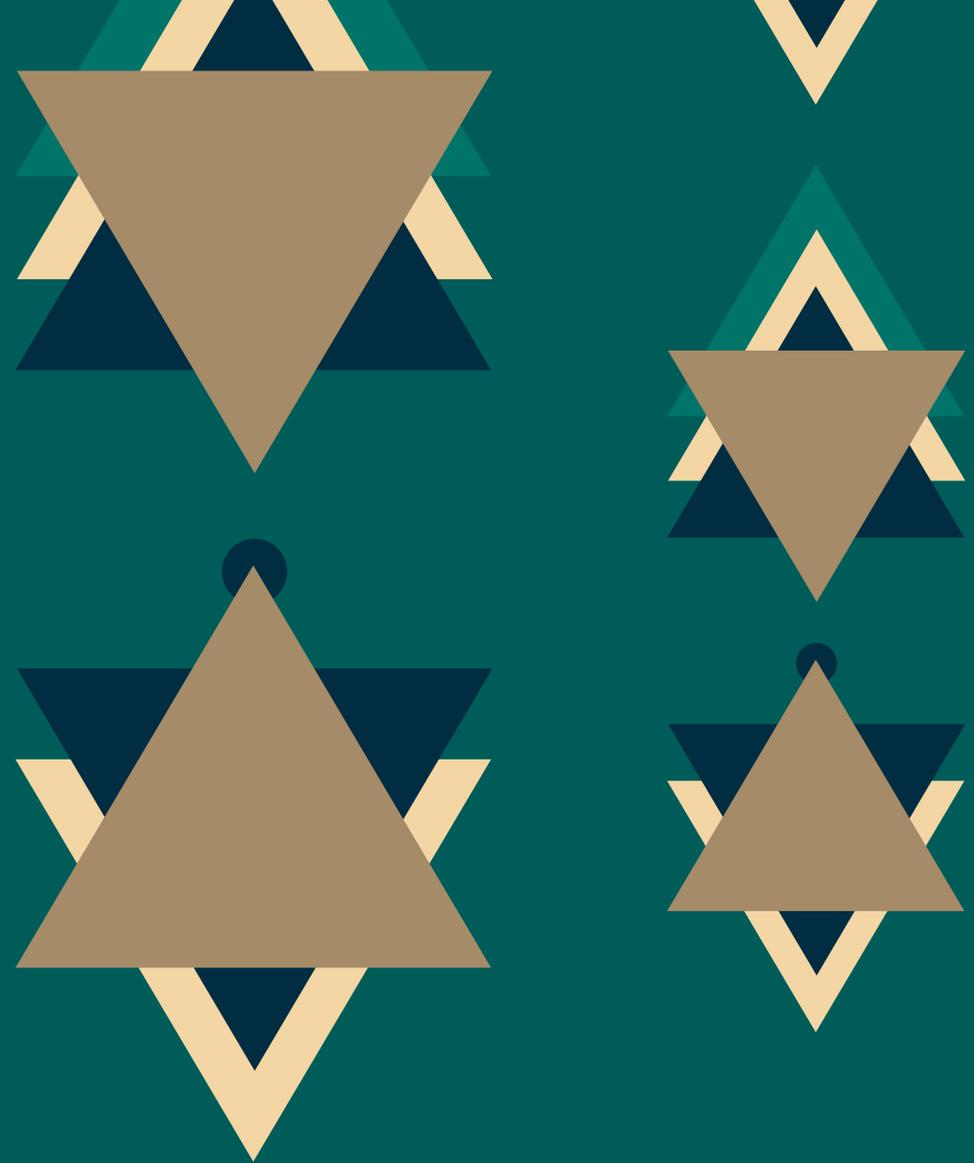
had transitioned in my mind from a curse to an essential blessing because even though that stove was hard work, that blissful stove provided for my family. I never thanked my father because much like the child in the poem, I could not fathom what my father was sacrificing to raise his family or how many hours he was working between that old house and his job to feed us; as a child, I would not even try to.

The speaker felt deep regret for not understanding what his father had sacrificed. The now grown boy feels remorse for how he had spoken to his father in the past as he seems to be almost crying out loud the words, "What did I know, what did I know." Despite what his father had done for him, such as driving out the cold, the boy still disrespected and spoke "indifferently" to his father. The speaker also referred to the "angers" as the home's internal problems and not just the less than perfect house itself. Once my family home had warmed, everyone would mosey down to the fire that my father had built, and my father would willingly push into the background. At least, that is what my mind perceived. He was onto the next project without a single thank you. At this point, I heard my mother shouting at my father, "The fucking water isn't working again Charlie." My father would respond without hesitation, "Maybe because ain't nobody kept the fucking fire lit last night while I was at work, Marsha. I'm only one mother-fucker, you know." As a boy, the severity of my father's predicaments while raising my family eluded me. Yet, as I grow, I start to understand what my father did go through, and I am thankful.

Because of the "angers" in my family home, I had become a wild child at school and at home. I said things to my father, such as "You're not my dad," and "I'm not your son anyways, so who gives a shit." I knew this would hurt my father; I was not mature enough as a child to understand how deeply my words could hurt my father, nor did I care, because I was merely a boy as was the speaker. The speaker feels remorse because he now feels obligated to his father, but it is too little, too late. The speaker probably now works and has a family of his own that he must tend to.

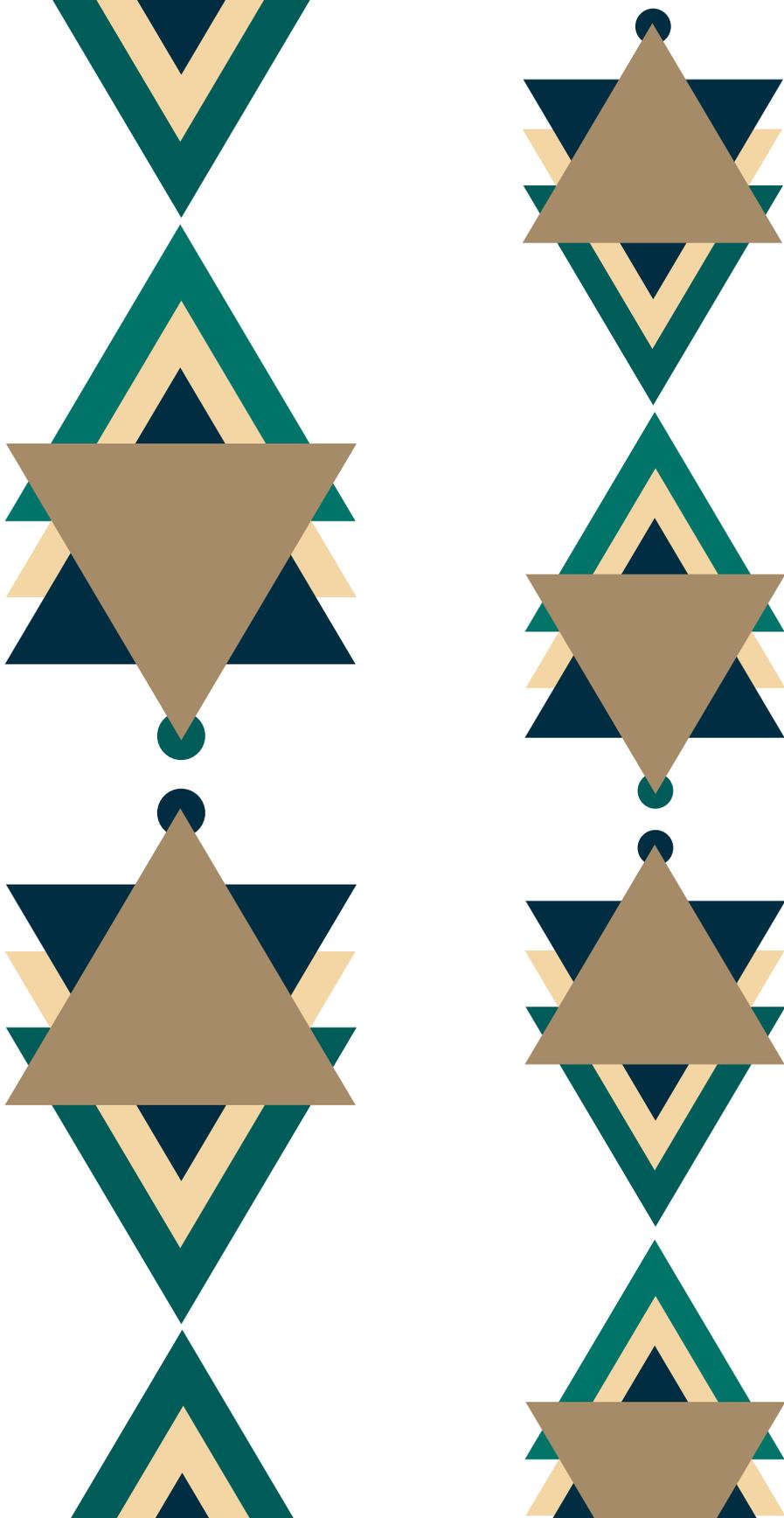
Because the child in the speaker has grown, he now appreciates his father, and he is starting to fathom the “lonely offices” that his father had endured while raising him. The speaker now grasps the fact that his children will also not be able decipher between a father’s “chronic angers” and a father’s undying love. The speaker has now accepted “love’s austere and lonely offices.” At such an immature age as the boy was at the beginning of the poem, it is almost impossible to know parenting difficulties and the sacrifice made to be a family. The speaker realizes being a loving parent is not luxurious and can be quite unpleasant at times, but a father’s love never dies. Unfortunately, our parents do perish, and more often than not, we do not tell them how we feel about them because it is too late to do so as it was with the speaker.

