A close-up photograph of water being poured from a clear glass. The water is captured in mid-pour, creating a dynamic, textured stream that falls towards the bottom of the frame. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface, possibly a sidewalk or pavement, with some small green leaves scattered on it. The lighting is bright, highlighting the clarity and movement of the water.

Voices

The literary and arts magazine
of John F. Kennedy High School

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Can I Love You?

By Imani Jones – Williams

Can I love you?

I just really feel like I wanna love you and that it's no longer enough to see you every once in a while and hug you.

Hello and goodbye.

Can I be the one you come to?

And can you love too?

Like, could you see yourself in love with me?

I think I could see you being one with me so... can I?

Can I feel the way I really think I wanna feel?

It's kinda hard to feel a way I've never felt, or at least know what I'm feeling 'cause I've never dealt with... Love.

Can I let that be what it is, if it's love.

Although I don't know what it is love consists of I'm... pretty sure it can't hurt the way they say it does.

Tis better to have loved and lost than to avoid bliss and run from the cost. I feel like... If it hurts it hurts, and if it breaks it breaks, but if it works it's worth every moment that'll have me thinkin "Maybe it ain't worth it." Let it surface.

This is life, and baby it ain't perfect, and neither are you, and neither am I, and neither is space nor time nor anything defined as divine, but if I'm yours and your mind, then maybe we can find an escape, or fall flat on our faces.

It's all good to me.

Frankly I don't care whether it's good or isn't good for me. I just wanna give it a try, and when in my mind all I see is your eyes then all I need is some time.

I'm just sayin, I think I'll just say it and, I don't really mind sounding sick or insane.
It's like you live in my brain.

Each night before my mind fades, into a new reality I always seem to think of one name. So if mine is on your mind, can I feel some type of way?

Can I have that?

I really tried a couple time just to grab that, only to pull hand back trippin' like
"Would I get my hand smacked, or would you grab back?"

See the sad fact is I might just be week, 'cause if your want it too then it might just be me, so... Can you free me?

See for somebody like me this just isn't easy, so if you could just ease me and let me breathe eas'ly, that would really please me.

Can I love you?

I just really feel like I wanna love you. Can I be the one you come to?

And can you love too?

Like, could you see yourself in love with me?

I think I could see you being one with me so... can I?

Can I love you?

