



Volume 24 Summer 2011

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NAKED TRUTH, the literary magazine of The New England Institute of Art, is dedicated to providing the college community with a place to exhibit its imaginative writing. We welcome student poetry, fiction, essays, artwork for our covers, film scripts, and critical writing. We accept submissions year round. We also host a reading series that features readings by students, faculty, and also by poets and fiction writers of national renown. All inquiries regarding the magazine may be directed to the faculty editor, as may any electronic submissions. Please send Word attachments in Rich Text Format. Students may also submit work to the magazine through our website www.nakedtruthmagazine.org. The contents of the magazine are chosen through a democratic process by the editorial committee, with some oversight by the lead editors, the faculty editor and our faculty advisors. For more information, or to submit your work, contact David Blair at dblair@aie.edu.

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HEARTWORM

by Robert J. LeBlanc

SEAN'S GRIP ON REALITY WASN'T WHAT ONE WOULD call stable under even the best circumstances. He was prone to hallucinations and had trained himself not to react to the absurd things he witnessed prior to the medication kicking in, usually an hour after taking it. This was different. He had taken his pill a full two hours ago. He knew he had taken it. He could feel the typical numbness he expected from the pills. He shook his head and ran a hand through his greasy hair.

"Think I might need to call my doctor, boy. I could have sworn you just said something."

"I did just say something, and stop calling me 'boy.' My name is Geoff," the dog replied.

Sean bolted upward, sending his empty coffee cup scattering across the tiled kitchen floor. "But, you are..."

"A dog, *Canis familiaris*, yes, I know. Now normally I wouldn't say anything, but this has gone on too long. We need to talk."

"But you're a dog. Dogs can't talk!"

"Dogs won't talk," Geoff corrected. "Normally we don't have to. We have a pretty good thing going, you see? Free food. Free home. All we need to do is act loyal, dumb, maybe a game of fetch, and it's clear sailing on the easy life."

Sean began to pace. “What? I need to call my doctor.” He could feel his heart racing. He’d never felt this lucid during a hallucination before.

“You don’t need to call your doctor, you need to sit and listen.”

“No. This doesn’t make any sense. I’m just hallucinating, that’s all. I just need to distract myself—play some video games, then I’ll feel better.”

Sean began to walk to the door. Geoff bounded across the kitchen, his nails making the familiar clicking sound, and blocked the door.

“Stay!” Geoff barked. “Sit! Listen to what I have to say.” Sean stumbled backward and fell into a chair, dumbfounded. “Look at yourself, Sean. You used to do more than sit around feeling sorry for yourself. You used to have a life, now you’re just pathetic.”

Sean couldn’t believe what he was hearing. His dog was talking to him! His dog was *insulting* him? “Wait, what? I’m not pathetic.”

“Oh really? When was the last time you went out?”

“I went out last night, to buy dog food, I might add,” Sean said defensively. “Plus I go to work every day.”

“I mean with friends, Sean. When was the last time you went out with friends?” Geoff cocked his head to the side. His tail was wagging slowly across the kitchen floor beneath him.

“I’ve just been busy, that’s all.”

“No Sean, you haven’t. You come home from work, microwave a burrito, play video games, and go to bed. You don’t even take me for walks any more. And your hygiene is atrocious.”

“My what?” Sean said. He could feel his face redden. He couldn’t tell if it was from anger or embarrassment.

“Your hygiene, Sean. Sometimes you don’t bathe for days. You

never wash your clothes. Do an old dog a favor and clean yourself up once in a while. Trust me on this one. My sense of smell is infinitely superior to your own.”

“Is it really that bad?” Sean asked, sniffing his armpits.

“I think you’re disgusting and I chew my own ass. Yes. It really is that bad.”

Sean slumped down in his chair. He ran a hand over his the spotty week’s worth of growth on his face. He looked at the months of burrito wrappers and pizza boxes scattered across the kitchen counter. He looked at the stained tee shirt and sweat pants that he had put on after he got out of work Friday night. The shirt smelled clean when he put it on, but the pants were past their expiration date. Hallucination or not, the dog did have a point.

“Maybe you’re right,” he said. “It’s just been tough to feel motivated lately.”

