

2022  
**SEVEN GILL  
SHARK**  
*Review*



At The *Seven Gill Shark Review*, writing is a means of change, an expression, a timely response. We're looking for writing that communicates something valuable and challenges our existing default settings for understanding. We're not limited by an idealized standard of writing, but open to any submission when the writer has something clear and valuable to say.

We hope to read your work in a future issue.

## Editorial Statement

At the *Seven Gill Shark Review* we believe in the validity of expression. As a result, we select writing based on what it communicates, not on how well-edited it is. We publish writing in its original form, without correcting mechanical issues unless they interfere with comprehension.

You may notice some typos as you read. Try not to let them interfere with what the writing is communicating. As a reader, we ask for your grace in skimming over these superficial issues and to focus on your personal connection to what you're reading.

We also publish academic writing which we believe communicates something valuable. In selecting these pieces, we have not considered them the same way we assess research papers and essays in our classrooms. Our focus here is on the quality of the writing and its creativity, cohesiveness and comprehensibility.

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Coffee Setup/ Mikayla Craghead

FICTION

## Fried Chicken and Kentucky Sunset

*A hill country story*

by Brie Wolfe

Ava Marie stood at the stove staring into the pot of bubbling oil. The flame under the pot was just right, she didn't need a fancy thermometer. She'd been frying chicken seemed like her whole life. As a tiny child, she'd stood on a chair in her mama's kitchen, watching chicken legs turn golden on the stove. That crisping skin aroma meant home and comfort to the child. Now, the grown woman, she wiped hot tears off her cheeks with the yellow checked dishtowel, *I've come to despise the smell of chicken fryin'.*

That morning, when she handed Billy his lunch box, he grumbled as usual about the boss he hated and his shit job.

"I want my favorite supper on the table when I come home tonight, some fried chicken and biscuits." *He only ever thought of himself. Thank God he doesn't have a dog.* Ava tried to smile.

"You cheer up now, girl, you livin' the good life. No bastard houndin' you all the damn day long, not like what I have to take. You livin' like a princess in my house," Billy chided.

She had stood at the door watching him drive off, the rising dust cloud on the road erasing the sight of him.

Hot oil sizzled and spattered, the tongs were awkward in her left hand. Her right arm throbbed in a sling. Everyone in the county knew Ava's fried chicken was the best anywhere, same as everybody knew the beatings she caught from her husband may one day kill her. Her chicken took awards at the fair. The beatings, well, such things are not spoken of.

Getting the table ready with just one hand slowed her down. She glanced up anxiously at the clock, the hands moving



to that hour she dreaded every day. She took steaming biscuits from the hot oven. She heard Billy's truck skid on the gravel. Dinner wasn't ready yet. Her panicked stomach knotted around her spine. Rushing back to the stove, she dropped the last pieces of chicken in the fat. The screen door slammed behind Billy.

"Hey baby GIRL, I LOVE the smell of that chicken fryin' when I come in the house. C'mon here, give your man a nice hello."

Ava glanced at the chicken bubbling in the pot, Lord, still twenty minutes out. Billy, smelling of bourbon, stumbled into the kitchen. Grabbing at her blouse to pull her closer, he tripped, pinning her right arm against the wall. Ava cried out and Billy slapped her.

"Don't you be trippin' me in my own house, bitch."

"Billy, please, sit at the table" she pleaded, "I'm fixin' to get your dinner right now."

He ripped off the sling saying, "What the hell is this piece of shit on your arm!"

Ava sinking her teeth into her bottom lip, whispered, "Honey, please, just sit down."

Taking a beer from the refrigerator, he sat down at the kitchen table. Ava bit down into her raw lip, hoping that would be enough to stop the scream exploding in her throat.

She carefully placed the chicken on the plates, spooning gravy over the biscuits. She could only carry the one plate, setting it gently on the table in front of him. She turned back to the counter for her dinner plate, when Billy's plate crashed to the floor at her feet.

"This chicken ain't goddam cooked."

Ava's eyes narrowed. She knew damn well that her fried chicken was perfect.

"Billy I'm sorry, here, take my plate."

She had set the second plate in front of him when she saw that look in his eyes. The familiar fear of being beaten rushed through Ava's body. She ran from the room.

She knew right where that loaded shotgun was, and she knew how to use it. She had thought about this over and over for months. Standing in the kitchen doorway, she was outside her body, watching the scene unfold. Sharp pains pierced her right arm as she aimed. Billy was drunkenly nodding into the plate in front of him.

Ava calmly said, "Billy Ray you're a bastard son of a bitch."

Billy looked up as Ava put a shotgun blast through his chest. His chair flew backward, his shirt blooming red with blood. She stared at the rose-shaped splatter on the wall behind the chair. The room swirled. A kaleidoscope of shapes and colors burst in the air.

Next thing she knew, Ava was standing at the sink, watching the golden Kentucky sunset fill the kitchen. With the comforting smell of fried chicken in the air, a slight smile crossed her face.

It was over.



Ram Skull/Simone White

## Don't Call Us...

by James Donzella

The sign read; Today's Specials. Not that Herbert Gunderson Wills was particularly hungry for Red Beans and Rice, with Andouille Sausage listed at the top. Granted, Remaulade's did serve the finest Louisiana style Cajun fare within a hundred miles, it was that Herbert's hero, writer M. Merrit Myrtlewood hung out there. Herbie knew everything about Myrtlewood. Born in Baton Rouge, played football for LSU, he even knew what the M stood for but he would never tell. Herbie wanted to be just like Myrtlewood, a writer—scribe—wordsmith.

He walked by The Booth. The sign on the wall read:

*This Booth is Reserved for*

*M. Merrit Myrtlewood.*

*If you are seated at this table and he arrives, you will be moved to another table.*

Herbie took a seat at a small café table in the corner where he could keep an eye on the scribe's booth. He ordered the Red Beans and Rice. It was the most inexpensive entre. Inexpensive, he thought. Not cheap. Cheap has a negative connotation. Herbie was always thinking about words.

He had a lot of time to think, as he ate his Red Beans and Rice with Andouille Sausage—about his future. One day maybe he would have a booth reserved for him. In the meantime, he would study his craft. From the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians to graffiti artists plying their craft on bridge overpasses, Herbie soaked it all in.

Herbie finished his meal. M. Merrit was a no show. He would try again, but now it was back to his day job, cleaning

Porta Potties for Porta-San at construction sites. A lonely job it was, but it gave him the opportunity of becoming a M. Merrit Myrtlewood.

Herbie would shower and change clothes at the Porta-San facility before heading home, a quick stop at Remaulade's just to check on The Booth, then to his apartment to hone his craft. Herbie twisted the key in the lock when a voice called out.

"Herbinator!"

Brad Shute, his neighbor down the hall, tall, athletic, good looking and a real pain in the ass, sauntered up to Herbie.

"Hey, Brad," Herbie said annoyingly.

Herbie hated being called Herb—Herbert—Herbie. He liked to go by H.G. but no matter how hard he tried, everyone called him Herbie.

"Favor bro. Potta coffee's on the burn, no milk. "Sup with that? You got any moo juice in the fridge?"

"Yeah, sure."

Herbie entered his apartment, Brad followed. Brad went into the living room. It contained a small couch positioned in front of the TV. TV stood on a stand made of plywood and cinder blocks. In the corner a desk, the things Herbie had been working on spread across the top.

Herbie entered, pint carton in hand.

"Your work?" Brad said.

"What's that?" Herbie said.

"This," Brad said pointing to the desktop.

"Yeah," Herbie said embarrassed.

He knew what Brad was thinking. In your dreams pal. Who'd pay to look at your crap.

"Herbinator! I never knew. Way to go bro," Brad said. "How's that one. Way to go... bro. Get it? Rhymed it."

"Yeah, great. Here's your milk," Herbie said handing Brad the carton.

“I’ll bring it back in a flash.”

“It’s okay. I have another pint. Keep it.”

“Way to go... bro,” Brad said as he opened the door.

“You can use it, if you want.”

Herbie dejectedly sat at his desk looking at his notes.

It’s all crap, he thought.

The menu board at Remaulade’s hostess station read: Special Today. Chicken Gumbo.

Herbie sat at his usual table. Ate his gumbo, and was about to signal the waitress for his check when it happened. It was like a bolt of lightning slammed into his chest. His heart literally stopped. He felt the blood drain from his head. The room closed in. He feared he would faint, face planting into the remnants of gumbo in the bowl. M. Merrit Myrtlewood seated himself at his booth. He was right there!

Hyperventilating, Herbie darted to the Men’s Room, splashed cold water on his face to calm down. Getting his sea legs back, he made his way to The Booth.

“Excuse me,” Herbie said sheepishly. “I’m one of your biggest fans, Mr. Myrtlewood.”

“I don’t sign my name on anything,” he grumbled. “Get lost, kid.”

Myrtlewood’s eyes were blood shot. Skin had a yellowish hue indicating the tertiary stage of cirrhosis of the liver. His hand shook slightly as he picked up the glass containing a double shot of Scotch, brought it to his dry, cracked lips.

“I just wanted to say, sir. I aspire to be just like you.”

“Whaddaya nuts! It’s a tough racket, kid. The road to success runs through the sewer. The sewer! Stick to whatever shitty job you’ve got. You’ll be happier.”

“I clean porta-potties for a living.”

“Wow! That is a shitty job,” Myrtlewood said as he downed the Scotch.

Herbie looked as though he was about to cry.