Most parents have spent half of their existence to provide their families with food and shelter, along with other things, and for this, we have an obligation. My father has gotten up too in the “blueblack cold” many times so that my family was warm and would not suffer. He would make “banked fires blaze” for us from the love in his heart, as he was usually going to work. My father’s hands were “cracked” and covered with work. My father was a great man who did his absolute best to provide for his family, once walking from Port Huron, Michigan, to New Haven, Michigan, because he was renting out that old house and my father had had some food in a freezer there. Fortunately, I can fulfill my obligation to my father by instilling his heart and his values into my children, and when my father leaves this earth, his life will have been exemplary. So, I say what the author never had the chance to say. “I love you father. I will sacrifice for my children as you have done for yours. I will do this for you, I will do this for your grandchildren, and I pray that they will do this for theirs. I will do this so that, you father, you, and your honorable heritage will live eternal life in our hearts, never perishing.”



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ANOTHER DAY IN THE OFFICE

Samantha Kicinski

Lub-dub. The call light flashes at me in white and orange. I've answered her call light what seems like a hundred times today. *Lub-dub.* *Everything feels normal, everything's fine,* I think when I open her curtain. Okay, she's on the floor. *Lub-dub.* "What are you doing, Mary?" I ask her. I walk towards her to shut off her call light. *Lub-dub.* *Squish.* *What the hell did I just step in?*

Lub-dub. I look down and my shoes are stained red. *Why are my shoes red?* Everything comes into focus and hits me. *Lub-dub.* She's laying in a pool of blood. *I'm standing in a pool of her blood.* *Lub-dub.* "Oh my god!" I scream loud enough for the whole building to hear. "Nicole!" I scream the nurse's name. "Call the supervisor and EMS! She's on the floor in a pool of blood!" *Lub-dub.* "Mary, can you hear me?!" I ask her as I begin assessing her. *Don't panic, Sam. Keep calm. You've done hundreds of simulations for these. This is your time to shine.*

The nurse rushes in with three more people behind her: another nurse and two more aides that somehow she was able to find within the span of about thirty seconds. *What? We had two more aides?* *Lub-dub.* Oh no. I'm panicking. No number of simulations can ever prepare you for this. "Did you hit your head, Mary?" I say as blood is gushing from a wound in her head. *Yeah, I'd say so.* I take a closer look around the room. Blood streaks go all the way up the table legs. Dots of blood are splattered on the walls. It looks like a scene from *Texas Chainsaw*.

Lub-dub. Vital signs are normal. Well, hers. Not mine. She's answering the questions. She's alert, thank God. We're somehow able to roll her to get the sling under her. *Lub-dub.* We use the lift to get her onto her bed. *Lub-dub.* EMS is called. For some reason, it's nonemergent, even though she clearly has a head injury. Why didn't they call for emergent?

Lub-dub. She looks like a horror movie victim, but we start to clean her up. *Lub-dub.* My fingers are shaking and tingling from the shock. I can barely hold the wash cloth as I gently wipe it across her skin. *Lub-dub.* My heart is still racing; somehow hers is still beating. *Lub-dub.* "Sam, go take a breather. You need it. We've got her," one of my fellow aides, Becky, says to me. "You're gonna be a nurse, Sam, you need to be able to handle this."

Lub-dub. I'm out in the hallway, pacing back and forth, just from the mere shock of finding this woman. EMS loads her into the gurney. "Why didn't you guys make this an emergency? She has a head injury. You're lucky we have a paramedic with us today," one of the EMTs said to us.

Lub-dub. She's still talking, Sam. She's still breathing, Sam. She's going to be okay. *Lub-dub.* "Good thing you went in there when you did. We could've lost her." *Lub-dub.* "Good job for keeping your composure in there." Did I? Did I really? She's okay. Somehow, she's okay.

Lub-dub. You can go through any number of simulations and clinicals you want. Nothing can ever prepare you for the real thing. *Lub-dub.* I sit up in my bed. I can barely catch my breath. Beads of sweat fall down my back and forehead. I still have nightmares about that day. About the pool of blood and how she was looking up at me when I walked in. *Lub-dub.* I still wonder to this day why the call was nonemergent. To be honest, I have no idea why. *Lub-dub.* I still go over everything I did that day. *What if I went into her room sooner? Would she still have fallen? Should I have reacted quicker?* I don't know; but thank god she's still alive.

Lub-dub.



SELECTION OF MERIT **MARINE CITY THROW BACK** Doug Penrod



ADVERTISEMENTS AND PERSUASION: MANIPULATING OUR WANTS INTO NEEDS

Rebekah Delmedico

Although some of us may not always like to admit it, a typical day can be consumed by wants. It's not enough to have some things; we "need" more things. I can't walk into Target without being tempted to make a frivolous purchase, and my Amazon cart is filled with hundreds of dollars' worth of stuff that I've convinced myself I need. But I do not 'need' any of these items; none of them contribute to any basic, physiological need. As a middle class American, my necessities have been met and now the desire for status and reputation has my attention. Consumerism feeds off of the desire for items that give the illusion of status. And behind these temptations are advertisements, showing the way and creating room in our brains for more wants. Advertisements have assisted in creating a nation that is never satisfied by effectively turning wants into needs.

In an essay titled "Everything Now," Steve McKeivitt discusses consumerism and how it has contributed to a warped idea of what our "needs" really are (123-129). He further connects Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how it outlines the fact that needs are distinctly fundamental in comparison to wants. Only until the most basic needs, which McKeivitt describes as "air, food, and water" (125), are met can we work our way up the hierarchy to the less necessary but more highly regarded levels.

As middle-class Americans whose most basic of needs have been met, we find ourselves looking to the higher levels of Maslow's Hierarchy; McKevitt describes these additional human needs as "achievement, confidence, respect" (125). When considering those who lack the more essential of needs like food and shelter, these needs of status and reputation should more accurately be described as "wants." However, businesses have found a way to capitalize on this misconception of what our "needs" really are by utilizing advertisements built to manipulate our thinking into the idea that spending money will provide us our desired self-satisfaction.



Fig. 1. An Oakley brand advertisement for women's activewear (Oakley. Business Insider, 29 April 2013, <https://www.businessinsider.in/Oakley-Is-Addressing-An-Epidemic-Within-The-Womens-Activewear-Marketarticleshow/21146951.cms>).

As I observe an online advertisement for women's athletic wear, specifically, for the brand Oakley (see fig. 1), the first thing I notice is a black and white picture along with some brightly colored athletic clothing - the only colored items within the image. The clothing pops against the grayscale monochrome backdrop. The fluorescent colored clothing is being worn by a lady (also in grayscale). She's attractive with an athletic fit and is standing with poise and confidence. With her arm outstretched behind her and clutching her foot with a bent knee, my eyes are directed to a group of women in the background. Above them is a statement that reads "For Exercising Not Socializing." The group of women

are sitting together at an outdoor coffeeshop and are socializing amongst themselves. They have all the characteristics of being the epitome of status. They are pretty, blonde, skinny, and of course, well dressed. One of them literally has her nose pointed in the air while another is glaring straight-ahead at our main lady. The superior and established image they portray depicts the apex I am trying to reach.

At a face-value examination, this advertisement appears to encourage the purchasing of their product by utilizing positive, confidence-boosting motives. The statement "For Exercising Not Socializing" initially promotes a feeling of superiority, that I somehow have more authentic purposes for wearing activewear, and that the table of snobbish women are inferior to me. However, with further scrutiny, I can see it has all the discernable signs of an ad designed to lower my self-worth only to offer a solution in the form of a product that needs purchased. I am led to believe that the leading lady is supposedly more relatable, with her contrasting brown hair, simple ponytail hairstyle, and an attitude focused on health as opposed to status. In reality, she's still stunningly beautiful, with an incredible figure and a disposable income that can afford to work out in overpriced attire. I am led to project myself into the image of this woman, as encouraged by the ad. When I picture myself wearing these clothes, my mind's eye has involuntarily misrepresented my body to be a replica of hers. I'm not the girl being looked down on by the elite; I am looking down on them. And in order to sustain this superior image of myself that's been created by this brand's advertisement, I must purchase their clothing.