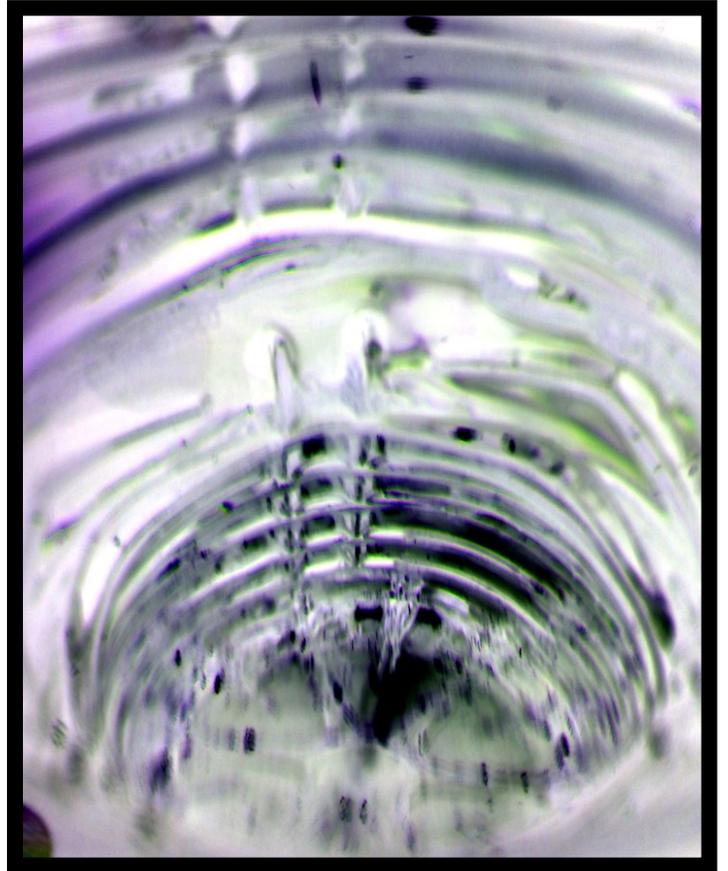


Art By Sandy Collado Estrada

The Rain

By Sonoka Fanwar

The rain poured and would not stop,
Its every drop hitting the surface with loud,
never ending thuds.
Thud, thud, thud.
"She's not coming" he said, as he sat anxiously,
waiting for her arrival.
He had searched, waited and yearned for her
presence for so long.
In a split moment, it was as if everything would be
washed away.
Thud, thud, thud.
His eyes shifted to every corner of the room.
The rain continued to drench the rest of the world
outside.
Would his moment to relive ever arrive?
With every moment passing by, the roar of nature
discouraged his hope.
Thud, thud, thud.
The sound of dropping pebbles only grew louder
and louder.
It threatened his confidence and drowned his pa-
tience.
A pain struck visage covered his face when he realized that
she may never come.
She would be washed away like a leaf down a drain.
Thud, thud, THUD.
The last sound was clearly not one of nature's.
I approached the front of the house and saw her dismounting her vehicle.
I covered her head, to protect and to shield her from the dangers of the rain.
As we walked through the entrance, I saw that he was no longer there.
Thud, thud, thud.
In his fears that he would lose her, he lost himself.
The rain had gently guided him away.



Art By Clay Chung

I Can't Give You What You Want

By Carla Anangono

I sat in the corner watching her every move. She flashed a smile at a tall good looking man. He clearly liked her too. She touched his shoulder flirtatiously from time to time as she listened intently, hanging on his every word. She used to look at me like that. I fell in love with her in college. I had just come out to my parents and friends and felt so unsure of myself. She was so confident and beautiful. We made love for the first time and she taught me there was nothing to be ashamed of. How could something that felt so good be wrong, she asked me that first night? I never felt ashamed again.

After 7 years my feelings for her haven't changed, but I am afraid. I am afraid of losing her. I used to catch her looking at other women from time to time. Lately though, it has been other men. She denies it, but I see it. It frustrated me every time she laughed and smiled because she was having fun with her male co-worker while I was just stood there looking at her other co-workers chat and eat fancy crackers with fancy cheese. I know I don't belong here but she made me accompany her. I grasped the tall glass filled with champagne as she got closer and closer to the guy. I finally had enough of her flirting and set the glass down on the nice marble counter letting it slip and spill all over the wooden floor. I grabbed her arm and pulled her away from the guy leaving their conversation unfinished. As I pulled her out of the house she squirmed around trying to free from me.

"You're hurting me. Let go of my arm. What is wrong with you?"

"Shut up and get in the god damn car," I yelled.

She stood there looking at me like I was crazy or something. Her face of terror shown clearly in the street lights. I pushed her in the passenger seat and put the belt on for her to ensure that she wasn't going to leave. I closed the passenger door and ran to the driver's side. When I got in I saw that she was tearing up. I

started the car and floored the gas pedal. I hit 89 mph almost killing a deer as it ran across the street. She held onto the door handle as the car swerved. When we got to our townhouse she quickly exited the car and entered the house. She slammed and locked the front door in my face leaving me on the doorstep. I furiously banged on the door demanding she open it. I noticed some of the neighbor's lights turn on. It was 3 a.m.. I remembered the spare key under the potted plant near the door. I entered the house and found her in the kitchen taking some generic, over the counter, anxiety medication.

“You know you're not supposed to take those when you're pregnant,” I said.

“Well, maybe if you didn't drive like a maniac I wouldn't need these,” she snapped, slowly lifting her excess weight from a wooden oak stool

She threw the bottle of aspirin at me with all her strength. It clocked the speed of a pitcher's most effective fast ball.

“Well, maybe if you didn't flirt with every single guy at the party, I wouldn't be so mad.”

“I was only being friendly!” she pleaded, burying her hazel eyes. “I can't have friends?!”

“That guy was not interested in being your friend and you know it.”

“Then what are you saying?” Her hands moved on her hips giving that sassy look.