“Have a seat, kid.”

Herbie sat across from Myrtlewood, the stench of alcohol filled Herbie’s nostrils.

“This business will break your heart. You pour out your blood and guts and they tell you don’t call us, we’ll call you. By the way, if you don’t hear from us in three or four months, it’s because your stuff sucked.

“Yeah, I know,” Herbie said.

“What’s your name kid?”

“H.G. Wills.”

“Jesus Christ, I need another drink,” he said waving his hand in the air. “H.G. Wills!? Was someone already usin’ Arthur Conan Boil?”

“Just the thought of not being a writer gives me a terrific pain in my guts,” Herbie said.

Barmaid was at his table within seconds with another double.

“Just thinkin’ of a story by H.G. Wills gives me a pain.”

“I need to write or I will die,” Herbie said.

“I was like that when I was young. I’d have a dollar. Go to the ninety-nine cent store and buy ten packs of Ramen Noodles—kept me goin’ for another week. Rejection after rejection brought me to a point where I was thinkin’ of goin’ to that indoor pistol range. Only need one bullet.”

“But you hit the big time. I used to see your work everywhere,” Herbie said.

Myrtlewood waved to the barmaid. Herbie never saw him drink the last shot.

“Yeah. One day someone liked my stuff. I became the flavor of the month. Everywhere I went people wanted to buy

me drinks. And the women. Jesus Christ, the women. Two—three in one night. None of them ever wanted to know who I was or what I was. They just wanted a piece of me. A trophy. I slept with M. Merrit Myrtlewood! What did it get me? Nothin! When nobody wanted my stuff anymore, nobody wanted me. All I have to show for it is a booth at my favorite restaurant. Gotta buy my own drinks now.”

Herbie waved to the barmaid. She brought another double.

As the weeks passed, Herbie continued to submit samples of his work.

Dozens of emails arrived in Herbie’s box.

We received a sample of your work. It sucked. Thanks for wasting our time, they read.

Herbie had enough. He swept his notes and writing samples into the trash and created a profile on i-need-a-fricken-job.com. One afternoon, while he was sitting in front of the TV, Ben Affleck or Matt Damon, Herbie never could tell them apart, appeared on the screen. He talked about the ones who almost achieved and the ones who embraced the moment. Herbie got up from the couch and sent out a flurry of submissions. Fortune does favor the brave.

Exactly one week later Andy Williams’ voice filled the air singing To Dream the Impossible Dream, from the Broadway Musical, Man of La Mancha, as it announced an incoming call.

“Hello,” Herbie said.

“I’m calling for H.G. Wills,” the male voice said. “You sent us a sample of your work. We’d like to talk to you about representation.”

“Who is this?” Herbie demanded.

“Pardon me?”



“Brad?”

“Huh?”

“Very funny, Brad. You know you’re a real a-hole!”

Herbie disconnected the call, wishing he had an old phone that he could slam the receiver down really hard. A moment later, his cell started playing Andy Williams again.

“HELLO!” Herbie yelled into the phone.

“Is this H.G. Wills?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, don’t hang up. You sent a sample of your work to us. I’m Franklin Strum with Simon, Simmin and Salmon. We’re interested in representing you. Can we meet tomorrow afternoon?”

There was a long silence.

“Hello? Mr. Wills?”

In shock, Herbie feebly uttered, “Yee..yes, I’m available tomorrow.”

Herbie signed with Simon, Simmin and Salmon. He was on his way... well it was at least a start. Herbie’s emotions bounced between fear and elation as he finished his first writing job.

“Congrats,” Franklin said. “We submitted your piece, it’s been accepted.”

Herbie, bursting with pride, marched up to the hostess podium of the Whispering Bamboo Sushi Bar where the menu board rested on an easel.

Please Wait to be Seated it read.

A signature in the lower right corner of the board read.

H.G. Wills.

Herbie’s work finally presented to the public. It had

that Herbie flair, developed over years of practice. It was good. He could call himself , H.G. Wills—writer.

He took a seat at the bar, letting the moment sink in.

She was in her twenties, the girl sitting next to him. Shoulder length blond hair, striking blue eyes.

“Is that your work?” she said her thumb pointing toward the hostess stand.

“Yeah.”

“I like it,” she said. “Can I buy you a drink?”



Fern Bowls/ Mikayla Craghead

## The Run

by Isabelle Unsinger

When I witnessed my first run, I was seven years old. I was lucky to have been so old, as other children were often brought along at earlier ages. Dad had been insistent that if I was to be a strong participant, I would need to know what was at stake. He would have taken me earlier, he reminded me, if it weren't for my mom.

They disputed this for hours whenever they thought I was sleeping, whether or not they would bring me along this year. It was always the same picture. Momma, clad in her lavender pajama set, constantly pulling her thick wine colored hair away from her face. She would sit at the edge of the bed with her left knee bouncing up and down. Dad would be pacing in front of her, wearing his gingham pajama pants. His glasses would leave indents on his brow bone as he argued and he would rub his head as if he were searching for the hair that he routinely shaved off. Finally, when I turned seven, Momma conceded. She had thrown her hands up in the air and said "Fine! Have it your way. But when she won't sleep for weeks on end I won't have you bitching to me about it."

We arrived late to the edge of the woods, where the old highway met the new one. We parked our car a good distance away from the crowd and made our way down to the finishing line. By then, the participants had already been within the forest for a few hours. As I peeked from behind people's legs and weaved through the crowd with my parents, I began to take in the uneasy atmosphere. Dark trees extended their spindly limbs in strange directions, reaching their delicate branches toward the stars. Lichen and moss suffocated the tops of the trees, swaying with the breeze. To my seven year-

old imagination, the forest appeared as if it were breathing. Not a sound emerged from the forest except for the occasional creak and groan of the old wood. The stars sent wicked shadows across the forest floor, cascading down towards the field.

Lining the edge of the forest, a group of old women kneeled praying with one tall woman circling them with smoking herbs. Dark purple veils concealed their faces and clutched between their hands they held various bundles of flowers and red fabrics. Behind them were men, big men. I tried not to look at them too much, as big men had always scared me to death. The glimpses I caught were of worn animal masks, stained black work clothes, and bruised and bandaged hands.

I clung to my dad's leg, refusing to look anymore. He chuckled, gently stroking the back of my head, he then hoisted me up on his shoulders, much to the distaste of Momma. "It's not a concert, David. Put her down for God's sake! It's disrespectful," Chastised the top of my mother's graying head.

"Well how's she ever going to see anything if all she gets are people's backsides?" He spat, his smooth round head glistening ever so slightly under the light of the stars. "Besides, Moon here has to learn a few things from this otherwise what's the point of bringing her here?"

"She can learn just as fine on the ground." My momma had a way of arguing that made her seem seven feet tall. This was no match for my father's simple words so he huffed, muttered a retort under his breath, and placed me on the ground again.

As we continued forward, I caught glimpses of worried mothers and fathers, siblings and cousins, all huddled together desperately trying to distract themselves from the woods and the run. In one family, there was a little boy younger than I whose eyes were swollen shut from crying so much. Little hiccups escaped his body and his dad patted his back, trying to

soothe him. His eyes were on the forest, refusing to land in any spot for too long. The forest watched him back, with unforgiving and unrelenting snaps and cracks. I felt a tug on my chest, sealing up my lungs and making it difficult to breathe. Momma noticed and rubbed my shoulders. "It's ok Moonie, it's ok." She murmured over and over again, the wrinkles deeping in her forehead.

We found ourselves a spot beside the masked men, much to my protests. Try as I might to avoid them, my eyes kept wandering to the masks. Each mask was dirtier than the last, some water marked, others stained brown in places, all wrinkled from misuse and sun. They looked at the forest with familiar eyes, scanning for something.

One man, bigger than my parents, saw me peeking out from behind Dad. His mask was grubbier than the others and looked to me like a lion. The mane was scratchy and frayed, the nose all but gone, but still a lion nonetheless. The corners of Lion Mask's dark eyes creased with what I remember as a smile. I stuck out my tongue as an undeveloped fight or flight response. He noticed my father and gestured to me grandly.

"Yours?" He chuckled. Dad hesitated, then grinned, lifting me off the ground.

"She sure is." He ruffled my hair aggressively and I desperately tried to cover my eyes with his knobby fingers. Lion Mask examined my face. Momma's lips were pursed in a thin pink line, arms glued to the sides of her body.

"How old?" A thick, unkept and unruly fingernail scratched at skin under the mask.

Momma swallowed, "Seven. She's seven." She fidgeted with her coat zipper, and my father quickly swatted her hand down.

A roar emerged from the mask that reminded me of a laugh as Lion Mask leaned back in amusement. "So that's why."

His joking tone vanished, the light in his eyes replaced with an absence of warmth. He pointed that finger at me, around my forehead and eyes. "She's forest food." Momma tore his finger away from my face, surprising me into a fit of hiccups.

"You can't just say something like that because you wear that mask you prick!" Her voice trembled as she flung her words against his torso. "She's got as good of a chance as any kid that goes in there."

Lion Mask was unmoving, whatever amusement he may have had was gone. "They might hear you." He growled, turning back to his post. "Forget it." Momma paled and drew back. Dad looked ashamed, beet red in the face and exhausted. My hiccups had begun to recede, with the promise of a return, one thing lingered in my childish mind.