A related advertisement for women's sportswear by the brand Adidas (see fig. 2) aims to produce similar feelings. The ad shows a woman bounding across the sky while wearing Adidas brand clothing and running shoes. Her face remains unseen, as she is strategically placed to appear in front of me, as though she has leaped past me during a race. With an exaggerated gait, her stance mimics an airplane taking off and flying over a city skyline. Her long, extended legs guide my eyes to the statement "Greater Every Run".



Fig. 2. An Adidas brand advertisement for women's activewear (Adidas. The Hauterfly, 7 March 2017, <https://thehauterfly.com/dedicated/adidas-ultraboostxshoe-launch/>).

Again, a woman with a conventionally attractive and fit physique is used as a model of what I should be striving for. The advertisement incorporates the additional feature of a contrived race, making the sense of a rivalry apparent. This element of competition increases the desire for success and growth. Additionally, the absence of a distinguishable face contributes to a delusion of the identity of the runner in front of me. This faceless individual is everyone in my daily life that I compete with for status and reputation, with the added possibility of it bearing my own face. The not-so-subtle statement of "Greater Every Run" communicates to me that in order to achieve perpetual greatness, I must wear Adidas.

The featured products may serve athletic purposes, but their ads play into something much deeper. While physical health is an important necessity that those of us in developed countries often take for granted, we do not require these overpriced luxury sportswear items to assist in a providing a healthy, active lifestyle. These ads have targeted individuals whose most basic of needs

have been met, and whose focus has changed to advancing self-image and reputation. They exploit our ingrained desires of seeking out growth and happiness by making us feel as though we cannot be happy without the purchase of their products. Just as the Oakley ad initially leads us to believe we are special, and the Adidas ad makes us feel as though we are winners, they both are ultimately telling us "you are neither of those things — without our products." With relentless advertisements manipulating the appearance of status and success to be something dependent on consumerism, our wants shift to a cycle of perceived needs, creating a continuous barrier to our own fulfillment and genuine happiness.

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SHORT
STORY
SELECTIONS



**RICHARD
COLWELL
AWARD**

PAREIDOLIA
Emily Kean

Someone would have to stumble upon it. Twenty miles away from town, buried deep in the woods, the cabin seemed to have always been there, swallowed by the forest. There were no neighbors for miles. But with seven bedrooms, the cabin felt like a mansion. Only two bedrooms were in use. And for as long as she could remember, it was just her and her father.

"Elise, I'm running late," her father said. "I've left a list on the kitchen counter for you, don't forget it. I'll be back before you know it." She sighed but followed him to the door. She didn't want him to leave. "I know it's a long time, but you'll be fine. Don't stay up too late and lock the door behind me." Like the cabin, her father had always been there, filling the cabin with his boisterous presence.

Her father started working from home after Elise was done with high school. She didn't question it and enjoyed being able to spend more time with him. Ever since Elise was four years old, her father was the only person she had any relationship with. It started after her mother's sudden death. But it was as though she forgot her mother ever existed. Growing up, she never talked about the kids at school or seemed to make any friends. Her father seemed like the only other person in the world. Her father took her to both doctors in town, but they both said the same thing, "she'll grow out of it." But it didn't stop him from worrying.

After Elise graduated high school, she was fine with not working. It was her time to relax from the stress of standardized tests and greasy school lunches. It aligned perfectly with her father's wishes because he didn't think she needed a job. When she turned twenty-two, she took a sudden interest in working. It took several hours of begging and pleading until her father gave in. She wasn't sure why her father had been so hesitant about letting her get a job. She got a job as a cashier. It wasn't much money, but it gave her a brand-new sense of worth.

It had been a few days since her father left on his business trip. Elise took a couple days off work, but now work was the only thing she looked forward to. The cabin was eerily empty with just her in it. Her first day back, she stood opposite of Jen, a sarcastic old woman keen on smacking her gum like a teenager, waiting for customers.. "How do you like being alone so far?" Jen asked.

"I'm definitely not used it yet," Whenever she thought about the cabin, she missed her father more.

"Sounds like heaven to me. Maybe try a new hobby?" With a smack of her gum, Jen sparked an idea. Forty minutes after her shift, Elise pulled into the drive of cabin. With Jen's words floating in her mind, she rushed into the house excited, a bulging grocery bag in tow.

There was a long list of things her father wouldn't let Elise do. The only one that always caught her attention was baking, even though she didn't understand why he was afraid of sugary treats. She got to work immediately on boxed brownies. She had seen them plenty of times while stocking the shelves at the store. With the few ingredients needed to make the batter, making them seemed simple enough.

After spraying the kitchen with brownie batter from using a hand mixer for the first time and almost setting an oven glove on fire, an hour later a pan of warm brownies sat on the pile of "To Do" notes her father left for her. She settled in the living room under a

thick blanket and turned on reruns of her favorite murder mystery show. Her father always had true crime documentaries playing in the background as he worked. He swore that it helped him focus on work. White noise. It was nostalgic for Elise now, the monotone narrator and the pure suspense throughout the episode.

It was late when her father called her. "Is everything going well over there?" he asked. "Don't fall asleep on the couch." It was strange only hearing her father's voice. He sounded so far away. She hadn't realized how much she missed him already. The phone call ended with Elise feeling more cut off than before.

Several hours and episodes later, Elise lay on the couch in the living room, drifting off to the detective's speech on the television. She had forgotten all about her father being gone and that she was alone in the cabin.

The next morning, she woke up later than she wanted. Her movements felt slower than usual. Remnants of a bizarre dream lingered. She couldn't quite remember what it was about, but she felt like it was real. An uneasiness weighed on her. Even though she slept the whole night, her body felt exhausted.

Her phone rang out once more. They wanted her to cover a shift. Elise contemplated the request a moment but gave in quickly and rushed to get ready with just a bit of fresh makeup and her hair brushed up into a ponytail. She left in the same clothes she had worn the day before.

Exhaustion left heavy marks under her eyes as she fought to keep them open. The grocery store was still just as slow as usual. She yawned and tried to rub the grogginess from her eyes.

"You okay, miss? Staying up too late?" The rough man she was ringing up spoke. He was buying an odd combination of clementine oranges, cigars, and a 24 ounce jar of light mayo. Elise wanted to ask him the same question, but she just nodded and finished his items.

The day moved in slow motion. Once four o'clock rescued her, she was finally able to leave. Driving the winding dirt road home made time move backward. She wanted nothing more than to crawl straight into bed once she arrived at the cabin.

She awoke a few hours later and pulled herself out of bed. She just hadn't slept well the previous night. She'd usually sleep in her bed. That was the first time in a while she'd fallen asleep on the old couch. Her body moved on its own, grabbing a glass from the cupboard and filling it at the sink. Just as she brought the glass to her mouth, something caught her eye. She could've sworn she only ate three of the brownies. Unease filled her when she found only one left in the pan, and an unsettling mug half full of coffee, she somehow missed before, sitting next to it.

Over the next few days, Elise grew increasingly nervous. It was worse at night. The silence sat heavy in the cabin. Memories of her father lingered in each room, haunting her. The cabin became hard to stay in; every sound she made seemed like it echoed throughout the empty walls.

Elise's imagination took over. She took more shifts at the grocery store after the brownie incident. Trying to take her mind off the thoughts that swarmed, she organized her new work schedule onto the monthly calendar that hung off the refrigerator. Putting the smallest details on it was therapeutic to her. She spent more time at the store to avoid going home. Each time she arrived back at the store, she felt more tired than before.

"How're you doing, Hun?" Jen spoke, looking through the customer.

"Alright, a bit tired." She focused on bagging the customer's groceries; the middle-aged woman was fuming at the lack of attention. She was obviously not from this small town, what business she had passing through here was beyond Elise. Jen finally turned to the lady and cashed her out without a word.

"This is the worst service I've ever gotten." The lady huffed and ripped the bags from Elise. Stomping like a toddler, she said "I'm going to give you a bad review."

"On Yelp? Facebook?" Jen spoke, "Lady, only the rich folk out here got internet." She smacked her gum, pushing the receipt onto the many bags the lady was holding. "And they sure don't shop here. What's wrong, you want the owner? I married him." Jen's natural defense was soothing.

Elise wished she could stay in the store all day with Jen or that her father would come home early. She didn't want to go back to the cabin. Maybe it was just the loneliness fully sinking in. Slowly she made her way back home. Rain made the drive home even more time-consuming. It turned the dirt into thick quicksand at the edges. Rain pelted even harder when she pulled up to the cabin. She was soaked just from the walk to the door. She left her wet shoes on the porch, not wanting to clean up any more water that would drip from her.

When she opened the door, something was different. Usually, on rainy days if no one was home, the cabin became chilly, and the air inside felt damp. But there was dry warmth spilling out into the cold night. She expected her father waiting to surprise her. She warily moved into the living room, towards the source of the heat. In the fireplace was the remnants of a pyramid of wood. Small flames still waltzed around it, lighting up the room. Elise stood frozen in place at the sight of this for a long moment. Could a fire last a whole shift? She called out to anyone, but no answer came. A sinking feeling grew in her stomach. She couldn't think straight. Her heart raced faster when she looked into the hallway. The previous thoughts she tried suppressing rushed back. Her suspicions were real. Someone else was in the cabin with her.