Geoff placed a paw on Sean’s knee. “That’s because you’re depressed. You claim it’s because of the hallucinations, but you know that’s just an excuse. You’ve been depressed ever since the Cat-Lady left.”

“Cat lady? You mean Becca?”

“Whatever her name was, she smelled like cats.”

“We split up a year ago,” Sean said. “She’s a non-issue.”

“A non-issue? Come on! I know better. You have a heartworm, something crawling around inside, eating you up. You won’t let yourself get over her. You let yourself go when you two split up and you haven’t bounced back yet,” Geoff said.

“Well, it was a bad break up, that’s all.”

“Trust me, you can do better. She treated you like crap.”

“She was a little bitchy,” Sean replied. “I’ll give you that.”

Geoff’s tail stopped wagging. Sean could see his expression change.

“Trust me,” Geoff said in a terse monotone. “She was no *bitch*.”

“I’m sorry,” Sean said. “I didn’t mean to insult you. I just forgot, you know...” Sean sighed. “Maybe I haven’t bounced back. It’s hard meeting women.”

“No, it isn’t. I’m adorable!” Geoff said, spinning once, chasing his tail. “When we went for walks, women would always stop to pet me. Use that to your advantage for once. Talk to them. Strike up a conversation, something other than ‘How’s the weather?’ Ask them to dinner, and then take them somewhere nice. Trust me, if you consider yourself a catch, women will too. Do you understand?”

“Yes, it’s just, I mean come on, I’m taking relationship advice from a border collie.” Sean felt dejected.

“Hey, don’t knock it. Have you ever wondered why all the puppies in the neighborhood are monochromatic? I know what I’m talking about,” Geoff said sitting on his furred haunches.

“Maybe you’re right. I guess in the past year, I’ve been living in oblivion. I’m just scared is all. It’s frightening knowing that one day I’ll have to have the ‘I see things’ conversation.”

“I know, but you’ll get through it. Maybe the next one will be scared off by it? Who knows? But maybe she won’t? Maybe you’re exactly what she’s looking for? You owe it to yourself to find out.”

Sean sat up straight in his chair. “You think so?”

"I know so. You just have to trust me," Geoff said, wagging his tail. Sean could hear the sweeping brush of Geoff's fur on the tile floor.

"What am I supposed to do, turn off the hallucinations?" Sean said, leaning forward, hands on his knees. "It's going to be tough."

"Of course it will. Nothing worth doing is easy, but I'll be there through the whole thing," Geoff said, standing.

"And that's supposed to make me feel better? Geoff, you're a dog!"

"That's right. And dogs are man's best friend for a reason. I'm not just telling you all this because you're part of my pack, Sean. I care about you. You matter to me, and not just because you feed me either. If you were a lost cause, I'd just move on to another family or maybe to a farm, somewhere I could herd sheep. But you're not. You're a good person. You're flawed, but we all are," Geoff said. "Once you learn to look past the flaws, you'll be better off. They are a part of you. They don't define you."

"Man's best friend, right?" Sean said scratching behind Geoff's ears.

"And don't you forget it! Now go clean yourself up. I think it's time for us to take a walk."

Sean stood and turned to leave the room. He stopped at the kitchen door and turned to look at his dog. "Thank you, Geoff."

"It's what friends are for," the dog replied. "And Sean?"

"Yes, buddy?"

"Call your doctor. Dogs can't talk."

FANTASIES

by Matt Bond

I.

DYLAN WINSTON, THE ENVY OF EVERYBODY WHO SURROUNDED him, walked confidently to his destination, his destination being grand yet mysteriously unknown. His present state of mind was that of a monk-scientist in the midst of a completely held-together, drug-induced connection with a mystical state of understanding—understanding of not only every sight (whether a being, object or idea) that came into his range of vision, but of abstractions that came from well outside the typical range of human senses. Arriving at a bar, Winston caught the eye of a swirling of young women huddled around a triad of healthy looking young college students. The tallest stood in the middle with a hand on the shoulder of each of the other two. All of the members of the mixed-gender grouping were looking at the tallest, who gazed into the night sky as he boasted of his collegiate football statistics. Dylan Winston slipped by the party, and in doing so, stole the looks of the women of the group, followed by those of the two shorter men, who simultaneously brushed the tall-man's hands off their shoulders in an involuntary motion. Mr. Tall, noticing the sudden lack of attention, recognized immediately the type of distraction personified in our hero, Winston. Sir Tall had it in mind that he knew the sort of hip-clothed, bohemian deceit so well he could spot it on a dime. Having attended college for three years now, he had as much practice in breaking the illusion of the so-called hipster image as he had in breaking apart cover shell defensive alignments. The reason for Tall's ignorance toward Winston's