I turned to Dad, who's red face had begun to travel to his ears. "Dad, what's in the woods?" His color vanished, and my momma muttered words of prayer under her breath. For the first time this evening, the other masked men shifted, a few quickly glanced in our direction, and one notably shuddered. Lion Mask released his throaty laugh again, but his gaze stayed on the looming trees. Momma's eyes pleaded with my father to tell me something. He sighed and turned to me.

"Moonie, I'm not sure I'm the best person to-"

"No, you certainly aren't." The tall woman seemed to float toward us, veil fluttering gently with the breeze. Momma and Dad adjusted their posture and clothing, and placed me back onto the ground before the woman. "And who is this one?" She asked dreamily, getting down on her knees to talk to me on my level.

"Moon. Moon Howards." Momma almost sounded proud, though I didn't understand why she would be.

The air around the woman shifted, becoming warm and familiar. "Hello there Moon." She extended her bony hand,

with chunky iron rings and bracelets covering most of her dark skin. I looked up at my parents, unsure. Momma eagerly nodded and Dad gestured for me to shake her hand. I gently clasped it as I searched for her eyes under the thick veil. Two black shone back at me, unblinking.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” I stated, hiccups beginning again.

“How very polite! Someone taught you well, sweetheart.” Momma could’ve swooned. I grinned up at her, then hiccuped. “Now then, I believe you have a question for me Ms. Howards.” She brushed some of my red hair away from my face, the rings cold against my cheeks.

“What is- \*hic\* in those woods? Why is this so scary?”

She continued to play with the hair around my face, twisting and twirling it as she spoke. “Before you or your parents were born, a family settled in these woods. They wanted to found a town. Do you know who they were?”

“The Arch family.” I responded, knowing at least that much.

“Good. Now, the Arches were a good family, and they wanted to raise their children in those woods as they had everything a growing family could ever need. They had neighbors though, neighbors who had been there first. The neighbors had one rule, and a simple one at that. ‘Never cut down the trees, we will provide you with materials for building the community. Just never cut down the trees, and you and your family can stay.’ More people began to arrive, setting up homes and shops and farms. But as the town grew, somewhere along the way the one rule was lost.” My eyes fell on the old women, who’s heads had turned slightly toward us.

“People began to cut down the trees, tearing them from the ground, roots and all. Our neighbors didn’t like that and they sent their friends into the town and took our children



from their beds. Desperate to stop it, the Arch family appealed to their neighbors. In turn, a bargain was struck.” At the sound of a gunshot, she turned away from me to Lion Mask. She shouted among the panicked sounds of the crowd, trying to find an explanation.

Lion Mask looked past the trees, and upon seeing a flash of red light in the distance turned to the tall woman. “Not ours.”

She stormed past me, yelling commands at the women and the masked men.

“Wait! \*hic!\*” I cried out to her as my parents scooped me up from the ground. “Moon-” Momma began. “Not now!” Dad finished. I tried to reach out to the tall woman, desperate to hear the end of the story. She had returned to the prayer circle, leading them in scores of feverish chants while the masked men pulled out knives and flares and guns from the folds of their clothes. The light from the flare and the stars sent shadows across our faces, with red and silver light shining across our eyes. At some point in time I had begun to cry, overwhelmed. Momma was consoling herself, muttering something I couldn’t understand under her breath while Dad violently shook. Their eyes were glued to the forest, horror plastered on their faces.

The crowd suddenly fell silent, all movement ceasing. Gasps and shrieks of terror erupted all at once as we gazed at the scene before us. The runners were floating in the air above the treetops, each body limp, unresponsive and detached, hovering as if a rope had been strung around their stomachs. Not a single one of the forms were recognisable. The forest trembled with anticipation and excitement. All at once they dropped, plummeting to the forest floor with deafening thuds and cracks. Momma was sobbing uncontrollably, Dad holding back tears. The red flare went out, plunging us into a silvery

night. The tall woman pulled herself away from the shaking veiled women, turning away from the wicked trees. She furiously walked towards us, her body convulsing with hate.

“That is what is in the woods, Ms. Howards.” She hissed, her jewelry clacking together. “Our neighbors are in the woods.”

## **Please Let Me In!**

by Chris Vasquez

Hey Seven Gill Shark Review staff,

I want to be a part of your upcoming edition! What would I need to do to be included? Would you let me in if I wrote like Dr. Seuss? Would you let me in if I was an eight-headed Baboosse?

What if I asked in Spanish? (*laissez moi entrer*) In addition, I can do the following:

I can give your school mascot a ride to the grocery store and back again.

I can donate blood at every other blood drive on campus (you can finally take a break from donating, school mascot).

I can fix my broken heater, water tank, and eyeglasses.

I can sketch blueprints of an aerial tram that takes you from the Student Center directly to the Eureka downtown bar of your choice.

I can promise to not attend Cal Polytechnic Humboldt events for a month.

I can ask that College of the Redwoods be renamed (Southern) Eureka Polytechnic.

I can promise to do pre-emptive Zoom bombs of classes.

I can get a henna tattoo of one random person on the Seven-gill Shark literary journal staff.

I can promise to keep my head about me, when literary references are dropped, and not blame those all around me.

I can dress up as your mascot, the pirate-y corsair, then give a 47-second lecture on the difference between sea legs, ocean legs, and peg legs.

I can ground a 17th century wooden ship on campus, inconspicuously titled Associate Faculty.

But back to my busted water tank; my frosty shower head has now replaced all the monsters in my nightmares. I know currently this is only a submission, but do any of you staff members know of a good electrician?! If you publish this piece I know there will be more eyes to answer my plea, so don't be afraid to put it in your next edition!



Drone Bros/Michael Andrew

## Together Alone

by Nicholas Nielsen

The rain came down in sheets over a nearly deserted parking lot. Tall beams stood at the edges of the asphalt projecting light from boxes fixed precariously upward, and in the distance, thick clouds crackling with blue lightning rolled forwards over a great expanse of farmland. A diner stood at the center of the tableau, emanating light from its plate glass windows that wrapped around the perimeter. A large sign declaring the location in red neon lettering: Big Rick's House of Slop.

Inside, Wiley had been waiting out the storm for some time. On his way to nowhere, the young man looked tired and racked with some sort of emotional turmoil. Greasy brown hair spilled down to his shoulders in dirty curls and his dark green army jacket dripped grime mixed with water into a puddle at his feet. He had pulled himself into the corner of a booth and was staring out the window with his eyes fixed on a horizon that he could barely see through the storm. A young woman in a black smock with white trim and a white apron stood behind the counter, hunched over a glass wall filled with all manner of pastries reading the paper while frustrated exclamations came faintly from the back; the single cook on duty taking pains to clean out the grease fryer.

Wiley stuck his hand into the pocket of his tattered old jacket and pulled out a wad of crumpled bills and jewelry and laid it out over the tabletop. He took inventory: 26 dollars, a worn set of pearls broken at the clasp, a woman's wristwatch, and a golden band inscribed with a single word: Always. The moment Wiley's eyes made out the inscription, the bell over the door wrung out and broke the silence filling the diner. A

large figure stopped in his tracks and took in his new surroundings. A beard peeked out under the hood of his dark green poncho and a large belly protruded out over his weathered jeans and blackened boots.

“Hey, hun,” A cheery voice piped over the counter. “It’s rough out there, huh?”

The man said nothing. His head swiveled around the diner making sure there was no one there that he did not know of before becoming fixed on Wiley at the far end. Wiley hurriedly scooped the trinkets and crumpled money back into his hands and stuffed them into his pockets as the man beelined toward him. Stopping at the edge of the booth, the man stared down into Wiley’s eyes and positioned his body to block him as Wiley began to slide from the wall looking to exit. A loud sigh emanated from the man, and he sat down on the same bench as Wiley, effectively corralling him. Some time passed before the man would speak. When he did speak, it was with a gravel voice occasionally cracking with deep pain.

“We were young when we first met. She had blonde hair and blue eyes which would light me up in a way that...” his voice trailed off and a tear fell to be caught in his beard. “I heard her voice across the room one night at a barn dance. In that instant, I knew the voice belonged to someone I did not know yet loved with all my heart, and when I found her, I didn’t even ask, just pulled her into the mess of bodies swinging themselves to the music. We danced for hours before we even knew each other’s names, and by the end of that night, there was no more me and no more her. Just us.”

“Listen, Mister,” Wiley spoke up, his voice betraying desperation, “I’ve got to go. I’ve got someplace to be,”

The man slammed his hand atop Wiley’s and gripped it tightly. “You’ve got nowhere to be just like me. This is where

we need to be.” The man would not look Wiley in the eyes anymore, his gaze held forward as he spoke.

“After that dance, we ran into the night together leaving our friends and families behind and making love in fields of fireflies. When the sun came up, we found we couldn’t move. Moving meant having to separate from one another, and we could not bear it. So I carried her for miles which felt like meters and hours that felt like seconds. I asked her to live with me, and she asked me to live with her, and we agreed that any space that did not have the other in it was not a space that was worth our time.”

Wiley shifted uncomfortably as the man continued staring out the rain-soaked window

“We started a business together where I would do the physical labor, and she would do the intellectual labor. I would build the houses, and she would write the bills. Ten years we did this. Creating and saving and dreaming. I never thought I would love anyone the way I loved her until the day that she gave me Sarah. Gorgeous and smart and pure of spirit just like her mother. I loved that child deeply, but so did God, and he wanted her back. And so she was taken from me as quickly as she was given.”

The man began to squeeze Wiley’s hand tighter; The faint sound of grinding bones complimented Wiley’s whimpering, as he tried not to draw attention to himself.