Art By Tahina Moise

She had flashed me the same look when I first met her. She knew that I could give in easily when she did that. She just doesn't know how much I love her. She drives me crazy every time I see her. She is so beautiful and sexy. I just love everything about her. I love her long curly black hair, her hazel eyes, her nice full rosy lips, and the one small dimple on her left cheek that forms whenever she smiles. But what I love the most is the ever so slight burgeoning of our growing child and the way her dress both hides and accentuates it.

"I'm saying that you shouldn't flirt with those guys! You're my wife, I'm your wife. We are having a baby!!!"

"I was just being friendly. Like what part of that don't you understand? I didn't know that making friends was such a crime."

"You're not the welcome committee. You acted like a little slut with that guy. This isn't the first time you've done this and I'm tired of it."

She raised her arm and slapped me in the face with all her force, leaving my right cheek burning hot and red. She stared at me in disgust. I felt rejected.

"I should have never dated you, I should have never said yes when you proposed. You can't give me what I want the most in life— a family."

I grabbed her from her neck and choked her. She gasped for air. I was no longer me, what used to be me was now a creature of rage and wrath. We fell to the ground. She kicked and struggled. I choked her mercilessly as tears rolled down my face. The room went cold and my adrenaline rushed. In my fury, her helplessness made me enjoy her pain. She tried to pick herself up and I

punched her hard. She fell on her knees, and blood gushed from her nose. Her eyes were swollen shut. I kicked her in the face. Blood splattered on the floor and on the tip of my shoes. Her once beautiful face was bloody red as she cried. The monster that was me loved the feeling. Every hit brought me happiness. She only did this because I couldn't give her what she wanted the most. But now it wouldn't matter because I was going to kill her. I grabbed a chef's knife from the kitchen block. I pulled her up by her hair barely an inch from my face.

"No more suffering, no more jealousy, no more flirting," I said with a maniacal grin.

I pushed the knife into her swollen belly and into the baby she carried. She fell to the floor and breathed her last breath. She stared into my eyes as she died and I couldn't tell what to make of that look. I don't think she hated me, even then.



Art By Neri Fuentes



Art By Mia Manning

Deception

By Cecilia Dibble

“Dad, I’m going out to the park again to finish my drawing,” Julia yelled so he could hear her from downstairs.

“Make sure to take a key,” he replied.

Julia stepped outside and walked several blocks to the regional park. She arrived at a stream and sat on a dirt ledge. She admired the view of the morning sun reflecting off the still water. This was the light she had to capture. She pulled out her drawing pad and turned her latest masterpiece. She thought she would finally finish today. Suddenly, she heard sounds of cracked sticks and crushed leaves. She whipped her head back but saw only the empty forest behind her. Then the world went black.

Julia woke up in a dark room. She put her hand on her head and felt dried blood. She tried to get up when she bumped into a wooden table. She felt the rough carpet on her bare feet. Somebody had taken her shoes. The only light eked through a small opening in a large steel door that separated her from freedom. She heard voices on the other side of the door. She stumbled over and peered through.

Two men stood in a long narrow hallway, bathed in florescent light. They spoke in hushed tones. She tried to bend her neck to see the faces of the men speaking but from her vantage point she could only see the right shoulder of a small man in a black leather jacket.

“It’s the right girl,” he said. “We picked her up right where you said she would be.”

“You didn’t mess her up too bad I hope,” the other man said, in a deep gravelly voice. “We need to keep her alive, at least for the time being.”

“No, problem boss. She’ll have a headache but she’ll live.”

“Good,” he replied.

Suddenly his face appeared in the window. Julia’s heart leapt to her throat. Deep, jagged scars meandered from his temple to the tip of his chin. His skin stretched tightly over his face and bald head. He smiled wickedly and she heard a key hit the lock and turn. The man stepped in filling the entire doorway with his largeness. Julia stood and faced him, pressing through her fear.

“This is no way to be introduced,” he said. “My name is Juan.” He had a slight Spanish accent.

“Hey! Where am I?” Julia yelled.

“Look at you, so much spirit. That is good.”

“Hey! I’m talking to you!” She yelled again, but he had already walked out.

Julia sat the small room for hours, trying to think of way to escape. She thought about her mother and how terrified she would be when she didn’t come home. She doubted her father would even notice. Although her father was never around for her lacrosse games, she missed it when he would come home late at night and sneak into her room and kiss her on the cheek.