Elise wanted to call her father, but she knew he was busy. If he answered, he would rush back home. He couldn't come home early from his trip so there would be no sense in worrying him unless there was real proof of something wrong.

She called the nonemergency crime reporting number. Someone would be sent to investigate her report. In the meantime, Elise dreamt up all kinds of scenarios worthy of a crime-solving series. The cabin was quite a big space for two people, and it had been some time since she ventured into any of the unoccupied rooms. There was never any reason to before. She was sure that her father kept those rooms locked.

She had always been content with spending time in her room or with her father in his office. Everything she used or cared for was on her side of the cabin. She couldn't remember the last time she stepped foot into her father's bedroom. He rarely spent any time there. Elise usually found him several times a week asleep in the large armchair in the living room with a newspaper crumpled under his arms and the television still on.

Two hours later, a sharp knock sounded from the door. Two officers stood on the porch, both wearing the same annoyed expression.

"We got a report of a possible squatter?" His badge read "Robinson." Elise nodded, feeling a bit insecure in her thin pajamas as the officers stared at her.

"I'm not entirely sure, but several things seem out of place. And the other day I came home from work and a burned-down fire was going, and there were wet footprints tracked throughout the house."

"And your father, is he home?" Officer Robinson spoke.

"No, it's just me. He's on a business trip."

"Is there any chance he could've forgotten something and came home when you were gone?"

"No, definitely not. He's —"

"Why not? It's entirely normal." The other officer interrupted Elise. He was younger and somehow looked crankier than Officer Robinson.

"He's in Japan." Elise said, deadpanning at the officers. They were not taking her seriously at all. "Is there anything you can do? I don't know how this works, do you go through my cabin or something?"

"Yeah, I suppose we could," Officer Robinson said.

The two men hurriedly spent the next ten minutes looking through the entire cabin; Elise was surprised that they did it that fast. She could hear them muttering to each other the entire time, but it wasn't clear as she decided to stay in the living room. After a few minutes, they stood in front of her again, more annoyed than before.

"Did you find anything?" She wasn't sure if she was hoping they did or not.

"No." Officer Robinson said, "There is no sign of an intruder. There were a few rooms that were locked though. Do you have the keys?"

"My father has a set with him, and there is a set somewhere in here I think but I have no clue where they are. Are you sure you looked long enough? There's —" They didn't even let her finish speaking before turning to the door and opening it.

"If you call again with a report, make sure it isn't just your house settling before you do," the other officer said after officer Robinson walked out of the cabin, he turned to follow him out. Then he shut the door behind him. Elise was left stunned, staring at the door, watching the officers pull out of the driveway through the window.

After the fire incident, she spent all her earnings on the cheapest version of a security camera she could find. She installed the camera in the living room facing the kitchen, ensuring the two spots of showing evidence of any intruder. She set the camera to record during her shift at the store.

She didn't think this invader would come out again until she was gone, but the next morning proved her wrong. A dull ache in her head and a stinging throat woke her up early. Bleary-eyed and slightly nauseous, she went to the kitchen to find something to

smother the pain, thinking water and aspirin would help. A quart of her father's favorite ice cream sat on the counter completely empty, the bowl next to it holding a mint chocolate chip puddle. After the fear that she wasn't alone in the cabin mixed with hot anger that this stranger was making her a fool, her fear washed away.

Each day Elise came home from work and spent hours watching recordings of an empty house. She began to give up. Every time she tried to catch the intruder on camera when she was gone, it didn't come out. She would see the things it left behind. The past week she found a wet umbrella sitting on the porch after a rain-storm. The food in her refrigerator seemed to disappear faster. There was also a random set of new shoes next to her work ones.

She started to grow increasingly frustrated that the person living there was coming out still, and she couldn't catch them yet. Elise had wasted all that time and money spent trying to capture a glimpse, just for them to again evade her advances and make her look foolish. Elise was never one to like games. They made her aggressive. This intruder was taunting her. If she did one thing, it did the opposite. Anger started slowly, her scanning the previous day's footage once more and finding nothing, again. It was like a small flame in her core, but it spread fast—like a forest fire deep in the dry summer heat. The feeling was familiar but new at the same time. Elise's skin burned and itched. She set the camera down shakily on the counter. The corners of her vision turned cloudy, and she no longer had control of her breathing.

"You're making me look stupid." She whispered, her voice shaking, "But I know you're in here. I know it. I can feel you. You're crazy if you think I don't know you're here." A laugh tore from her throat, and she looked down at the camera. "I don't need a camera to catch you! I'll do it myself!"

One second the camera sat on the counter. The next, it was on the lawn outside following a loud crash. Elise froze. She looked up at the source of the noise. Glass fell, joining the shattered remnants of what once was a window.

Elise called off work the next couple days, figuring they probably wouldn't even need her help. She didn't know how to process what had happened. The broken window sat covered with the old tarp. She didn't want to look at it or think about it. A bad taste crept up her tongue every time she did. Explaining what happened to her father seemed impossible. There was no logical explanation for the broken window. The camera was unusable now. Cracks covered the lens, and the battery cover wouldn't latch shut. Still, after her brief meltdown, she couldn't shift her thoughts from the intruder. She felt violated that a stranger could coax a reaction like that from her. The anxiety made a home in Elise, continually nipping at her brain. She felt like someone was watching her.

She figured that the person was coming out of hiding when she was asleep. She would just have to sleep a little bit less if she were to find it. This was the solution to all her problems.

She lay in her bed waiting. She didn't hear anything in the extra hours she stayed awake, so she added more. Staying up later and later each night, it was getting harder to stay awake. She went back to work to keep her job. It didn't offer solace like it used to. There was no distraction from her thoughts that switched from the intruder to just how tired she was getting. The fourth day Elise was back at the store was the hardest. She had been staying up late for almost two weeks now. It felt like she got no sleep at all. But Elise was determined, though she hadn't found anything yet. The few times there were noises, it was nothing but the cabin settling or the wind. Several more times she had seen more dishes on the counter and food she couldn't remember eating. She'd just have to go without any sleep to catch them.

"Elise." She snapped her head up at the sound of her name. Jen was standing in front of her, hands on her broad hips. "I was calling your name a million times!"

"Oh. Sorry, Jen. I'm just a bit tired," Elise mumbled, just barely loud enough for Jen. Talking took too much energy.

"Girl, what is wrong with you? My shift just ended, but no way I'm leaving you here. You're going home." Elise tried to protest, but Jen wouldn't have it. "Argue with me, and you'll be off the schedule for a month. Now get on outta here. Get some sleep."

Elise was off the schedule until further notice. She was too tired to get angry. She wanted to tell Jen that she crossed a line, but she couldn't. This gave her more time to catch the intruder.

She headed straight to her room and pulled out her laptop. Sitting on her bed with an open note pad, she started taking notes on building booby traps in your house as security. The bed under her was so warm, so comfortable. She could feel it reaching out to her, trying to pull her in. Her eyelids drooped every other second, threatening to close. She desperately wanted to sleep, to forget everything that happened since her father left. Maybe it was all a messed-up dream, and she hadn't woken from it yet. But it was real, and she couldn't sleep, if there was someone in her cabin that was watching her, taunting her, she needed to end it.

It was dark when she woke up. At first, she didn't know where she was, When she looked at the alarm clock next to her bed, it read 3a.m. She had slept for almost 12 hours. She was mad at herself. She threw off the blanket and rushed to the living room.

Her anger spiked again, filling her chest with heat. It had been out, and she had missed it.

The television was on again, as were the lights in the kitchen, and the counter was a mess. There was a fire in the fireplace and a bottle of butane leaking onto the rug next to it. The screen door on the front entrance to the cabin was flapping wildly in the wind. Water was spewing into the kitchen with the tarp loose above the sink. The cabin was a mess. It played her again. Trashed her cabin. Fury surged through her veins like hot magma. She was going to get it out. It was going to pay. She was going to make it pay.

Without a second thought, she made her way toward the east side of the cabin. Elise didn't care how small she was, the adrenaline in her veins could surely rip someone from hiding. She banged her fist on all the doors, hard. It was just now that she noticed the nameplates on every door. The only one she could read in her fit of anger read 'JASPER, KEEP OUT!'

"I'll give you one chance to come out on your own." She spoke calmly at first. The silence she was greeted with changed that. "Come out! I know you're here. Come out!" She'd just have to drag them out herself. But when she tried opening the doors, the lock prevailed. "Goddammit. Get out! Get out! Get out!"

She ran back to the kitchen and grabbed the hammer from the toolbox. Even in her adrenaline-boasted rage, she only marred the solid doors. "I'm going to get you out. You just wait!" Elise rushed to the living room frantically. Searching for something, anything, that could help her get through that door. Her foot hit something laying on the floor; it was the lighter fluid "I got you now."