enlightened state and admirable demeanor drew life from the fact that the group was visiting unfamiliar territory. First, he would certainly not have overlooked the subtle nuances in our young hero's sense of style. Here was the perfect mix of that traditional individuality you find in pictures of the rugged men of America's past with the utmost originality of the leading trends of fashion found in the world's most major cities. Secondly, according to the scales weighing widespread popularity against "underground" obscurity, Winston was perfectly even. Therefore, Tall would not only readily recognize young Dylan, but would most assuredly feel that curious excitement that manifests in the minds of those lucky enough to set eyes upon the likes of a UFO. Tallboy's contempt would subside undoubtedly in the near future, as his ears found the source of live entertainment to be none other than our restless yet confident hero. Winston took his well-used guitar from its well-traveled case and the serenade began. Each pluck of the string sent a shiver down the spines of all who came to see and hear. Each word found a way to tickle the soul. Each rang true. Each brought in a new customer. For a moment, the whole bar stopped in awe and wonder. For a moment, the world stopped. The universe was speaking through Dylan Winston. And when the last note vibrated out of the bar, it was carried gently across the city.

II.

Timid and lonely, Steven Beck scurried across the street just before a large eighteen-wheeler honked on by. Feeling a soothing sensation brush his earlobe, Steven started to feel good about himself for the first time in a long while. You see, our small friend was well-aware of

his status in the social order that surrounded him. Perhaps too aware. Steven would have done well to drop his habit of judging himself against others. One would struggle to come up with any positive characteristic possessed by Steven. He once held the delusion that he held wisdom, but this had been shattered recently by the realization that he had mistaken cynicism for wisdom. Also, our subject had never been romantically involved. And in fact, the only thing which Beck had ever been committed to was the fantasy of being an idol in the eyes of men and women. He had hoped for love to strike him but had never searched for it. He had never known it and had therefore told himself it was a lie. Passing the time while walking back to his apartment, Steven Beck again dreamed of being admired. And as his mind was generating an image of sexual accomplishment, a flock of college students turned the corner in front of him and were now blocking his path. Steven considered walking to the other side of the street, but the constant stream of whizzing cars changed his mind. Steven's brief feeling of happiness was now gone. He heard a high-pitched cry from behind. Turning his head, Steven saw three blondes heading in his direction. Were they yelling at him? Most certainly not. Steven's heart rate soared regardless. The three were yelling through Beck, recognizing the flock ahead, which they had lost track of in their drunken city-weaving. The females of the leading pack dropped behind their male counterparts in an attempt to reconnect as the trailing pack ran up behind. Steven looked down and forged his way ahead, doing the best he could to act as if he hadn't noticed any of them. Yet, in a cruel twist of fate, the two parties met just at the point containing our young subject! Steven Beck

found himself as the center point in a circling of some of the most drunkenly wild-eyed young women the city knew. Attempting to escape proved only that the women resembled a boa constrictor. The circle tightened as one of the women fell. In perhaps the only heroic act in his short life, Steven grabbed the falling damsel, keeping her erect. In fear of the drop, the woman screamed, alarming the men ahead. Turning their heads, they saw nothing but Steven Beck's hand firmly clutched to her well-shaped breasts and buttocks. This set the pack fleeing wild-eyed toward our young victim of circumstance. Steven found himself sprinting faster than he thought possible, and darting across the street without proper contemplation. One of the chasers, hot on Steven's trail, was struck by a passing vehicle. The resulting force sent the man over Steven's head and directly through a sign warning against the dangers of a life without proper intake of a particular carbonated beverage. The voices of the many who loved the man and the few, who loved the cola, rose to a symphony of fearful music. Stephen, frozen in space and lost in time, was paralyzed by the unlikeliness of his current situation. Cries of loss became supplemented by cries of sirens. The crescendo came rushing toward Steven with the fury of a shockwave, sending him into flight. And as he ran, he dared not look back, for he could feel the city crumbling under the weight of the vibrations behind him.