Days went by and she still didn’t know what was happening. She was terrified at first that she would be raped like so many stories from the news. But these men seemed to have a larger purpose. She studied their pattern every day when they delivered her three meals. That was the only time when the door opened. She looked out of the small window and saw the guard walking down the hallway towards her. She quickly hid in the corner behind the door and waited for the guard to walk in.

He opened the door and dropped the tray of food without even raising his head. Julia jumped on his back. Julia swung her arm as hard as she could at the man’s face. The commotion caught the attention of other guards who quickly came into the room. It only took one other man to pull Julia off the guard, but

she continued to resist. The guard she attacked stood up and turned around; he had a bloody lip and a crooked nose. He took one look at Julia and smacked her as hard as he could in the face. Julia stopped fighting back and fell to the floor. In moments, Juan entered the room.

“What happened?” Juan asked.

“Sir, she attacked me,” the guard said as he stumbled to his feet.

Juan had taken the guard’s arm and dragged him into the hallway. “You can’t do that. We need her alive. Understand. She is worth more to us unharmed.”

Julia stumbled out of the guard’s arm and leaned by the door and overheard Juan speaking, now she knew why they were keeping her, they were doing her for ransom.

Juan sent the guards down the hall. He entered the room again and reached out a hand to Julia but glared at her and staggered up on her own.

“I know what you’re doing,” she said. She put a hand up to her bloody nose and wiped her bloody fingers on her bed sheets.

Art By Claudia Crespo

“And what is that?” He smirked.

“You’re holding me for ransom. My parents would never pay you.” But just thinking about her parents made Julia tear up. She pushed back her tears. “Why are you doing this? My



family has never done anything to you!”

“I think you should ask your father about that.”

“What does he have to do with anything?” Julia held back her tears.

Juan walked toward the door. “Your father is a dangerous man.”

“You’re lying!” She said as Juan started to walk out. “You will pay for this!” She screamed.

Juan snapped his head back, “Just like your father is paying for his mistakes.”

“What are you talking about?”

Juan didn’t answer her question, and just stared at the wall.

“My grandmother was a good woman,” he whispered. “She should never have died in that fire.” Julia could barely hear him over the sound of the talking guards coming toward her room. He snapped out of his blank look and he walked out, slamming the door behind him.

“I don’t believe you! You are never going to get away with this!” Julia threw herself at the closed door and smacked it until her hands were swollen and cut up.

Julia sat alone in her dark room. Days turned into nights and nights turned into weeks but to her, the world was one endless night. With nothing to occupy her mind, she obsessed about Juan’s words. She thought about all the times where her father said he had a business trips, all those mysterious meetings in his office downtown. She never really understood his work or even if he was working. Was he involved in something criminal? She knew her father owned a lot of real-estate downtown. A building of his went up in flames about ten years ago. She had only been 6 at the time. She remembered at least two people died in that fire, it was an older lady, and a younger boy. Juan must have been one of the victims. He had the scar to prove it and he was out for revenge.

Juan walked by again and Julia banged on the door to try to get his atten-

tion.

“Hey! I need to talk to you!” Julia tried to catch his attention. She banged on the door, but he just ignored her. “I know about the fire!”

He stopped, turned around and glared. The scared side of his face frightened Julia. He unlocked the heavy gray door.

“It was my grandmother.” He clutched the cross around his neck.

“She died in that fire right?”

“Yes”

“What happened?”

“Your father rented her a house downtown. She couldn’t pay. He tried to evict her but the city wouldn’t let him. He burnt the house. My brother and I were in the kitchen, my grandmother was downstairs. She didn’t make it, and neither did my brother.” He turned his face toward Julia so she could clearly see the burn marks on his face and arm.

“That’s not true. Stop lying to me! My father would never do that!” Julia inched closer ready to attack.

“Do you think I’m doing this for fun? I watched my grandmother die when I was 12. He needs to pay for what he did.”

Julia stepped back, “You were only 12?” She asked.

“Yes, I grew up on the streets,” he paused, “I own them now, all of them” He shouted and walked out, latching the door behind him.

Julia sat on the bed and lingered on his words. She felt sorry for him. She felt betrayed by her dad. How could he do such an evil thing? How could he lie about it? She wanted to help Juan, if she ever got out then she would help Juan get revenge.