“It nearly broke us. It broke me, and it broke her, but it could not break us. We fell into each other and held one another up through indescribable pain. You couldn’t imagine the strength that something like that takes. We carried on like that for ten more years. Every day, a struggle. Every day, more grief. Every day, love holding the edges of a broken soul. Then one day, that strength overtook the heartache, and we knew we had made it through the darkest journey two people could take



together. We knew if we could weather that storm, then we could make it through anything together. We spent another ten years rediscovering the beauty of the world. Traveling and exploring and laughing and dancing.”

The man loosened his grip on Wiley's hand and turned his head to face him. His face streaked with tears, and his eyes glazed over with confused pain. The man's voice cracked as he spoke and he shook his head

“We were free...?” The words choked themselves from the man's heart and Wiley made a last-ditch attempt to stand and excuse himself. The man's hand caught Wiley by the shoulder and slammed him back into his seat.

“She was always a kind person. Too kind, I would tell her. I said, ‘One day you’ll meet someone who doesn’t see the world the way you do and that kindness will get you in trouble’ Well, one day she did. The police said she must have picked up someone on the highway who should have stayed stranded. They found her in a drainage pipe with a bullet in her brain.”

For the briefest of moments, the man took his eyes off Wiley and moved them towards the parking lot where he had seen his wife's car parked in a space far from the entrance. As the man returned his eyes, Wiley pulled the small rusted revolver he had used to kill the woman from his jacket pocket and began to extend his arm outward towards the man's head, but as he pulled the trigger, the man slapped the gun from his hand with a swat of his massive paws. In the same instant, the man moved his arms around Wiley and pulled him into a tight bear hug. His beard rubbed across Wiley's face and his lips pressed to his ears.

“Why did you do that? Why did you take her from me?”

Wiley tried to speak. Tried to beg for forgiveness, but the man held him too tight, and he could not pull the oxygen

down to his lungs required to breathe, let alone to speak. The man, for the first time since entering the diner, allowed himself to weep fully. Gasping for air in between anguished cries, he tightened his hold on Wiley with vice-like strength, and the sound of cracking ribs filled the booth. His internal organs perforated with broken bones, a rattling cry escaped Wiley's mouth, while his arms could do nothing but desperately claw at the man. Two beings, wrapped in an embrace as the full spectrum of emotional and psychical pain washed over them both. At that moment, neither had ever felt so alone.

## A Night at the Movies

by Endya Humphers

I wish I had worn jeans. But no, I got myself to wear a dress. A pretty knee length sage green with tiny white polka-dots dress. A what would have been just fine for sitting in a movie theater dress. Hair delicately braided to one side, and minimal fly-aways. Cheeks rouged, and eyelashes curled. And even shiny black flats instead of sneakers ready to be swept away like any damsel. And my distress you may wonder? Enduring the coldest goose-bumped legs on record. I did plan for this, in a way, I brought a jacket but I thought he would have been early, early enough where maybe I didn't even need to put on the jacket. But here I am, jacket zipped all the way up to my chin, legs wading through the swift relentless 9:45 at night breeze, and waiting. Waiting, standing, outside on the curb, so it would seem like I had just arrived. You would think all this time waiting and I would have worked off some of the nerves, but no. The teeth chattering thankfully hides my nervous shakes but the cold is not helping my heart rate. Don't really know how that's possible, but I can hear it in my head. My frantic drum roll for this fool to finally show up. Bum. Bu-bum. He's. Not coming. Bum. Bu-bum. He's. Not interested. Bum. Bu-hum.

I look at my phone and it reads: 10:00 p.m. no new messages.

The movie will be starting soon, maybe I should just go in. To hell with it, I'm done playing this game of naked and afraid. The warm whoosh of popcorn filled air is a much needed relief, I had planned on just standing inside by the door but at this point I just take a seat on a bench next to the arcade machines. Honestly I am not even interested in the movie we planned on seeing. Action packed meaningless bullshit is not

my cup of tea. But on the first date I didn't want to argue right off the bat, I think we've all pretended to like things we haven't for that first date. Being stuck watching a guy who has to rob a bank for the sake of saving the world seems like something I can endure to finally get my chance with him, hopefully we won't do too much watching anyways. Who knows, a girl's got to keep an open mind.

I scan the lobby in hopes of a sign of what I should do. Should I stay or should I go? I make eye contact with the person behind the cash registers. He gives me a long look, I think he's been watching me the whole time because he doesn't immediately look away. Or perhaps the words, I HAVE BEEN STOOD UP, are written all over my forehead. He lifts his eyebrows at me almost to say "this isn't the first time a perfect movie dress has gone to waste". With that I broke eye contact. Did this dark haired lengthy boy consider me another teen movie scenario? Girl stood up on the first date after dolling herself up for Mr. Right? Why did I care about what he thought anyways, he only knows what the last half hour has shown about me if in fact he has been watching me. But there was something inside of me that wanted to march right up to him and tell him that I was just early, yes early, that I wasn't being stood up.

I sit back and look at the ceiling. The weird pretend gold tiled ceiling that was put there to make this little town movie theater feel like it was worth more than little, peeling at each corner of the room. I realized I feel a bit like this ceiling, had the full intention of being a pretty authentic ceiling but because of lack of attention is becoming... unattached. Starting to succumb to its original value as a little small town nobody. I have never been one of the girls that gets asked out to the movies. That wears dresses, or flats. But I want to be. Instead of the townie background girl I usually am. But dolling up the outside doesn't always erase the feelings inside, does it ceiling?

I look over at the door as it opens with a gust of that frigid wind that my legs still haven't completely gotten over. I stood immediately, he came. I was beginning to think he had gotten hit by a car or something at this point. I bend down and grab my purse before elegantly rushing over to find him holding the door for someone else. Someone else in a pretty, little, good for the movie theater dress. My steps falter, it has to be a mistake. I slowly make my way to him although every polka-dot on my dress tells me not to.

I confront him, "Hey you made it, I didn't realize there would be three of us."

His eyes are everywhere but on mine when he responds, "Oh, I texted you saying I... couldn't... make it," at that I check my phone: 10:26 p.m. one new message:

"Hey I'm not feeling too hot, Idk if I can make it to the movies tonight. sorry"

My heart rate finally slows, "But you did make it... Why her and not me?" I couldn't believe the words so effortlessly flowing out of my mouth. He's speechless. Or he just doesn't have the care to think up a nice response. I know why her and not me, but I want to hear him say it.

"I guess you could come if you want..." he manages to come up with. The girl in the better dress makes a face like she would rather die than have me in that theater with them.

"No that's okay, see you in class." I don't let the pain hit my mouth when I give my best at a genuine pink lipsticked smile.

I caught the eyes of the dark haired boy from behind the counter, he had seen the entire event, and I noticed his eyebrows were raised and his mouth agape, he was just as surprised as I was. Hadn't seen that one before huh register boy?

I turned and once again *elegantly* walked out of the lobby to find that my heart had become much colder than the night's air.



My Shoes/ Janet Winzler

# POETRY



## Heartbreak

by Lawrence Orcutt

Mistreated and mislead  
Misguided and mistakes  
One more again for the heartbreaks  
Was it real or was it fake  
Over the coals goes my heart with a rake  
Am I dreaming or am I awake  
Addiction in my ear away the pain it will take  
Love is not opaque  
Fuck having it to I'll wear the damn cake  
You say fuck you  
The color is blue  
This break we can't hem it's more like a hew  
I am not through  
Depressions on que  
What do I do  
I gave you my view  
I got what was due  
My life is askew  
Walk in my shoe

I need a new boo  
My life's in review  
Bit off more than I can chew  
I need a cold brew  
This shit is a stew  
What's loose is my screws  
Fuck me no fuck all of you  
I'm no better than any other guy  
Then why oh why do you say I make you cry  
Time I can't buy  
What goes up must come down I thought I could fly  
In my ear the devil whispers "just get high"  
A log in my eye  
I just want to die  
Please don't cry  
I don't want you to hurt  
I feel like a jerk  
Love is too much work  
I'm going berserk  
Alone in the darkness my addictions lurk  
I scoff with a smirk

I did my homework  
Get off me Satan you Goddamned jerk  
Depression is deep  
Alone I weep  
A feel so damn weak  
I long for the tweak  
The future is bleak  
I feel like a freak  
I'm lost in this Creek  
Of being alone with just me  
In the dark I can't see  
From love I will flee  
I drown in it's sea  
A bumble to it's b  
The c to the d  
Follow the steps like the roots to the tree  
Blame it on me both the hurt and the pain  
I let love go like a saw through my brain  
My heart at full strain  
A runaway train  
Release from my chains

I know I can't stop this who am I to try and stop the rain  
This powers arcane  
I'm a bird not a plane  
The needle in my vein  
Welcome to my insane  
I love and I run I flew and I fall  
How can we stand together when I can not crawl  
This life seems like an endless hall  
I cry out but nobody answers my call  
Happiness shouldn't be a brawl  
In this pit I will fall  
This journey is now in snowball  
Another fastball  
The love is all gone replaced with just hate  
I can't solve this great debate  
I need to sit and contemplate  
What path do I take will determine my fate  
My addiction is roaring at the gate can you come to my level  
and just relate  
I love you now I loved you then my question is simple is this the  
start or is this the end



Bone Still Life / Mikayla Craghead

## Subjection

by Katherine Cech Latonio

She was a Shirley Temple 1930s girl, the blonde blue-eyed cherub ideal that still didn't prevent her beanpole brother from taunting her as Lardy Lois and Lumpy Lois.