III.

Dylan Winston, having finished his set, flowed out of the bar followed by a steady stream of admirers. The women who followed desired nothing more than to touch, to smell, to taste our revered Winston. The men, who followed the women, desired nothing more

than to be consumed by the charm of our hero, only later to blossom into a being of similar magnitude. Even our old friend Mr. Tall could not help being humbled by Dylan's very presence. Yet despite the fact that his night had so far been one worthy of an extensively entertaining novella, Winston felt an ominous feeling of trouble ahead. This was perception was so clear and clairvoyant. This growing sensation of a fourth-dimensional disturbance looming heavily caused a sudden stop in his motion and, subsequently, in the ever-growing chain of his followers. And as he looked ahead, he saw the object of his sudden fear manifesting itself, drawing ever closer.

IV.

Racing along at a startling pace, Steven thought and dreamed of nothing. His mind seemed no longer to be the intermediate step between his body and soul, as it once was in full force. Steven could feel the fury swelling in whatever it was that pursued him. Yet despite being in imminent danger of disappearing, Steven felt more alive than he had ever imagined possible. A sinister yet genuine smile forced itself upon the face of our troubled Beck as he accelerated past the reach of the trailing storm. And in the most paradoxically curious fashion, he felt the gentle grasp of calmness carry him off the ground. Steven Beck now flew perpendicular to the sidewalk below, to the astonishment of those he left behind. With one fist forward, our new hero caught sight of a crowd resembling a fresh arrangement of bowling pins. And as he accelerated with greater and greater speed toward the head pin, Steven felt a rush of energy that seemed to come from deep within his past.

V.

The collision of our two spirited protagonists sent a silent shockwave outward in every direction, the essence of which settled into a beautiful fog enveloping the globe, invading every sleeping mind it passed. And as the sleepers dreamed, their souls resonated together with a pitch that shattered the chains of time into the infinite abyss. All of which was forgotten upon the rising of the next morning's sun.

BREATHE

by Robert J. LeBlanc

THE WORLD EXPANDED BEFORE HIM AS GARRETT OPENED THE door. He could feel the draw of gravity pull him forward as if he was standing on the precipice of some great ledge and was fighting the urge to jump. His heart was racing, beating against the confinement of his chest. The warm summer air felt like the breath of some unseen animal waiting to pounce. He stood frozen in fear. Today he would go outside.

It hadn't always been like this. When he was younger, he would play for hours in the warm sun and not think anything about it. That was a long time ago, before he changed, before the world changed.

He leaned with his back against the door and took long slow breaths. He could feel the heat of the sun-warmed door on his back. Even here, safe in his house, the outside was trying to get in.

He slid down the door into a sitting position, pulled his knees to his chest and held them there. Closing his eyes, he leaned his head back and drew a long full breath, feeling the cool air fill his lungs to capacity. He held it for a moment and released slowly, letting the fear go with it.

He had to go today, that he knew. He had put it off for far too long, and with the call from his mother this morning, this might be his last chance. His mind wandered back to the call.

"He's started coughing up blood last night, Garry," she said. She sounded exhausted. She always sounded exhausted since his father was diagnosed with cancer. "You need to come. Your father really wants to see you. Make your peace with this *thing* you're going through and

come, today. The doctor said he probably wouldn't last the night."

Garrett hadn't gone outside his house in years, not since Sarah's service all those years ago. As a data analyst, he didn't have to. He worked from home and lived off of deliveries. The Internet was his lifeline, and he was fine with it. He didn't need friends; he was content where he was. But now he had no choice.

Garrett hadn't seen his father for months, not since he stopped coming by after chemotherapy made travel difficult. They would occasionally talk on the phone, until the operation to try and remove the tumor from his father's throat left him unable to say anything above a painful whisper.

He stood, stretched his legs, walked to the phone, picked up the receiver, and dialed the number his mother had given him.

"Yonkers Yellow Cab," a rough voice said.

"Um, yes. I'd like a cab."

"Where you'd like it?" the voice responded. He sounded annoyed.