She had fallen asleep and was woken when someone shook her.

“Get up, wake up, now!” The same guard that Julia hit grabbed her arm and shoving her out of the door. She had never been in the hallway. It had white walls and a concrete floor. The guard forced a black cloth over her eyes as she was lead down the hallway into a door that leads outside. She could feel the cold breeze. She did not know what month it was but feeling the cool air she assumed it was fall. Julia could not see where she was going and kept tripping over rocks that cut her bare feet. A few miles away, they stopped and she was shoved into a car.

She wasn't allowed to remove the black cloth over her eyes. She desperately wanted to see the sun, although she didn't know if it was daylight or nighttime. About what seemed like forever of driving, they stopped. Someone grabbed her arm and forced her out of the car. They kept walking some more. Her feet stung with every step she took. They finally stopped and she was pushed on the ground and someone removed her blindfold.

“Don't move.”

It was dark outside, she looked up and saw the shadow of a man standing beside her, and it was Juan. He was wearing a black mask and all black clothing. She could tell it was him by the way he stood. She could see a portion of his scar through the mask which only showed his large eyes. He had a walkie-talkie on his right shoulder, which he kept whispering into.

Julia took a look around and there was nothing but a plain field. The grass started to die because of the chilly weather. The trees surrounding the field were partially covered in leaves.

“What's going on?” Julia asked.

“Your parents have the money,” He replied. “If they do what I asked no one will get hurt.”

The walkie-talkie beeped and someone muttered something. Julia assumed it meant that her father was here. The walkie-talkie beeped again and

something else was muttered. Juan tightened his grip on Julia's shoulder.

He pinched she shoulder and lifted her up.

A car drove up the field; they stopped about ten feet from where Julia was standing. Her dad got out of the car. He appeared cool, calm and fearless. Her entire life she never remembered him being any other way. Her dad was holding a black duffel bag. He slowly walked up half way between the car and Juan and dropped the bag.

"Let my daughter go!" He yelled

"I gave you specific directions and you didn't follow them," Juan yelled back

"I did! I did everything you asked!"

"No you didn't," Juan snatched Julia and unclipped the gun from his waist. He pointed it at her head.

"Put the gun down and walk away," the father said.

"Approach nice and easy or I will shoot her!" His voice echoed in field.

Julia could feel the nervousness in his grip. He stepped forward, dragging Julia along with him. He pointed the gun toward them and then back at Julia. His arm moved up around Julia's neck. He squeezed harder and harder with every step he took.

"Let me go," Julia gasped. She shot a desperate look at her father and he didn't seem to show any fear.

"Please, put the gun down, nothing will happen if you just walk away." Julia's father said calmly. "I've got your money, what more do you want."

Juan tightened his arm around Julia neck.

"Shut up!" he said.

"Please..." Julia started.

Her father approached and set down the bag.

“It’s all there,” he said. “If you plan on counting it we are going to be here a while.”

Juan stared at him blankly and made no motion to pick up the bag of money.

“What are you still doing here?” Her father asked.

“Remember me?” Juan pulled off his mask. He let go of Julia and she ran behind her father.

Julia’s father immediately recognized Juan.

“That scar on your face is very interesting,” her father said. “Yes, yes, I remember you, your brother, and your grandmother. She was a nice old lady, until she couldn’t pay rent. Then something had to be done about it. She knew all about my business. She knew too much. She just had to go. You and your brother were just collateral damage.”