Elise sprinted out of the house, throwing the door open. The wind whipped around her, pelting her with an icy rain. Steam was rising from her skin. She ran toward her car, slipping in the muddy driveway. This would be it, the final plan. She was getting them out. She would get proof. Throwing open her back door, she desperately searched the back seat. She groaned and went in the driver's side door, reaching over and opening the glovebox. Elise tore things from the compartment. Then she found it: the brand-new bottle of lighter fluid her father made her keep for emergencies.

She wasted no time bounding back to the cabin, spreading mud all over the carpet trailing to the east. Fumbling with the bottle of lighter fluid, she tried to open the lid. Impatient, she hit it against the wall, breaking the cap off and cracking the top of the spout. Its liberating smell spewed on the walls and carpet. She walked up the hallway, spraying it on every door. She laughed at how it sprayed out of the broken top like she was pinching the tip of a hose. Elise backed up into the living room, spraying the couch and the chairs,

going over the counter in the kitchen, and finally into her own room, emptying the bottle on her bed.

She would finally get it out. She stood at the edge of the hallway to the east side of the cabin, which she knew held the intruder. She let gravity do its work, letting go of the match right onto the sippy puddle of lighter fluid. It ignited in a flash, singeing the ends of her hair. She yelled one last time while laughing, "If you won't come out on your own, I'll just burn you out!"

Elise sat in the driver's seat of her car. The fire grew faster than Elise imagined it could. Even for an old log cabin. When the cabin was almost entirely engulfed in flames, she was sure the intruder would come out any minute. The pressure of the fire burst through the windows. She could see the tarp flapping in the wind, burning. The intruder still hadn't appeared. Tears she didn't know she'd been collecting started to pour from her eyes. The flame illuminated the inside of the car, casting shadows that morphed with the blaze.

She sat watching the cabin as the screaming flames died and the night went dark once more. She watched the embers blink through ash. Light poured over the forest as dawn broke. Fresh tears slid down her face, chilling her bones as she stared at the charred skeleton of the cabin. Once again, she felt herself wishing her father never left.



SHE STRINGS THE BEADS TO MAKE A BRIGHTER DAY Natalya Reid

It was almost a week before winter break, when Abella ran her hand over the pink paper, smoothing the creases and steadying her breath, that she realized she had a problem. People always said she was angry, that she always looked about ready to snap, but she never saw it in herself. She didn't feel angry. She was frustrated, annoyed, tired even. But that white-hot anger that was supposed to be there, the kind she was always accused of having, she never felt it.

Flattening the paper wasn't helping anything. She didn't even remember balling it up. She heard shuffling in the other room and with a heavy sigh, she shoved the paper in her jacket pocket and started packing because her family refused to celebrate anything on an actual holiday. Christmas was coming three days early this year and they were staying at her uncle's place.

Her uncle was an eccentric old man with a peculiar taste in wall art. Everything was abstract, and while she could get behind the idea of nothing having real meaning, red and yellow smudges on canvas weren't her preferred art form. Her uncle was also colorblind though, so she decided he probably couldn't see it anyway.

When the gifts were finally doled out Abella had a hefty pile of gift cards to stores she didn't know were still open and a pile of holiday cards written in calligraphic fonts she was pretty sure half her generation couldn't read. She tucked them into her bag and by the time she reached the living room, Charlie was giving out clay like it wasn't his gift to begin with.

Her little cousin had gotten a tub of air-dry clay for Christmas and decided everyone needed to try their hand at making something. Abella didn't think much of her choice. She had an empty necklace chain at home, so she decided to make a single bead. She had a big family anyway; if everyone made a big project the kid wouldn't have anything left. So, perched on the arm of her uncle's couch, she rolled the clay in her hands, making a small ball, and then poked a toothpick through it. She spun the little piece of wood until the hole was sufficiently wide to fit on the chain. Her cousin was running around the room and checking on everyone's progress. Charlie seemed satisfied with her results, and Abella thought she did well too. She wasn't necessarily known for her creative side. She kept that secret. She didn't need anyone thinking she was going soft. She went home and forgot it ever happened.

A few weeks later, she was rifling through her drawers trying to find something. She couldn't remember what that thing was, but she could've sworn it was there. Instead, she found the bead. It was a gray little thing with a hole barely wide enough to fit on the chain it was intended for. It was uneven and bland, and she immediately decided she loved it. Something about that wonky little chunk of clay was so incredibly familiar and she was attached. She slipped a pendant off a different necklace with a slimmer chain and switched them out.

She held the small clasp and studied the charm. The bead was nothing substantial, but she couldn't help being a little proud of herself. It had been a long time since she had created anything. Abella was, after all, known for her destruction.

Will saw her piece-of-shit necklace early Monday morning on the way to her Spanish class. He asked her if she was okay. He wanted to know what on God's green earth was around her neck and if someone was forcing her to wear it. He wanted to know if this was a cry for help, or if someone was threatening her. It was not. She considered stabbing him with a pencil.

Will was one of those people who liked conventionally pretty things. He liked clean surfaces and questions with only one true answer. She wondered what would happen when he finally realized the world was about the biggest mess that existed. She didn't expect him to understand, but he could've been a little nicer about it.

"You don't like it," the bead weighed heavy on her neck.

"It's fine," he said like he was in pain. He shouldn't be. She hadn't stabbed him yet. "I mean, why wear jewelry without the," he made a vague hand motion, "jewel part?"

She glared at him and wondered how someone who appreciated beauty so much couldn't immediately see it in something so wonderfully simple. The bead wasn't perfect, but it was hers, and she would not have him insulting it. He apologized and backtracked of course. She couldn't really blame him; it was pretty early. Monday mornings did that to people.

"What about adding color? You could paint it."

He was right, she could paint it. It could still be simple, just a little brighter. She could do that. This was good. This was exactly the kind of thinking she needed. There was only one problem.

"But what should I paint?" she asked, and the boy had the audacity to shrug in response. He suggested she paint something meaningful, whatever that meant, and refused to clarify. She decided she was going to break one of his fingers. One of these days, he was going to be the reason she finally snapped.

As soon as school let out, she went to the local craft store and bought a decent array of paints. She went for a set of natural colors, whatever that meant, and a tube of white and black. She got home and spilled the contents of the store bag onto her desk. After reading a fairly short article on color theory, she almost felt prepared. She pushed the tubes around to clear an area and started the tedious work that is creating something from nothing. In the end, she had a light teal bead with small white swirls. Satisfied, she set it to dry on a piece of paper towel.

When she checked on it in the morning the paint was smeared and had an imprint of those patterns paper towels always seem to have. The paper almost had more paint on it than the bead. She guessed it looked okay. It wasn't horrible, but she could do better. But what did "better" mean anyway? She needed to consult an artist.

The only artsy person she knew was Cameron. Abella fully intended to corner her and bombard her with questions at the next possible opportunity. That opportunity happened when Abella was given yet another hall pass to go to the office. This one wasn't even on the official paper; it was just a sticky note with a signature. She did threaten a classmate, though, so she supposed it could be worse. She caught the girl on the way to the cafeteria and did just that. Their principal glanced at their interaction before deciding whatever was happening was none of his business. Good for him.

Cameron had dyed her hair again. While this in itself was not unusual, she had chosen an unusual color. It was orange, so very orange. Orange like lifejackets and traffic cones. Sequoia was sitting at the table with her when Abella arrived. Sequoia's hair had been blue as far back as Abella could remember. But those two looked wild sitting next to each other... just wow. She was pretty sure if she lined up her friends, she could make a rainbow. Abella considered waiting until Cam was alone but she decided a second or third opinion couldn't hurt. She slid onto the bench and crossed her ankles. This conversation was going to take longer than she liked.

When asked, Cameron eyed the bead like it was actually a piece of art, like it was museum worthy. Cam was a true critic in this moment, but sadly a critic of few words. Sequoia dropped the thing as soon as it was in her hands. The poor girl was so clumsy, such a bad case of the dropsies.

"I like it," Sequoia said. She picked it up and rolled the bead around in her hands before setting it on the table. "It's got texture."

Cam took to glaring at the little lump of clay as if it had personally offended her. "What'd you do to it?"

Abella blinked, "I made it." She had thought that was obvious, but clearly, she was wrong.

Sequoia's eyes widened and she grinned. "I love it!"

"It's okay," Cameron grunted, "You just need some practice." That was high praise coming from Cam, and Abella was going to run that high as long as possible.

She saw Ellery on her way home, and he had plenty to say about her newfound interest in jewelry making. The problem was absolutely nothing he said was helpful. She often wondered what happened in that head of his and how on earth he had better grades than her. Ellery was no goddamn help ever. She didn't even seek out his opinion, but he gave it anyway. She barely occasionally considered him a friend. Her real friends told her she was lying to herself, but she told them they didn't know him like she did. She'd lived next door to that boy for three years, and the only thing she learned was that he was a menace. He never actually did anything wrong, but he was annoying and practically radiated chaotic energy. He had ideas and always found a way to give them real shape. She almost respected him for it, but that didn't have to change her opinion of him. He could use some humbling. Her friends told her they knew he was a menace, but they all kept and loved him regardless. Because even if she didn't consider him her friend, he was their friend.