"1125 Ashburton. It's past Oakland Cemetery, on the left."

"We know where it is. Fifteen minutes," the man said, and hung up.

Of course they knew where it was, they were a cab company, he thought. It was habit, was all. When you never leave the house, giving directions becomes a kind of routine. He hung up the phone, walked to his office and grabbed his credit card from its place in his card file, and cash from his lockbox. He placed both into his old unused wallet and slipped it into the pocket of his slacks.

He sat at his desk and turned to look out the window to await the cab. He had a plan. The cab would pull up out front, and he would simply run from his front door to the back seat. After that, a short run from the cab to the hospital doors, and he would be in. It would be his first time outside in what, a decade?

His eyes drifted across the traffic flowing on the avenue to the cemetery beyond. Sarah was buried there. Well, at least an urn filled with the few personal items recovered.

He thought back to the morning he lost her. “Them,” he corrected. He woke up early to get in a run. She left for work before he came back. He showered, dressed, and left in a rush, leaving his phone on the dresser. He tried to call her at work from his office but couldn’t get through. No one could that day. When he got back home later that night, his heart sank when he saw she wasn’t there. There was a message on his phone.

“Hey, honey, something happened, not sure what, but it was pretty crazy. We’re okay. I love you.”

He was sick with worry. He waited up all night for her, mindlessly staring at the TV with the images replayed over, and over, and over. The last time he saw her she was curled up in a ball with her knees pulled up tight against her swollen belly. He didn’t even give her a kiss goodbye.

All he could do was wait. It was all anyone could do. He took time off from work. When he left the house, seeing the smoke on the horizon turned his stomach. Over time, the dread became a pain in his gut. Eventually the pain turned to fear.

After six months he ordered the urn in the hopes that more would be recovered. After a while, he was allowed to declare them legally dead. The urn sat empty in a box the whole time. A few months later, he received a call saying that they recovered part of her wallet and the scorched remains of a few of her credit cards. A few months after that, they were released from evidence and sent home. Garrett placed them in the urn. To that he added a photo and a copy of the ultrasound they got the August before, and the rattle he had bought for the baby.

On his desk, he had a framed picture of Sarah, her swollen belly evident under the summer dress she was wearing. He was by her side smiling. The picture was taken in Times Square, during a trip into the city. It was supposed to be the last trip before the baby would come.

The last time he left the house was on the day of her funeral. It was a rainy morning, and he was certain that he could taste the remains of burning jet fuel in the air, though he knew this would have been impossible. He was constantly scanning the sky, waiting. At the end of the day, she was buried. He cried for the last time and went home.

His father was there through the whole ordeal, he never left his side. He was constantly trying to convince Garrett that Sarah would want him to get outside, to stop living in fear all the time. Garrett would protest, but inside he knew he was right. He knew his fear was irrational, that it was controlling him, but there was little he could do about it.

The worst part of the ordeal wasn't the day she died, but slowly losing her after. First, it was her scent that left from her clothes, then from her pillow. Later he couldn't remember the sound of her voice,

and finally the sound of her laugh. It was bad enough when he could blame someone else, but this was his fault, his memory. The worst part was when he would discover some artifact of her, sometimes even years later. He would find a note she had written on an old receipt and turned into a bookmark, or find a hair caught in the nooks and crevices of his past life.

He knew that the same thing would eventually happen to his mother, and sooner rather than later. If he didn't fight his fear, he wouldn't be able to be there for her. He decided it was time to stop living for himself and start living for other people. Maybe that was his problem. With Sarah, he had someone to live for, and with the baby on the way his focus was doubled.

The sound of the traffic drew his attention once again. The cab would be here soon, and when it was he would have to leave. The thought alone caused his heart to race and his hands to shake. He tried breathing away the stress. This was a technique he learned as a child to combat anxiety attacks. He forced himself to focus on the cool air as it filled his lungs and on the dull ache as it left him, taking the tension with it, in and out in rhythmic meditation.

As he heard the cab pull up to the curb and honk, the panic took over. He could feel the adrenaline surge through his system. He could feel the rush of blood to his head as vertigo sent his head into a spin. He reached out his hand to steady himself. He stood and took deep breaths to calm his nerves. His eyes caught Sarah's in the frame and willed his nerves to be still.