As a teen, she hid her developing curves beneath homemade blouses made of rationed fabric, though she thought more about keeping her cardboard-soled shoes from disintegrating than about what was underneath.

At twenty-two, her figure called to mind Jayne Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe, but she still imagined herself trapped in pudge, and didn't know the power she could have yielded from the cone-shaped brassieres of the day.

During the 60s and married with five children, she finally became thin when mired in depression and numbed from electro-shock therapy that left her hollow-eyed and unable to even appreciate the cinched-waist dresses she now fit into perfectly.

Later, divorced and back in school, she slowly returned to herself and became, if not a "bra burner," then at least a liberated 1970s woman, but the years of dissertation-writing padded her like the chair she spent so much time in.

So, despite the accomplished middle-aged woman she became, most daily conversation managed to work in a discussion of her weight, regardless of her newly awarded Ph.D., overseas Peace Corps adventures or Fulbright fellowship work in Africa.

In her later years, she stopped sharing her poetry but never stopped sharing her latest attempt, and occasional success, in getting back into those size 10 pants.

Along with scribbled notes about doctor appointments, blood sugar levels, and pills she needed to take, she carefully apportioned her meals of boxed mashed potatoes and lo-cal bread.

Even in her last months while battling brain cancer with radiation treatment, when food held no interest and had no taste, she thought about the calories, fats and carbs, all while wasting away.

So it was sadly ironic when, on her last day, drifting away from us on the just-delivered hospital bed, my sister and I tenderly lifted our mother's pajama top to bathe her and were confronted by the holy grail of an amazingly flat tummy.

## **Animadversion**

by Andy Lai

Vivacious as our wish our memories may be  
they are bitter and abusive and are not met  
with hospitality. Their panache pangs  
we impatiently wait to see, that maybe, just maybe, things will  
be different, conceivably.

Elliptic memories are not hard to see,  
they are bitter and abusive and are not meant to be met  
with hospitality. Their panache pangs we impatiently  
wait to see, that maybe, just maybe, things will  
be done different, conceivably.

Elliptic memories are hard to see,  
they are bitter and abusive and met  
with hospitality. Their panache pangs we patiently  
wait to see, that maybe, just maybe, I could have  
done things different, conceivably.



## For My Dear Uncle Smokies (or 146,000 First Dates With A Marlboro Man)

by Sonnee Swisley

Dear Uncle Smokies, I think we should see other people.  
I mean, we could try to stay friends but we shouldn't.  
It turns out, and I long had a feeling about this, that you are a filthy pedophile.  
How was I to know how many times I would forfeit my lunch money to you?  
We could be alive with pleasure, together. Forever.  
My front teeth tried to hide their bite into my lip as you said,  
"You got a dollar for me sister?"  
I was a little girl and you were smokin' hot.

We held hands one rainy Sunday when I was five, our little secret.  
If only one hand could hold every cigarette I held after that day, if only you listened to me. If only no meant no.  
Every first one, a virgin lung,  
a three pack day in the tree fort full of grade school girls  
puff, puff, snuff sixty stolen Lucky Strikes on that Sunday. It never stopped raining.

We went to first base with Marlboro Lights cruising in Charlene's Chevy Luv.  
She's ten years older than us but doesn't want to be alone  
and neither do you.  
We made it to second base on Camel Lights bought from the gas station machine  
closest to my 6th grade classroom. Outside in snug denim, 8th grade boys lean  
against pillars  
and almost notice me.  
You said you'd be there for me always and forever Uncle Smokies, if only I  
Smoke, smoke, smoke that cigarette.

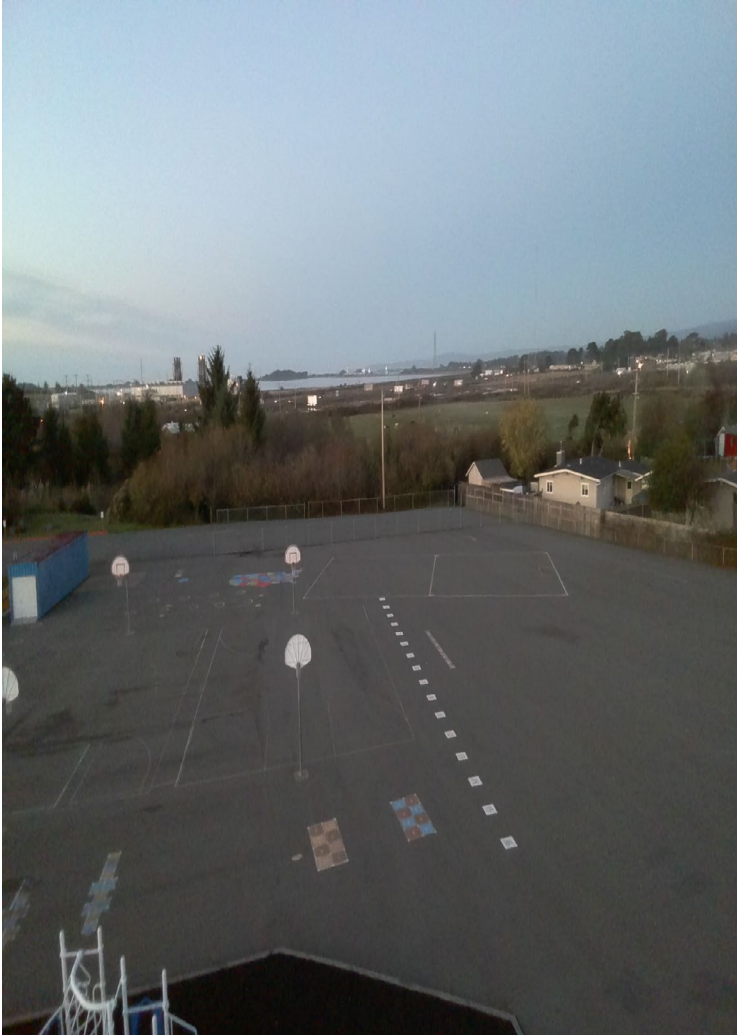
I didn't understand consequences  
going to third base with Uncle Smokies, Joe Camel's dirt-bag brother, son of crotch-  
ety Marlboro Man. In the liquor store parking lot,  
heavy lids, feathered mullet and peach fuzz mustache,  
Uncle Smokies relishing a tap on the shoulder.  
"You got a dollar for me, sister?"  
Lurking around, when no one was watching, convincing me to go ahead,  
play with those matches.

The party never has to end when you party with Uncle Smokies.

We started hanging out together before I knew that one day I would forget how to stop and would have to fight for my breath, for my blood cells to be mine again, before I knew what it meant to go all the way. Before I knew how you Uncle Smokies would be the best, worst friend I'd ever had, until finally it all somehow stops and I see you for the asshole you are.



"Study of Van Gogh – Peach Tree in Blossom/ Elizabeth Forcier



Playground/Michael Andrew

## Mechanical Door Ghazal

by Miguel Gutierrez

Waking up in the morning just staring at the metal door.  
My celly is brushing his teeth, I'm next, sink next to the door.

Picking things up inside the cell, so that I can clean the floor.  
Today is my day to clean and wipe and do my chore.

I wipe the windows, the walls and I wipe the door,  
but I cannot wipe the outside of our locked door.

The officer is passing breakfast delivered to the door.  
Food looks really skimpy, wish that I had more.

Yard's coming up soon, can't wait to step outside the door.  
As we're walking a single file line along the corridor.

A few hours of freedom outside the mechanical cell door.  
Blues in hand, so that I may get a package and store.

Hours gone by, a sound by the intercom calling yard recall.  
Officers calling sections to take it back to your cell doors.

I'm heading back the same route to the corner cell door.  
Finally, something good happens! Food in handful, food galore.

Birth bath time...hang a sheet on the cell door.  
Shampoo, bodywash, and water all on the floor.

Clean the sink, the toilet, and wipe the door,  
is now my celly's turn to do the same chore.

Mail passes by, the officer stops at our cell door.  
Could there be one letter, two letters, three maybe more?

The officer passes food once again to our door.  
Tray pick-up, the officer shuts the side door.

Night's here, time to chill, and mess around with the cable  
cord,  
T.V's fuzzy ,fixed it up, lay back and watch outside the metal  
door.

Mike, you had a good day, rest your mind a little more.  
Tomorrow you'll still see the same mechanical door.



Lost Thoughts 2/ Draken Munson

**Notacon Variant**

by Eric Ignacio

Notacon Variant

Im coughing and im sniffing Tears Keep flooding my eyes  
already bloodshot been up since last night WHO THE  
what is this frustrated in the mirror cause it never fits  
its a smile Just to get a lil closer ness

UGH

this mask will never fit who the WHAT IS THIS

(Impatient zero zero patience

Im the quarantine teen addicted to visine but im not  
my eyes sting in my fourteez but I SWEAR im notacon  
Victed at 19 for short

IM COVID 19 for long  
a very long time dont ignore me

Im the virus with prison storys

YOU CANT IGNORE ME

Oh thats what I get no thats what I got  
did it ever matter what im not im BANISHED

from humanity 6ft. X 6ft. public demand is  
ANOTHER 6ft. contagious I must be turns out

NO BUDDY CAN HEARRR ME

but I can definitely see



Keep Keeping your distance the further you get  
the clearer things get for me  
prefer it I bet you like it Just

WARRRY

I'm coughing and I'm sniffing  
tears still flood my eyes what's it gonna take  
WHEN do we realize this booster for my booster  
has to be enough let me go let me live my life  
Dr. Fauci tell 'em I did my time  
I just want to be with you dear world of mine



2-15-22

## **Flaws**

by Richard Palomino

The way I feel about you is dangerous

The love I have for you,

Cruel

Tormented and wounded

I'm bleeding for you.