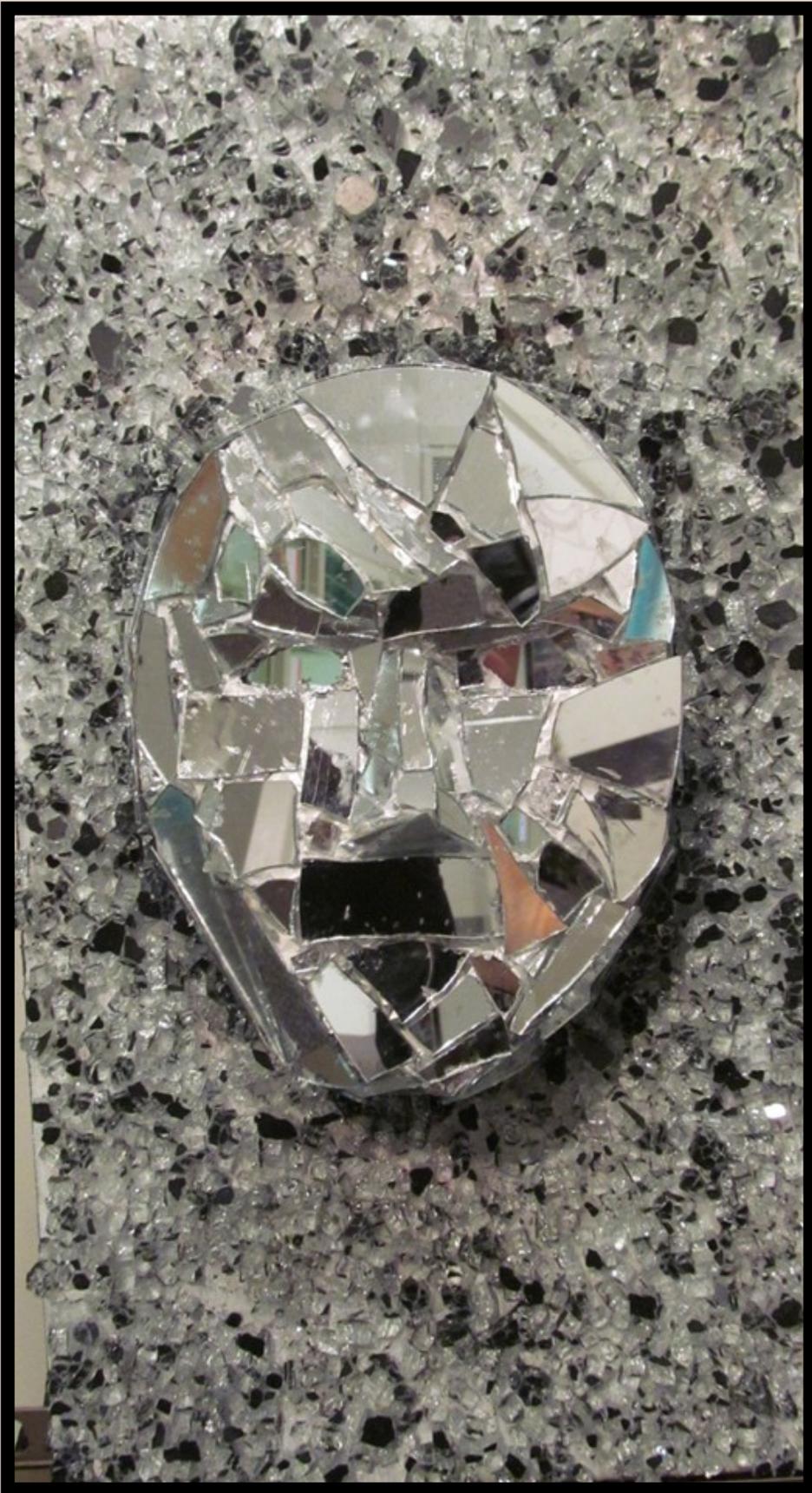
“And what’s stopping me from shooting you now?”

“Dad, no one has to get hurt,” Julia said.

“This is between me and your father Julia,” Juan snapped back. “Julia turn around, you don’t need to see this.”

With the bag of money still in his hands, Juan threw the money at the father’s feet.

“This was never about the money,” Juan said right before he pulled the trigger. He looked over at Julia, “Use the money for art school, far away from here.”