The driver of the cab honked again. This was it, he thought. He stood, and walked to the table near the door and picked his keys out of the dust and grime. He closed his eyes and took another deep breath, once again, letting it out slowly. He could feel his heart beat hard in his chest. He placed a shaking hand on the door handle and turned, hearing the click of the mechanism as it gave way. He opened the door quickly and, as before, felt the gravity grab hold. The sense of vertigo was overpowering. His mouth went dry and the beating of his heart grew to a vibration in his throat. Sunlight hit him full in the face, and for a split second he felt as if he were standing in front of a furnace. As his eyes adjusted to the light, he could see figures form from the curtain of light—a couple pushing a baby stroller, a stray dog sniffing at the base of one of the many trees that lined the avenue, drivers racing by in their cars, and the yellow cab waiting impatiently at the curb in front of him.

He closed his eyes, lifted his face to the sun and breathed in the fresh-cut grass, and saw the crisp blue expanse before him. Sarah loved days like this, he thought. She called them *Summer's Sapphire*. He had forgotten that. How much of this part of her life had he forgotten by hiding away? How much of her was out there somewhere? He could do this. He had to. He could do this for his parents. He could do this for Sarah and the baby. He could do this for himself. All he had to do was master his fear. All he had to do was breathe.

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LUCTOR ET EMERGO

by Mark Mason

If someone asks, I'll paint a picture.

I extend the brush towards the canvas,
walking through the painted landscape,
a figure I once knew.

Basking in the radiant silence,

I close my eyes and go back to that place.

•

I close my eyes and go back to that place,

Basking in the radiant silence,

a figure I once knew

walking through the painted landscape.

I extend the brush towards the canvas

if someone asks. I'll paint a picture.

HEAVEN ISN'T LIKE THAT ANYMORE

by Luke Pynchon

Heaven isn't like that anymore

They turned it into a strip club/Pizza Hut/Taco Bell/ Liquor store which
is fine with me

They said nobody interesting ever goes there anymore so they had to
bring in business with new edgier techniques like free Wi-Fi and
purchasing a liquor license

So now when you die you can take comfort in knowing you can stuff
your face with all the fast food you want and still get updates on
what's happening with Lindsay Lohan and the Kardashians

Unfortunately because of their new business practices, heaven is
also experiencing global warming and a drop in the some of
their demographic

Some of the snobbier folks that like to read and philosophize have taken
up timeshares in hell

TITUSVILLE LOOP

by Gabrielle Grimaldi

An unoccupied chair once stood embracing the life it held onto.
A doorknob led you into an occupied space taking a little bit of you.
But no one is there now and it has been twice around.
New walls. Old walls. But all the same familiar sounds.
Old lights strung around and around.
Unable to plug them in. Ironic because it is where the light begins.

AS YEARS GO BY

by Robert Candido

Give my regards

To a more perfect you

Who always had something to say.

I miss her dearly.

FLOATING

by Mark Mason

Packed my silence
and excitement neatly away
without any regrets,
paperback novels,
the printing press.
Floating upwards
to the surface,
to spill words
up against
the open air.
Fly high, fly high,
crystal quarters for your
abandonment.
A flurry of blankets,
a mountain of threads
pass beneath you—as you
expel thoughts into rain,
droplets that traverse
where the sun meets the surface
to voyage that important
transformation from water to haze.

THE GARDENER BREWER FOUNTAIN

by Mark Mason

There is a place
on the Common where
the clock stops still.
In that moment of suspense,
the grains of water pause
to take in that beautiful sunlight.
The faces of those trapped
by the brooding bronze shell
persevere in the sounds
of the casual waters.
These reflections
are a mirror in time
resilient with a smile.
But when the sun dies out
and the candles stay still,
I will be there
silent and complacent.

SIDELINED ON TEAM STUPID

by Anthony Nguyen

They look like fools,
embarrassing us all.
We're supposed to be adults.
Instead, they bicker like kids on a playground,
oblivious to the judging eyes
that stare at them, as well as me,
as if I am an incompetent parent
who cannot control them.
Should I step in?
No.
I would just end up collateral damage.