As scars start to grow

I think to myself

Never will I go

A day without you

I could, I probably should

But I won't

Forever by your side

Like a shadow

That protects you

Trust and honesty

Was it ever really there?

Or are lies your reality?

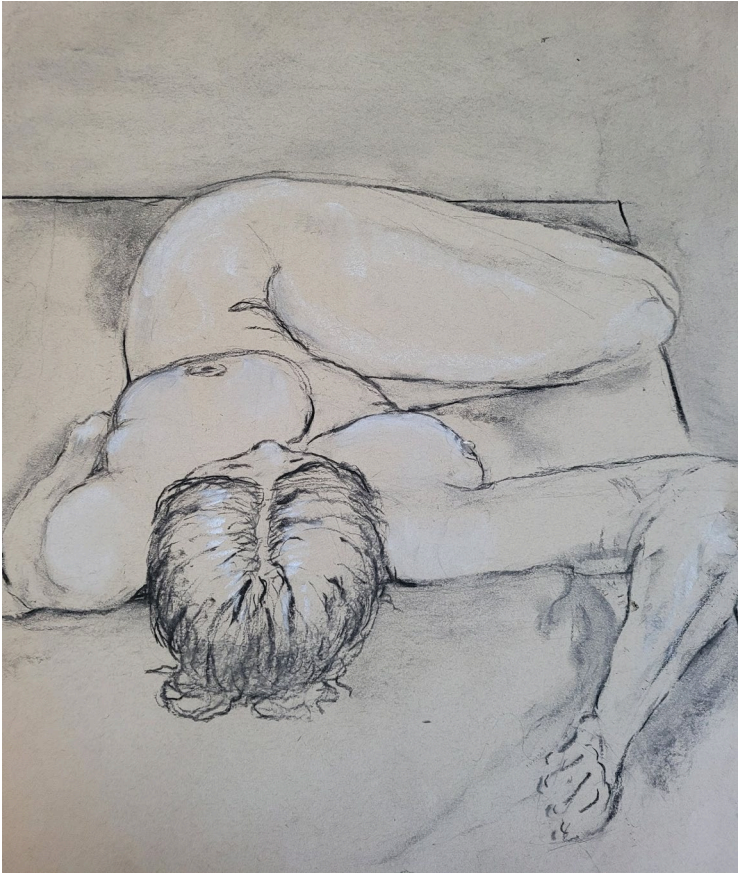
"Love."

A powerful word  
But just a word it is.  
Meaningless at times  
See words, I need not  
I express myself through solid actions  
But question is,  
These days are they ever enough?  
Dangerous, violent, serious  
A fire without containment, no end in sight  
Does your "Love" truly match mine?  
Only time will tell  
Do we make it,  
Or will I live  
My eternal Hell.

**for you, if you are reading**

by Brynn Oleda

I will not write you poetry  
    for you  
would never read it  
                    for poetry,  
symmetrically,  
relies upon conceding that  
the act of observation has  
an impact, has a meaning, so  
                    for me  
I write my poetry  
    for you  
if you are reading



Life Drawing/Janet Winzler

NONFICTION

## These Things Take Time

by Anonymous

I'm not an artist, I can barely draw a stick figure, but if I was, I could capture exactly how it looked the first time I tried a beer. Probably not too far off from a lot of kids first forays into that mystical adult world of suds and cider.

I was five maybe six, camping with my family and one of my Dad's construction buddies. Time passed and it was just Dad, construction buddy and five or six year old me. Under a tarp my Dad had strung up. Out of the rain. The two of them were drinking and Dad had me try his Heineken. Finally, my turn to try the bubbly liquid that made old people smile. I took a small sip and..... I was an alcoholic. Kidding. I spit it out. It tasted god awful. Why would anyone drink that stuff?

Ten years later I got black out drunk at my parent's post-remodel house warming party. Wine, beer, Baileys, whiskey, weed, whatever else. I puked in the drive way. I puked on the living room table. This was the first time I had had alcohol since that camping trip. And I said I would never drink. Ha!

I drank more in high school. For no other reason than trying to look cool and impress girls. Neither of which did I achieve with any success. Well, I did get a girlfriend eventually but that was due to my dashing good looks. Hmmmmm. Let's take a step back though, before going on. In the time between that first sip and the house warming black out.

Me being the youngest of four kids I grew up very much separate from my two sisters and brother. Mary, four years older, the next closest to me in age. Jennifer one year older than her. My brother Robert the oldest and four years older than Jennifer. You following?

Fighting. Lots of fighting in my house. Jennifer fighting Mary. Mary yelling at Mom. Robert kicked out of the house. My Dad (when he was home), mad about something and yelling louder than everyone. We had a 160-pound rottweiler named Apollo at the time. He learned that whenever a voice was raised to go downstairs, and hide in the alcove under those same steps. Me, I would usually hear this over my videogames or movies and hope the battle wasn't brought into my vicinity. Because, naturally, I would somehow become part of it and maybe even the one to blame at the end.

Then the fighting stopped. Jennifer and Mary were out of the house hanging out with friends. I liked to be alone. Peace. My own friends would call to hang out, and I would say I was busy, or say my Mom said no. I just wanted to be by myself. Just me and quiet and whatever I'd make of it. And that's how it was, with things getting even quieter as my sisters moved out after high school. The only thing left was dreading when my Dad was coming home from fishing. But, after he was done yelling at whatever demanded it, I could disappear downstairs. Turn on the TV and go away.

Alright, speeding forward again, my first girlfriend of almost three years dumps me when I'm twenty. I'm in a bad way. Prior to the break up we were living together. So, tail between my legs, I moved back into the parent's place. Now, this is the first time I drank to numb a pain. I'm sure we've all been through a break up. It sucks. Especially the first one. Her name was Aubrey and when she kicked me to the curb I hurt. I really, physically hurt.

My parents had plenty of spare bedrooms with all their kids gone away, but I chose to sleep in the garage. Sometimes on an air mattress, a lot of the time on the concrete floor. I hardly ate or drank. I cried and tried to sleep. Sent Aubrey messages on Facebook with no response. I lost nearly sixty pounds



in less than one month. Going in for a checkup, my doctor took one concerned look at me and prescribed anti-depressants. Which I didn't take. She gave me a list of therapists. Who I never called.

It was around this time that my brother and I reconnected. Unluckily for everybody though I had also rediscovered alcohol, and in those first two months following the break up I wanted to escape reality more than anything. Honestly, the desire to drink was the thing that got me out of bed in the beginning. I was still half a year shy of twenty-one and I'd try sneaking into bars, asking strangers to buy me a bottle, stealing. Then, when I did turn twenty-one, it was all downhill.

Somehow, I got a job as security guard slash dishwasher at a place in Arcata. It was very close to the plaza, which was convenient because I could go straight from work to the bar. Or, vice versa. Beer, beer, gin, beer, try to sleep, cry, cry, gin, gin, beer. You get the picture. After a while the cry went away and the beer and gin took its place. I was floating through life. Passing out in bushes, puking in the urinal at my work's Christmas party, ripping urinals down off the wall, and crying to strangers at the bar. But then, the most incredible thing happened.

No, I'm kidding again. Incredibly I continued drinking, and it got worse. I came to work drunk, didn't get fired, but quit a week later anyway. Then, I started commercial fishing for my Dad. Made about twenty-thousand dollars in three months and drank it all away during that same time period. This was in Morro Bay, right next to San Luis Obispo in Southern California. Home of Cal Poly Tech, party town.

If I wasn't on the water, or repairing the endless things that need repair on a boat, I was in the bar destroying my brain. Somebody told me at the time that Playboy magazine had ranked Cal Poly number three in the U.S. for the best looking

women on campus. Exciting prospect for a freshly dumped twenty-one year old, but for some reason none of them would look at me. At the time I wondered why. Looking back, it's blatantly obvious, and there is one perfect example of why: It was around 1 p.m., the optimal time for a couple of beers and a few shots before going to a movie by yourself. I walk into Bull's Tavern, and the bartender looks up and immediately tells me to get out, while at the same time starting out from behind the bar. Startled and confused, I say, "Okay, but can I ask why?". Looking at me with a mixture of anger and some creeping doubt, he asks, "Weren't you here last night?". Shockingly enough I'm not lying when I say no. After conferring with the one other customer in the bar, he says, "Sorry, there was this transient here last night we had to kick out for starting shit".

So, not only was this guy telling me I look like a homeless person, but he also didn't remember the countless times he had served me previous nights. Or, maybe he did remember me and I just never realized he thought I was a transient. Now, this might be a crushing blow to a somewhat normal person's self-esteem. A normal person might look at themselves and wonder why people would make these assumptions. But not me, for me it was just a day in the life. A simple misunderstanding. And so, it went. When I got back to Humboldt I was broke. I took the natural next step and sold my car and my few other possessions, bought a plane ticket to Ireland, and off I went.