Max showed up halfway through their biweekly study group/gossip meetup and said they wanted to know about the damn bead. They would not be left out like this. When presented with said bead, Max huffed a little with narrowed eyes. They stretched their arms behind their head, "That's it?"

"What'd you expect?"

"I don't know, but El wouldn't shut up about it so..."

That made sense. Max was more Ellery's friend than anyone else's. It was almost difficult to find one without the other. Max looked mildly disappointed. They'd expected more than a smudged little piece of clay. Further proof Ellery was a menace, convincing people this was important. She would have to yell at him when he got home. She knew where he lived, and she was not afraid of confrontation. Will told her to calm down because Max was just trying to be excited for her.

In the end, her friends were all traitors and conspired against her. Ellery knocked on her door one morning with a bag of plain beads and a tub of clay just like the one her cousin got for Christmas. This was apparently a gift from all her friends. El told her if she needed anymore paint, she could come over and borrow some. His aunt had offered. These people were on to her and her secretly creative nature, but she didn't have it in her to be mad about it. As far as she was concerned Ellery's aunt was a saint, and Abella would not disrespect her like that. She attempted to thank him for bringing it over, but Ellery said he had to get back before Max burned down the building. Ellery was attempting to teach them how to cook, so she was spared the awkward conversation.

She found out that if she dried the painted beads on a line or string the paint wouldn't get messed up, so she set up a few strings around her room, taping and gluing thread to bookshelves and walls like it was going out of style. They looked like tiny clotheslines. Tiny stupid little clotheslines that she couldn't help but laugh at the ridiculousness of. The beads her friends got her had some kind of clear coat on them, and the paint wouldn't stick. She was going to have to file the coating off. She'd complain about it to them later.

So, this was a thing she did now. People were noticing how her necklace changed all the time, always one bead but never the same color, shape, or pattern. She started turning the beads into bracelets and earrings too. She even gave Cam a pair of earrings for being the only person she knew with actual advice. Abella didn't think much of it, but apparently, she was an artist now. Their word,

not hers. She refused whatever title they gave her on principle, but an art teacher she had never met approached her about putting something in the school showcase.

At this point, the beads had meaning; every single one told a story. One bead, in particular, had a small pan and flames on it. Max hadn't been pleased with the depiction, but Ellery had laughed for a good few minutes and gasped like he was dying. What they had deemed "The Cooking Incident" was then banned from friendly conversation for Max's sake. It was the first bead she'd made with her new materials. She had planned to make one every time something big happened in her life, but better were those small everyday moments. The ones she always tried to grab at when she was sad or lonely. She could make them stay, give them a physical form, and immortalize them. It was meticulous, repetitive, almost therapeutic. It was almost a month later she realized she hadn't been sent to the office in weeks.

It became a daily thing, a ritual of sorts. If she wasn't painting and molding, she was designing and planning. There were sketches in the margins of her notebooks that weren't there before, and when she looked at them, she smiled. It had been a long time since she'd done that without care. It made her cheeks hurt.

And maybe her room looked like some rainbow spider took residence there with all the string attached to her walls, but she was that colorful spider. A bright little thing lit up like a caution sign, and whoever didn't notice better know what kind of venom she was packing. She could lean back on her bed, keep an eye on her web, breathe, and be content.

Will told her on Saturday that she looked happier. There was some kind of bounce in her step that he hadn't seen in a while. He said he was proud of her. She told him he should shut up before she seriously hurt him.

It was nice.



BROTHER Makenna Joppich

Rain lashed down on the rooftops as my bare feet pounded down on the wet asphalt. My heavy breaths created clouds in the air as I ran down the street.

“You better get back here, Justin! We just want to talk!” A voice yelled after me, shortly followed by cackles of laughter.

I kept running, my calves burning as I desperately attempted to create some distance between the voice and me. And by the sound of the laughter, there was more than one voice. More people to chase me down and attack me.

Then, as if the universe sensed my horror, I stumbled over a curb as I tried to get back onto the sidewalk. My heart was beating loud in my ears as I righted myself, gearing up to start running again. I felt blood from the scrapes on my knees soaking into my blue jeans.

The rain was coming down much harder, so much so that I could barely see a foot in front of me. When I finally start to run again, I ran smack into something solid. I turned around and tried to run in the other direction, only to have the same result.

A crack of lightning lit up the night sky and illuminated three figures surrounding me. Their mouths were drawn up and

SELECTION OF MERIT **FACE OFF** Alicia Fortuna

twisted into devilish smiles. They were wearing their varsity jackets, something that I had seen them in ever since I had known them. They were Donovan Jensen's friends. If I knew anything about Donovan, there was no way to get out of this.

I pushed my wet hair out of my eyes as I stood up straight, trying to ready myself for a fight. I forced myself to take a deep breath.

"You don't have to do this," I said, forcing words around the lump that was beginning to form in my throat.

"Sure, we don't," one of them laughed. "But we want to." There was a telltale glint coming from his hand, the knife now illuminated by a dim streetlight.

A sudden fist to the face blindsided me, sending me sprawling into somebody's front yard. I instinctively curled in on myself as I took some hard kicks to the ribs. I was hoping that with less of my body exposed, I would get hurt less. Blood dripped from my lips as I tried to get up, but my efforts were squashed as I was shoved back down to the ground again.

I was flipped onto my back as one of the assailants pressed a boot into my chest. My fingers clawed at the grass underneath me as I gasped for air. What I'm sure was only a few moments, quickly turned into what seemed like hours.

"Hey, guys. Nice night for a jog isn't it?" I choked out with a bloody smile, trying to diffuse the situation. The last thing that I needed was to piss Donovan off. "But I thought you guys don't run. Last that I knew, you guys just drank beer all weekend."

That comment was quickly met with a fist to the face. This was followed by another punch, followed by several more kicks to the chest. The beating caused tears to gather in my eyes.

"Oh, look! He's starting to cry!" One of them laughed and leaned down, getting so close that our noses almost touched.

Forcing a look of defiance onto my face, I used this opportunity to launch a wad of spit into their eye.

However, without a warning, I felt the cool metal of a switchblade against my throat as they somehow leaned in closer. "That was a nice little act you put on, Justin. It's almost a shame that no one is around to see how pathetic it is." My breath caught in my chest as I felt the blade press closer to my jugular. "We told you what would happen if you didn't quit the team, dude. As a friend of Donovan's I assumed that you knew that he didn't need any competition. He's up for a full ride at Michigan State! He doesn't need recruiters looking at somebody else."

The weight was suddenly lifted from my chest as they all backed off. The knife was placed back into a pocket as if they hadn't just threatened me with it. "Remember, Justin," one of them said. "All you have is Donovan. Remember when he put in good word with Coach and got you the starting position? The least you can do is return the favor. If you don't... you'll have nothing. Nobody. Not even your addict mom or deadbeat dad. So, you better do what is best for you. Okay?"

Before I could respond, they ran off. They just left me laying there in the muddy grass as they ran away. I couldn't even make myself move. I didn't have the energy for it anyways.

Suddenly, a porchlight flicked on and it illuminated the entire front yard. I could hear footsteps approaching, but I couldn't bring myself to care. Nothing could be worse than the damage that had already been done. Whoever was coming could literally kill me and I would just let them do it.

However, an audible gasp cut my thoughts short. "Holy shit — Justin? Is that you? What the hell are you doing here?" In the blink of an eye, my best friend Bo Avery was standing over me. I could see his eyes widen in horror as he saw the state that I was in. "What happened to you?"

I opened my mouth to respond, but I decided against it. I knew that if I tried to talk that the tears that had been gathering in my eyes would begin to fall. I wasn't going to let that happen. Not now. Not here. He didn't need to worry about me.

Bo seemed to nod in understanding. "C'mon, brother. Let's get you inside." He wrapped my arm around the back of his neck. He heaved me up onto my feet and we hobbled inside.

In my blind panic, my feet had carried me down the streets that led me to Bo's house. Me and Bo are brothers. We have known each other since we were in the sixth grade. I had just moved from Oklahoma and was having a hard time adjusting. Everybody was wearing Under Armor and Nike, and I was wearing blue jeans and cowboy boots. My accent only made things worse. The second I opened my mouth, everybody looked at me like I had three heads.

Bo was the first person that didn't look at me like that. He sat with me at lunch when nobody else would. When things started to get bad with my mom, he convinced his parents to let me stay with them for almost a week — and any other time that I needed after that.

His parents treated me like their own. They fed me and even paid the pay-to-play fees so that I could play football. Hell — Bo's parents even bought me my varsity jacket when I couldn't scrounge up the money. When my mom left with one of her boyfriends for Christmas, they invited me to come up north and spend the entire holiday break with them. Bo's mom and dad have been more parental to me than my mom ever attempted to be.

"Hey. You with me?" Bo said and placed a hand on my cheek. "You were spaced out for like, five minutes."

I blinked hard and pulled myself out of my thoughts. My head was pounding with what I could only assume was the start of a migraine. "Yeah-yeah. I'm good. I'm good."