POEM

by Andrew Tran

I see the fish bones of the sun, a portrait of composed wounds.
Creatures, enchained by jealousy, forever gaze upon a river of stars.
We embrace our grudges against the misery of the world,
Champagne and Nameless Flesh.
I see the fishbones of the sun in the poetry that is written
beneath the skies of bed sheets and loved scars,
while the reflection created by the way the sunlight falls
gives birth to eternity.

THE WOODSMAN

by Robert J. LeBlanc

Life is change and Oz is alive. The Wizard gave them their reward.
But that was long ago. Dorothy climbed into the Wizard's basket and
drifted off on the wind.
The Scarecrow killed his blessing through perpetual Bacchanalia,
His reality is suspect. His brain has twisted. He has banished
the Woodsman.

Longing for the sepia brilliance of his home has blinded him.
His heart has broken.
It has moved on without him.
All those years ago, but does he not move! Does he not run!
He ran even as the golden road began to tarnish into some flayed
hornet beneath his feet.
He wishes he could leave his country to do it himself, banishment
be damned.

VANGUARD

by Robert J. LeBlanc

The sun spreads across the marsh
With tapered gold.
The mist drifts into the ether.
White tails twitch and velvet-horned heads
Stand at nervous attention.
There is anticipation in the light,
A heavy weight that hangs
Like a pregnant pause.
Tendrils of warm air wrap, and curl, and snake.
It is the vanguard of a greater force
Rising from the east. The swelter will arrive.
Sweat will seep from exposed flesh.
It will be as if the atmosphere is bleeding
And we are the wounds.

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STATEMENT

by Patricia Vanriel

“Ailay,” my stepmother said. That word for her meant “the devil’s child,” and it was a word she thought described me. I was just twelve, but I knew no child was evil or even deserved to be called “the devil’s child.” After that moment, I sensed the pure hatred she felt towards me and constantly wondered what I had done wrong. I would later find out that my transgression was being alive.

I flailed about in my sorrow, overpowered by my tears. Crying had become a part of my everyday life, something I had no control over. Her verbal abuse had broken me like a tired soldier after a battle. My stepmother’s words pierced my skin like daggers that wouldn’t go away. My father never said anything in my defense during the whole ordeal. His silence spoke volumes. It told me that even though my family constantly revolved around me, I was totally alone in this world.

When I turned thirteen, I started to seek out volunteering opportunities at nursing homes and libraries to show that I wasn’t evil, and in fact, I could help people. I also took refuge in my books. They became my escape from reality, a reality I sometimes thought would end with a stormy night, my desperate cry for help, or suicide. In my books I was loved and had a family that was truly there for me. Since then, I have tried to prove to myself that my stepmother’s opinion wasn’t the same as what everyone else thinks.

The verbal abuse I endured in my father’s home showed me that I had to be mentally strong; it made me want to be a better person. But

it also left scars that I work each and every day to heal. The verbal abuse made me feel worthless and left out. Even when people truly like me, there is a voice in my head that tells me that they don't, and that they are just tolerating me. Sometimes that voice telling me that I'm worthless is really loud, and I push people away so that I don't get hurt. To offset these feelings of worthlessness, I tell myself that if I weren't wanted, I wouldn't have been accepted in their circle. I have learned that in order to get anywhere in life, I have to continue to motivate myself and to be determined to overcome any obstacle I may face. I strive to become a better person, and not feel any resentment towards my stepmother. But it is a constant struggle that I plan to overcome with the support of good people around me.

DEAD LEAVES AND THEIR DIRTY GROUND

by Emely Contreras

There are some things in this world that weren't meant to be
There are some things that you just shouldn't say
There are some things that people should not know
Without dying, without pressure, without knowing
I am not a dirty jailbait rebel, nor a hood rat
I am not a clean rich princess, nor a queen
But I am someone who has seen the good and the bad
There's a dead weather and there is the cold blues
There's the reckless ghetto rants and there are murderous kills
Never meant to make you cringe or cry for these words
But it is the truth, not the stereotypical girl's point of view
I am not a dirty jailbait rebel, nor a hood rat
I am not a clean rich princess, nor a queen
I am someone who has seen the good and the bad
I am someone who has seen enough of this tragedy everyday
I am not perfect but at least I'm real