While writing this essay, it really hit me how much of my twenties was spent being a drunken idiot in different places. With that in mind there are just two things I'll say about this trip. First thing: I left for Ireland with intentions of moving there. My brother was living there now. Him and his pregnant wife. I intended on being there for the birth and christening of my nephew. Second thing: Six weeks after getting to Ireland I woke in a construction site. I had slept on some scaffolding on

the side of a building, three stories up. I was in Amsterdam. I was broke again. And for some reason my family didn't want to talk to me, and wouldn't send me money. With no options left, I stumbled my way to the U.S. Embassy. Uncle Sam got me a ticket home and revoked my passport till I paid him back. I have never seen my nephew in person, and my brother and I don't talk anymore. So ended my European Odyssey.

Now going all the way back to when I was dumped. I don't want anyone to think I was just a kid being a dumb kid. "Oh, the things I did!". No. There was little to no joy in my life for a long time. By myself, alone, I hurt a lot of people. I stole money from my parents. I stole money from my job in Arcata. I destroyed my relationship with my brother and very nearly everyone else that was close to me. I was crashing and burning. Anybody who got hit by my debris was just collateral damage in my mission of self-destruction.

Then for absolutely no reason at all, I joined the Navy. It saved my life. I learned not be an awful person and lie and steal. I went to different places and saw lots of cool things. But every chance I got I was still drinking. That didn't go away.

I got married to my wife Breanna while I was in the Navy. I'm not sure if my being stationed away from her in Connecticut was a good or bad thing. Breanna wouldn't have married me if she saw how I was. We did get married though and here I am five years later. After putting Breanna through hell. Drunk almost every night, while she takes care of our three kids. Driving drunk. Out of town fishing for my Dad again and when I am home, I'm at the bar. The same shit. Nearly a decade of drinking and for what? It took getting a DUI to get me start looking to make a change. Thankfully I was pulled over and nobody was hurt. I went into a recovery center for two months, and haven't had a drink of alcohol in close to two years.

“I’m a bad person. I’m sorry”. That’s what I said crying myself to sleep on the concrete floor in parent’s garage. If I wasn’t alone and saying it aloud, I was out somewhere and thinking it to myself. But, never once did I tell myself, “I love you”. It seems so simple and immensely preferable to the alternative, but I never thought it much less said it.

The through line of all this, from before I ever drank to numb my pain to now, was me. Before anyone else was caught up in my storm, I was in the eye of it, sitting alone, surrounded by swirling chaos, that I only escalated by pouring on fear and hate and misery. Anything but love and connection. Apologies will never fix a lot of the damage I’ve done. Just the loss in terms of time is staggering. But I’m here now, and I feel better than I have my entire life. And, to that boy hiding with his dog under the stairs, telling Apollo, “It’s okay, you’re a good dog”. Well, you’re okay too. I love you.



Dragon's Isle /Nikola Kordič

## Products of the Hive

by Angela Stewart

I always wear protection when working with my honeybee colonies. It's foolish not to. But this was going to be a quick and easy trip in and out of a hive, so I figured there wouldn't be a need to fully suit up. Feeling both Humboldt County cute and too lazy to change my clothes, I decided to stay in my nicest Costco yoga pants and just throw on a veiled jacket. Black being the most triggering color to bees and skin-tight being the poorest choice a beekeeper could make, I knew going into it I wasn't making the best wardrobe decision. But really, who willing goes into something knowing that it might actually be the worst decision one could ever make?

I was planning to do a simple maneuver that involves lifting up the hive cover and sliding in a plastic sheet to collect a thing called propolis. Propolis is a sticky, resinous substance bees collect from trees to coat the inside of the hive during the cooler seasons. It becomes somewhat of an expansion of the colony's immune system, and with the abundance in our woody area there is more than enough to safely collect a surplus for use in human products and crafts. Behind honey and wax, it's the third best harvestable product of the hive. But none of that actually matters for this story. It's really just hard for me to shut up once I start talking about bee stuff.

Anyway, I needed an inch of space to do my thing, but bees only need a quarter of an inch to get through anything. Upon lifting the cover a half an inch, bees immediately started flying out of the hive in a cloud of hundreds, protective of their area and on a mission to deter the intruder. They buzzed a distinctive irritated buzz and pelted at me in warning. Most of my colonies are sweet and docile, but the normally feisty nature of

this particular colony is what keepers call “hot.” It’s normal to get stung more than a few times doing any kind of work with a hot hive. It happens. I anticipate it. I actually don’t mind it so much.

Lifting up the cover another half inch to get the plastic in, a new wave of bees crashed onto me with no courtesy warning, successfully locating any exposed patch of bare skin and the entire front and length of my pants. Not caring if I was their friendly keeper or a threatening bear, they bypassed the thin material of my pants, attaching their stingers directly into the skin right below, lighting up the lower half of my body with either venom or fire. I know the difference, but for a minute it was hard to tell. But I took the hint, put down the cover, and started walking away slowly.

Unfortunately for all of us, I accidentally placed the cover askew, leaving it open just enough to piss off every other worker bee still in the hive. Walking away slowly instantly turned into involuntary jumping and urgently brushing at my legs. Mere seconds later there were heats of determined bees flying right at those cursed black pants, so many I couldn’t brush them off quickly enough, or even at all. I looked down to see a literal carpet of bees gripped on to the entire lower half of my body. I made the executive decision to take off the pants entirely and get behind a closed door through any means possible.

But the shock of so many stings and the volume of their venom became enough to override any executive reasoning, leaving me to fend for myself with only a select few and severely out of shape fight or flight skills. My most natural reactions imposed vividly in the middle of a very open and exposed yard in one of the most quiet and conservative towns in the county: a middle-aged, slightly overweight lady furiously stripping off her pants until she is wearing nothing but a bee jacket

and underwear, cussing out bugs in every direction at the top of her lungs. All the while she is galloping around with fervor to nowhere like a wild horse in captivity and slapping madly at her butt and crotch with primal frenzy; while a majority of the bees stayed on the pants that were now flung halfway across the yard, some bees realized the new opportunity of bare skin and went for it. Many of those little determined bugs tried their darndest get through the panties from every single possible direction. Most, I dread to say, had success.

I finally made it to the safety of our semi-enclosed shop, brushed the rest of the bees off my bare legs and undies, stripped them off with my bee jacket, and darted back outside to throw it all away as far as I could. Mind you, however, the shop walls are constructed from windows. Between what was visible outside in the yard and what was visible inside the shop, it all must have been the most action packed, extensive, and complete strip show my elderly neighbors have ever seen, because I know they already spy on me through their sheer privacy curtains on even a normal day. Good thing they already think I'm weird.

After a brief break and a quick wardrobe change into full body protective gear, I was able to safely execute the rest of the original mission with no further casualties on the end of myself or the bees. But even some hours later I am still pumped with a pleasant amount of adrenaline, my legs feel independently exhilarated, and my full and encompassed bikini line is now hot, itchy, and alive in a way I have never felt before. And that also likely won't soon subside. And that may even wind up swelling. Bee sting reactions can be delayed and unpredictable, so we'll just have to wait and see how things progress down there. But after eight years of marriage, I will take what I can get.



In the end, I guess it didn't wind up being the worst decision I could have ever made. Reflecting on it all I see real win-win-win situation, actually. The bees taught a keeper how to dress more appropriately, the neighbors now have an exciting story to tell at their next church dinner, and my entire crotch region feels tingly and invincible. If this feeling keeps up, I may have just discovered the fourth best product of the hive.



Tranquility of the Spiders/ Leila Moon

## A Strike for the Unions

by Melissa Lindsey

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, workers at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama were given a choice: to join a union or to continue working without representation, job security, or bargaining rights. They voted no. Unions have long been the backbone of the American labor rights and union membership is known to increase pay and benefits for workers. This warehouse, one among many, was hoped to be the first domino to fall in the push for worker's rights against mega corporations. So why would they vote no? The answer is complicated, but can be better understood by a combination of economic factors, national trends, and employer resistance.

The simplest answer is money, or rather the lack of it. Bessemer, Alabama is a small, working class town with a population just over 26,000. Statistically inverse, Bessemer is 72% Black and 21% white, opposed to Alabama as whole at 70% white and 27% Black. To say that it is a poor town is an understatement with an average annual income of only \$19,420 per capita and a poverty level of greater than 25% (QuickFacts). Amazon, the behemoth who needs no introduction, is a major employer for the entire region at more than 5,800 jobs (Williams). According to the Birmingham Business Alliance, Amazon is now the third largest employer in the metropolitan area comprising seven counties (BBA).

In an interview with Business Insider, workers expressed concerns over the need for a union in a workplace that already pays more than double the federal minimum wage, at \$15.30 an hour, with included health, sick leave, and vacation benefits that are not guaranteed by American labor laws. They feared the added annual cost of \$500 in union dues would not

be worth what they would get in return, with one worker describing a union as “like a middleman” (Williams). In a place like Bessemer, every dollar counts towards the monthly budget.

However, the true financial cost of supporting a union could be much greater. In the event a union bid fails, Alabama is one of many states in which employment is “at will” (BLR). Without job protection, workers that are pro-union can be fired without cause. Even if workers do organize, the odds are not in their favor. Although United States’ law provides for legal union strikes, it also allows employers to simply continue operations by permanently replacing striking workers, effectively firing them (Clawson 100). In 2009, employees of a Colorado DISH TV branch won their union election. However, the company ignored the union petition, hired a law firm, and the case dragged on for nearly ten years while DISH TV continued to operate. Meanwhile, the company slashed the workers’ pay forcing many pro-unionists to quit (Lafer & Loustanaou 17). Although the case was finally decided in the workers’ favor, the cost in time and quality of life over ten years is incalculable.