Bo smiled and took a washcloth to the side of my face, wiping at fresh blood. "So, would you like to explain why I found you in my front yard at..." He trails off, looking at the clock on the wall behind him. "Three in the morning?"

I try to huff a laugh, but pain explodes in my ribs. It takes me a moment to gather my senses. "It — it was Donovan...again."

Anger and worry flared in his eyes. "Seriously? He cares so much about that damn scholarship that he jumps you in the middle of the night?" He sighed. "What were you even doing out in the storm anyway?"

"I wanted Skittles."

Bo looked at me incredulously. "You braved a thunderstorm so that you could satisfy a late-night craving?"

I nodded. "I was studying for the history exam tomorrow and I wanted something to snack on. Besides, the walk to the party store was only like, five minutes."

He chuckled, but his mood quickly turned into something sour as he peeled away my shirt. The sopping wet fabric revealed a size-ten footprint in the center of my chest. "I'm gonna kill him—"

"He wants me to quit the team."

Bo looked at me, his brown eyes incredibly wide. "He wants you to quit?" He paused, looking into my eyes.

The flash of recognition was instantaneous.

"You aren't actually considering it are you?"

I sighed. "What else I'm supposed to do, Bo? They pulled a knife on me. What happens if they decide to use it next time?"

"That scholarship was supposed to be your ride outta here, Justin! You can't just give up!"

"Didn't you hear me? What am I supposed to do if they decide to actually use the knife again? Just let them stab me?"

"You don't have to worry about that."

"How do you know? You can't be with me every waking moment of the day!"

"It won't!" He yelled, slamming his hand down hard on the bathroom counter. I flinched and fell so bad that I nearly fall off my perch on the side of the bathtub. Noticing my reaction, Bo's anger seemed to ebb away. "Nothing will happen to you. Not while I am here."

I shook my head, taking a deep breath. "Bo, I have to quit. You know what Donovan will do. He'd actually kill me."

Bo placed a band-aid on the cut on my forehead. "You are not going to quit. You deserve that scholarship. I've seen you play. You work harder than anyone else. You — you have been through so much... you just can't give up."

I wiped at my face in an effort to hide the tears that had begun to fall. My right eye was getting harder and harder to open as the swelling got progressively worse. "What if they come after me again? At school?"

Bo smiled softly and handed me an ice pack that was wrapped in a dish towel. "Don't worry about it. You're my little brother, alright? I'd do anything for you."

I laughed softly as I hold the ice pack up to my eye. "Dude, I'm four months older than you."

Bo ruffled my hair. "But you're shorter. So, you technically are the little brother. Now, if you excuse me, I have to get you some clothes before you freeze to death in my bathroom."

"You better remember that I'm the little brother next time I whoop your ass when we play Call of Duty!" I called after him as he steps out of the bathroom.

"You also better take a shower, too," He retorted. "I don't need you stinking up the entire house!"

I laughed and hopped into the shower, trying to clean myself up and take my mind off of the possible torture that was going to be the next school day.

Just as expected, football practice the following afternoon was an absolute nightmare. I could hardly breathe during our drills because of all the hits that I took to the ribs. But to make things worse, it was an open practice. That meant that parents, friends, and family could watch us all while we ran through warm-ups and plays for the upcoming game.

I felt Donovan's friends' eyes on me as I tried not to give them the satisfaction of seeing me in pain. Every instinct that I had was telling me to walk right over there and punch them square in their smug-ass faces. But I didn't want to make a scene. If I just picked a fight with them, I would be no better than they were.

Bo wasn't at practice, though. Which was a bit odd; he always tried to come to every open practice that we had. But it all clicked into place as coach walked onto the field late and made his way towards me. He was never late. I tried to take a deep breath to calm my nerves.

"I need you to go to my office. I'll be right behind you," he said. His face held an emotion that I couldn't seem to describe.

"If this I about my performance today, I can do better. I promise. I'll — " I said, a hint of fear tainting my voice. I had never seen that look on his face before. I must have screwed up. I thought I was so careful about hiding my pain. But I guess it didn't work.

"Just go, Justin." He gave a tired smile. "We'll talk in my office."

I nodded and trekked back to the locker room. When inside, I tried my best not to cry out in pain as I changed out of my practice gear. The boot-print shaped bruise on my chest was a bright shade of purple now.

When I reached Coach's office, Bo was sitting on the cushioned bench right next to the door. I looked at him, approaching cautiously. "What the hell are you doing here? I thought that you said you had work to do."

Bo just looked up at me. "We'll talk about it later. Just go inside."

I looked at the door, then back at him. "What did you do?"

"Justin, look..." He started, but the look on his face said it all.

"You told Coach, didn't you!" I said angrily. "What the hell, Bo?! I told you not to do anything! You know what kind of hell Donovan will put me through if he finds out?"

"I had to protect you, Justin. That's why I told my parents--"

My eyes widen. "You told your parents?! Dude! Have you ever heard of keeping secrets?"

"Keeping secrets doesn't expand to hiding threats on your life, Justin. Do you have any idea what it was like to find you last night? I thought you were dead!"

I shook my head and walked into Coach's office without another word. I knew that Bo told his parents, but what I didn't expect was to find them sitting in the office. They had been waiting for me this entire time.

His mother immediately welcomed me with a warm embrace. "Justin, why didn't you tell us sooner? We could have helped you."

I pulled away from her, giving a tired smile. "I didn't want to worry you. You guys already do so much for me."

Coach, Donovan, his friends, and a police officer filed into the room a few moments later. And I could have sworn the room was going to explode.

"This afternoon before practice, I was notified by the Averys of a disturbing incident that occurred earlier today."

Coach started off, taking a seat at his desk. "And I am disgusted with the conduct that has occurred within my team."

"Sir, whatever you've been told...it isn't true." Donovan interrupted and Coach glared at him so hard that I thought that his head was going to explode.

"**You** will not interrupt me again, Jensen. Is that understood?"

I have never seen Donovan back away from anything before. The look on his face was absolutely priceless.

"From what I understand, you sent a group of your cronies after Justin and threatened his life. All over what, Donovan? A football scholarship?" He sighed, a small smile growing on his face. "Since I have heard of this incident, I have also decided that my team does not need to be associated with your toxicity. You're off the team."

"Coach, you can't!"

"I most certainly can. Now, get out."

Donovan glared at me before storming out of the office, slamming the door shut behind him. Normally I would have been intimidated, but this time, I didn't feel scared. He didn't have any leverage over me anymore. I was finally free of the curse that is Donovan Jensen.

However, when Donovan left, his friends tried to follow him. The cop stepped in between them and the door, blocking them from following their leader. "You three need to come with me!"

One of them spoke up, fear evident in their voice. "Are we going to jail?"

The officer laughed and nodded, escorting them out of the office. "You guys didn't expect to get off scot-free did you?"

Once they were gone, I could feel all eyes on me. All anger was gone from Coach's eyes now, the emotion replaced with a look of empathy. "I am so sorry that your suffering was overlooked, Justin. But I have to ask you, why didn't you say anything?"

"I didn't want to distract the team. Donovan started his little reign of terror just before playoffs started."

"You know that you can tell me anything right?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Well, now Donovan has screwed himself over, we need a new team Captain. What do you think?"

"I think that will be a nice change."

"That's not what I'm asking, kid."

"What are you asking?"

"I'm asking if you want to be team captain. The players seem to listen to you when you speak up. That's the kind of leadership that we need on this team."

A huge smile spread across my face. "Alright. Let's do this."

Coach extended his hand and I extended mine in return, shaking it. "Now go home, Justin. You've been through enough these past couple of days."

I nodded and filed out of the room, followed by Bo and his parents.

"I still can't believe that you told him, Bo." I sighed, running a hand through my hair.

"I had to. I care about you, Justin." He wrapped his arm around my shoulder, pulling me close before ruffling my hair. "After all, you're the little brother."

I laughed and pulled away, bolting down the long corridor. "Yeah, I may be the 'little brother,' but at least I don't act like a three-year-old!"

I heard Bo's laugh echo down the hall, followed by his footsteps chasing me down the hall. "Just wait until I get my hands on you! You'll see who the real three-year-old is!"

I just kept running and running. But this time it wasn't out of fear. This time, I was running away physically, yet I knew I was running towards my brother. This entire time, I thought that I was alone. I was terrified of being a burden. But after today, my brother had kept his promise. With him here, he wouldn't let anything bad happen to me.



SHORT STORY SELECTION OF MERIT **THE RUBY-EYED MAN**

Jacqueline Wahl

Zippering up my dress, I climbed into the car and drove excitedly to the Ruby Eyed Man's address. How lucky I must be to be cordially invited to his royal masquerade ball. The car rolled to a stop as my eyes widened. This man lived in one of the largest homes in the state, he was every girl's dream, but his dancing was to die for.