Alternatively, decreased membership can be tied to national trends and culture. Public support for unions and actual union membership have been declining in tandem for decades. Recent numbers show a dismal 11% average American membership (Desilver) with only 51% showing favorable attitudes towards unions, down from a 1950’s high of 75% (Jones). Additionally, the American South has the lowest membership rates of all at only 6.5% (Desilver).

Social scientists have also found that individualism in a society is inversely proportional to union membership (Posthuma 521). It is in the very nature of being American to not want to join labor organizations. Amazon used this trend for their benefit. In the weeks leading to the vote, workers found themselves barraged by anti-union propaganda with

punchlines, “I don’t need anyone to speak for me”, “Speak for yourself!”, and “We don’t believe that you need to pay someone to speak for you”. Through mandatory anti-union meetings, forced text messages, and even flyers hanging over urinals, the influence was unavoidable and it greatly affected the workers’ agency. (Hamilton).

These examples of employer opposition perhaps contributed the most to the union’s defeat. In the Annual Review of Sociology, Clawson and Clawson found that aggressive anti-union tactics had a profound negative effect on union win rates. In their research, the unions won the vote only 48% of the times in which the employer used 5 or less tactics, 32% of the times they used 6 tactics, and an average of 7% less for each additional tactic. This type of labor warfare is becoming more common. Since the 1970’s, 87% of corporations have used union-busting consultants, 64% have required workers attend anti-union meetings, and 76% have had individual meetings with supervisors to persuade workers to vote no (Clawson 101). In the Economic Policy Institute’s report, “Fear at Work”, Lafer and Loustaunau confirmed each of these aggressive tactics while adding modern examples such as anti-union ads, texts, and the use of social media (1-2).

Amazon used all these and more. After hiring an outside consulting firm, the company started a strong disinformation campaign. Workers described mandatory multi-hour-long meetings several days a week where workers were told they would lose their benefits, be required to pay union dues, and that non-dues paying workers would not be represented – all of which untrue. Amazon purchased anti-union signs, banners, pins, door hangers, lanyards, and ran an anti-union ad on streaming service Twitch, which is owned by the company. Workers were intimidated by regular interrogatory visits from

managers, supervisors, and Amazon representatives from outside the warehouse (Hamilton).

Although workers were receiving up to five texts a day from Amazon while off duty (Hamilton), union representatives were barred from the property (Clawson 100). Pro-unionists were confined to standing just outside the building hoping to speak to leaving workers, all under the watchful eye of the employer. In January, Amazon even persuaded Jefferson County to change the pattern of the nearby traffic light to limit the time union representatives had to approach workers as they left (Hamilton). Amazon used every trick in the book, even inventing new ones, to influence this election.

So why does a corporate giant like Amazon need to spend so much time, money, and effort in tiny Bessemer, Alabama? Amazon is a pillar of Capitalism in America. As Marx would attest, Amazon is the modern bourgeoisie, controlling a large portion of American material goods consumption. The workers' surplus value has made the CEO into the world's richest man, and to pay the workers their actual worth would upend a system designed to feed the upper classes. The structure of American Capitalism, rooted in the expectation of unending growth in the stock market, puts more value in dividends than in quality of life. What could you expect in a country where the minimum wage has not kept pace with the GDP in over 40 years (Hill)?

In summary, the Bessemer union bid was doomed to fail from the very beginning. From the microsociology standpoint, individual workers saw little value in asking for their worth due to the extremes of the town in which they lived. Amazon offered above what uneducated, overwhelmingly poor minorities could have asked for in one of the poorest states in the Union. From the macro level, it is obvious that the large

corporations that run America will not go down without a fight and union membership is likely to continue to decline.

However, this one small blip in a sea of union failures could be positive for our country. For the first time in recent memory unions made national news and television pundits actively discussed the inequality of our labor laws. With this renewed pressure, our society may have the ability to work towards real, lasting change because without political invention to help shift the balance of power, history will continue to repeat itself.

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## Author and Artist Bios

**Michael Andrew** "The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies." – Thoreau

**James Donzella** is currently a freelance writer of on-air comedy programming materials, as well as producing audio materials for various radio show-prep services. His short stories have appeared in War Stories.com, Every Day Fiction and War Horse Magazine.

A U.S. Army Veteran, James served one tour in Vietnam. He is a member of the UCLA Wordcommandos Military Veteran's Writers Group.

**Elizabeth Forcier** lives in Ferndale, California. Taking Art classes at College of the Redwoods has inspired her to further her education in Art. She plans to graduate from CR with an associate degree in Studio Art in Spring 2023.

**Miguel Gutierrez** was born in Escondido, California, raised by a single mother with two sisters, and one brother. He would like to dedicate this achievement to his son and daughter and add a special thanks to Mrs. Knowlton for believing and encouraging his craft in writing.



**Endya Humphers** currently is in her second year at College of the Redwoods where she will be graduating with two associates degrees. From there she will be transferring to Cal Poly Humboldt where she hopes to become an English Lit. professor, her big dream being one day becoming a published author.

**Eric Rubio Ignacio**, from Azusa, CA, is currently working toward release. He is a student at College of the Redwoods on the cusp of obtaining his AA Degree in Behavioral Science. Housed at Pelican Bay State Prison, he has been incarcerated for 25 years, with a sentence of 16 years to life. Today, at the age of 42, Eric is a unique artist with the ability to transport readers into his world. He spends much of his time enjoying reading and writing poetry, drawing, and painting to live vicariously through other lives. That is his freedom.

**Nikola Kordič** returned to art after suffering a life-altering accident in 2017. In pain and unable to leave the house, he turned inward and found a spring of creativity. Nikola strives to capture enchanting, phantasmagorical moments. A son of Yugoslavian immigrants, Nikola draws inspiration from Slavic and Middle Eastern traditions.

**Andy Chen Lai** currently resides at Pelican Bay State Prison where he dreams of nothing – but potatoes. In his “free time,” he enjoys plotting his escape. And wonders. One day, he hopes to be able to sit, hold hands with the woman he loves, and read weird poetry together. And make fun of ducks (as they spoil them with popcorn).

**Katherine (Kay) Cech Latonio** is a retired educator, activist and writer who happily relocated to Eureka from Southern California four years ago. She enjoys writing poetry and stories that explore the connections between lived and ancestral trauma and how social/cultural expectations and geographical place impact individuals and communities. The beauty and rawness of the people and the place that is Humboldt County provide fertile ground for such ponderings.

**Melissa Burns Lindsey** is a second-year biology student at College of the Redwoods. After graduation in Spring 2022, she will pursue a bachelor's degree in Cellular/Molecular Biology at Cal Poly Humboldt. She is interested in various scientific fields including chemistry, sociology, and zoology.

**Leila Moon** is a fantasy realism artist, currently working towards a bachelor's degree in art and film. Here to share art with the world.

**Draken Munson** is a disabled LGBTQ fine artist.

**Nicholas Nielsen** is a student at Cal Poly Humboldt. He previously served as co-editor of poetry for *Toyon Literary Magazine* and is thrilled to have this be his first published story.

**Brynn Oleda** has been a staff member at CR for a little over a year, but they have been a poet for as long as they can remember. They are working towards a master's of library sciences so that they can help preserve libraries as safe spaces of expression and learning.

**Lawrence Orcutt** Pain, heartache, and addiction. The struggle is real. Without hate I would not know how to love. Keep fighting. The only battle you lose is the battle you decide to stop fighting. Pray about it.

**Richard Palomino** would like to say: "Thank you so much for your interest in my work. I was born June 24th, 1994 in West Covina, California to my dedicated mother Connie. She and my wife, Carol, are my strength and inspiration to keep moving forward despite tough times. They mean the world to me. I owe them everything. Thank you."

**Angela Stewart** enjoys describing herself in great detail.

**Sonee Swisley's** grandmother wrote to her in a letter that a rolling stone gathers no moss, adding "Guess you don't like moss." She is interested in science, fiction, old things and going places. Currently, she grows mosses and trees in Eureka.

**Chris Vasquez** now lives a semi-autonomous life in Humboldt County after passing the Turing Test in 2005. If you are interested in reading more of Chris's writings, you can subscribe to his Doofa & Slorpa account by pinching your neighbor's earlobes.

**Izzy Unsinger** is a freshman at College of the Redwoods studying fine arts with an emphasis on Theater Arts and English, planning to become a high school English/Theater teacher. She was one of the first Youth Poet Laureates of Eureka and spends her days driving around Humboldt County.

**Simone White** is a high-school student at Alder Grove Charter School. She has taken art classes at College of the Redwoods since her junior year. She hopes to continue to pursue her love of art when she attends UCSC in the fall.

**Janet Winzler** grew up in Eureka and have taken art classes along the way. I have always loved art but working and raising my family took over. I am now retired and returning to Art. Dean Smith's intermediate drawing class has been challenging, educational, and fun. It has inspired me to continue developing my art skills. I'm just beginning, and my goal is to improve so that I can one day feel comfortable calling myself an artist.

**Brie Wolfe** graduates with two AA degrees this semester, completing sixteen online classes. Currently living a nomadic life, she writes about travel, culture, food, and all things interesting,

from anywhere in the world. After a lifetime of technical and non fictional writing, she debuts her first fiction story here.

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HUM/SGSRChapCover21.indd 04.13.21

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