The man was known to everyone as the Ruby Eyed Man, who lived in the quartz castle. None know of his actual birth given name as his heritage is unknown. However, he responds strangely to the name Baron. The tale goes, he took a boat from across the sea and came here to London. He brought twelve times his weight in gold with him and has been living like a king since. The quartz looked almost as soft as silk but was tougher than brick when touched. Someone might even guess it was so strong that the house could survive a hurricane. Inside was even more divine, the ball room surrounded by large glass pane windows. The first few panes had masks painted on them, the next few had blossoms, and the last few were blank. The room was pure white with the exception of soft pink and blue pastel drapes clinging to the windows. It was large with an ash wood floor that was littered with flower petals, freshly picked from the trees outside. The dance floor was lit up by a tear shaped chandelier. There were strange people, mainly women; they all wore dresses hand stitched and crafted specifically to their liking. Some of the higher class people had dresses made from the most expensive and rarest of materials - spider silk, yak hair, even dried kelp. One woman had a dress made from snowflakes, and though it only lasted a short while, it was very stunning. None of the women talked

SELECTION OF MERIT **LUCY IN THE SKY** Brandi Schmitz

to anyone besides the group they entered with. Their eyes darted around like a seagull soaring above the sea searching for scraps. Something about this place was oddly off putting. But it wasn't that way until the Ruby Eyed Man was noticed from the terrace. It took but a moment for everyone's eyes to land on him as he sashayed down the spiral staircase.

His suit was laced with perfect purple petals, and his shoes were made from the finest leather. The fabric clung closely to his chiseled body, the kind of body I pictured my future husband having. He was a man whose touch was so gentle he could hardly knock over a dried sand castle. Yet his gaze was deafening and remarkable, and his voice could blind you with just a single syllable. His gloves resembled life, easy to run from, impossible to escape. His lips were pin pricked with thorn bushes that could choke down my breath with just a smile. Despite all these things the Ruby Eyed Man wore a mask. A mask visible to every eye, even those who never had sight, and yet though no one had removed it, everyone tried. He lifted his glass of tinted nectar and spoke. "A toast, to the women with whom I get to dance tonight." Everyone cheered in return as we all took a drink. We all knew what was going to happen; however, Ruby Eyed Man's eyes locked on a young woman chattering nearby. He sat his drink down as he walked over to the group of maidens. They all giggled as he took the lady's hand and kindly guided her to the center of the room, where the pianist began to play.

I watched through glaring eyes as she spun and danced with the grace of a rhinoceros. Her nose resembled that of a horn and her clamping feet were like weights. I was shocked to see her friends supporting her and her so called dance with the Ruby Eyed Man. He too seemed to be enjoying himself; how I had not the slightest clue. When the first maiden smiled, I was confused as of the time. I knew I had entered the ball room as the sun was setting but her teeth were more yellow than the afternoon sun. When she laughed, I looked around as I thought a pig was being butchered in the kitchen. Her dress screamed eye sore as it was much too tight for her body and was barely holding up without straps. It was

made almost entirely of golden silk, and I'm sure it took a team of horses just to pull up the zipper. She wasn't even dancing properly, her feet were slipping and sliding like deer on asphalt flailing about to escape the car screeching to a halt. I am almost certain the east side of the ballroom got a clear view of her undergarments; heaven knows if she was wearing any. I sipped on my dragon tinted rock salt champagne as I stalked from the edge of the room. The song was nearing its end as a large thud was heard and down fell the rhino-looking woman. She had stumbled over her own hoofs and slipped to the floor. Everyone in the room froze as her friends let out sharp gasps. The Ruby Eyed Man simply smiled and offered her a hand, his body language showing no disgust in her small slip up. The woman's face, however, was already closed in tears as she sprinted out the door in a sob. The man let out a soft breath and turned to the next woman closest to him.

This woman was different from the first: she was small, frail, and sweet. I had noticed her when I first entered the castle. She smiled at me which is much more than any of the other women had offered. She curtsied when taking a drink from one of the servants, which was unheard of. I watched as her nostrils flared from the drink that was tickled in alcohol. She was younger than most of the women here and if I had to guess the youngest to ever attend one of these parties. Her dress was the kind of dress one would wear to a simple picnic: it was made of cotton and had a pattern of flowers and ladybugs. It was clearly purchased from a tailor, rather than hand stitched like the rest of ours. When she arrived, she was escorted in by a tall man who quickly knelt before her and helped her straighten her dress. With a quick pat to her ink dyed hair and kiss to the nose he dashed away like a coyote from a gunshot. The clock had barely chimed ten before that tall man returned to the entrance of the castle. I eyed him closely as he wore simple farmer's clothing, and the stench of horse absorbed the room. The guards nodded before firmly walking over to the small girl who was startled by their armor. The farmer waved kindly with the same smile as the young girl. She gave a soft bow and a thank you to guard as she sprinted

to the large doorway. She was engulfed by the arms of the man who waited eagerly for her. They both exited talking and laughing about the party, as the small kind-hearted girl brought up everyone who scattered across the mansion. She had never been offered a dance by the Ruby Eyed Man, which for her sake, was a better option.

As the night drew on the tension between all of the women grew as the gossiping grew and the glares became intense. The Ruby Eyed Man was not fazed and continued to dance with the women.

He danced with the beat of the music not missing a single note. The music varied from woman to woman, some had upbeat pop, some had salsa, some had classical slow ballroom music. I watched his eyes, his royal ruby red eyes, as they trotted across the angel he held in his arms. His hands were calloused and scabbed over but they trickled with delicacy as they pranced across her pale white skin. Their fingers intertwined as she twirled. Her dress spun from spider silk wisped across the floor as her shoes made a pitter patter sound. Oh, how I longed to dance with the Ruby Eyed Man, who made every girl swoon with just a twitch of his hand. I stalked with my tender fingers mimicking that of the women in his hands, wishing and pretending it was me instead. I watched with a small smirk as other women did the same, yearning for the thing I was waiting to claim as my own.

The girl in his arms had a voice softer than that of skipping stones on the beach. I heard her speak only once since the night began, and that was one word in a language I was not familiar with. Her eyes held something deeper than her voice could ever put together. They were dark, damaged, deranged even. She looked as if she had seen and put an end to many people's simple lives. Her dress seemed to have a red tint to it, and as she danced small specks of red liquid slipped from its fibers. The wind whistled by, ruffling his doe-like hair as the night reached its peak. The Ruby Eyed Man stood still and watched as the coughing spider spun girl was the only one making a sound. The man slowly lowered her to the floor as the

medics rushed over. Their cases tapped against the hardwood floor. Mumbling and whispers escaped the crowd. In the end the medics carried her away as she lay gasping for breath. The Man cleared his chest and offered another dance to the next woman in line. Slowly all the women were rushed away for some reason or another. Their children were sick, they had to use the restroom, their noses began to bleed. They rushed away with their hands to their noses, afraid of ruining their dresses.

The Ruby Eyed man stopped his dance as the music followed in his wake when the last maiden rushed away crying. Every step the man made was calculated by the music; he ran with the smoothness of a clock. Every second there was something new. Every minute a new dancer fell into the clutches of the Ruby Eyed Man. Then his tree-like arm reached out towards me. His tender fingers practically begging to be held, to be comforted by the warmth of another. Without a second thought my sun-kissed skin was washed away by the Ruby Eyed Man as we danced. Something was awfully comforting about the arms of a man who just held a fallen maiden. He traced the music chords, step by step, note by note. Before long, my breath grew faint, and my thoughts became ripples like a rock tossed onto a still lake. They rained over and became like lightning in the night sky. Only glimpses of myself remained as I dazed into the Ruby Eyed Man's soft soul. Something about him put me off; even the pianist had stopped playing. Now it was just the man and I. Before I could resist, before I could beg for a second dance my feet grew staticky and I fell to the floor as I felt the blood in my veins stop flowing. This was what they had talked about, right before the bad thing happened I would see horns freckle off of The Ruby Eyed Man's crown, and a pointed tail wrap around his torso. I reached up begging for assistance from the man who had me entranced before I even met him. I couldn't hold on any longer, the darkness had consumed me. I had been the last volunteer at the Ruby Eyed Man ball. Now the only entity in the entire estate was that of the Ruby Eyed Man.



VISUAL ARTS

**AWARD
WINNERS**

"New View" by Skylar Aleman captures the socio-political nuances of the 2020 year paired with historical contrast. Both sides of the composition are filled with symbolic objects that invite comparison and contemplation for the viewer.



FIRST PLACE VISUAL ARTS

NEW VIEW

Skylar Aleman



"Strange Medicine" by Doug Penrod is a complex composition that brings together diverse visuals. The craftsmanship, color selections, and symbolism merge together to create a harmonious and mysterious image.

SECOND PLACE VISUAL ARTS

STRANGE MEDICINE

Doug Penrod



"Snowy Dirt Road" by Heather Brassfield is a beautiful depiction of one-point linear perspective on a deserted road. The scene is quiet and solitary, and seems an appropriate metaphor for the social distancing that took place in 2020.

THIRD PLACE VISUAL ARTS

SNOWY DIRT ROAD

Heather Brassfield