Art By Sandy Collado Estrada

Colin Briggs' Conscience

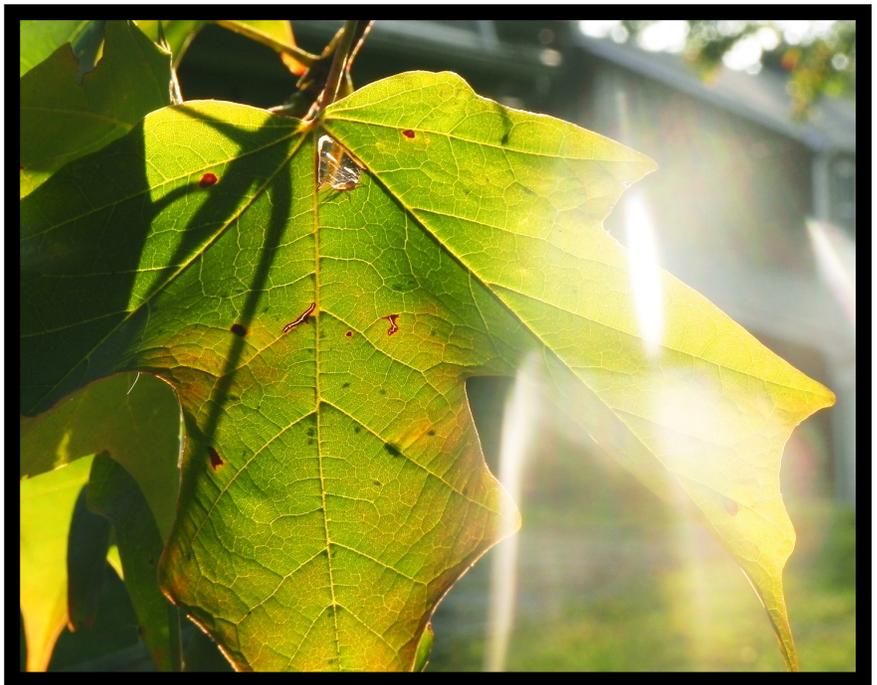
By Imani Jones

I swear it's always race with these people. They'd probably drop their lunch and find a way to blame it on "the White Man". I don't watch the news much, but I'm guessing some kid got arrested yesterday for messing around in a convenience store. Why the hell are they always in these convenience stores anyway? I mean, I'm not trying to be racist, but every time I walk into one of those places, there's some black guy in there with a hoodie on, sagging his pants or something. Can you even blame the owners for being suspicious? It's not like I don't like black people. I just don't know why they have to be so ghetto sometimes. Just the other I was walking around with my lunch, trying to find somewhere quiet to eat, but I should've known better, because a bunch of these black girl were walking around in what seemed like the same direction as I was for a good 3 minutes. I couldn't take it. They were howling and screaming, and laughing just like they were a couple of hyenas. I wanted to turn around and say "Hey! Stop acting like a bunch of zoo animals!" but knowing the way things go around here, the whole school would be up in arms talking about the white kid that called the black girls monkeys, so I just kept my mouth shut.

Know what else? I hate how some of them think they know so much about politics, when I know from experience with some of those people, that they don't know jack. For example, there was some kid in my homeroom yesterday, talking about Ronald Reagan. That caught my attention, 'cause my Grandfather's always talking about how Ronald Reagan is his favorite president, and probably the best. Well I was quite surprised, 'cause this kid had the nerve to sit there and tell his friends that Ronald Reagan, the greatest president this country has ever seen, was distributing crack cocaine and weapons to low income neighborhoods. I couldn't believe it! I turned around and I said "Dude, just where the hell are you

getting your information from?” Of course he decided to get hostile for whatever reason. He said things like, “I wouldn’t expect a privileged little white boy to know what I’m talking about!” and “You probably worship people like Ronald Reagan.” He said there was proof in some book he’d read, but I didn’t believe a word coming out of his mouth. That might be the worse part. The things these people have the nerve to say about America’s greatest heroes. “F’ the police” is something I hear daily. I can’t stand it. Maybe if they weren’t always getting arrested, they’d have better relationships with the police. My uncle’s a police officer, and he’s a great guy.

He’s always putting down crime. He comes over sometimes and tells us about all the dangers he comes across, and stuff like that. It sounds so exiting. But with people like that walking around with no respect for authority, I feel for him. I’ve never had to put a black guy in hand-cuffs and have all of his friends put it



on film, trying to make me out to be some kind of vigilante. I’ve seen the videos.

Art By Misha Baguio

“What’d he do?! What’d he even do?!” “He ain’t do nothin’!” “No justice, no peace!” and with absolutely no video of what the guy probably did to deserve it. It’s totally biased. Like I said, I don’t look at the news much. All I ever see is one of them dying again, but when I do watch, it’s because it’s the only just source for news there is anymore. On Fox, they tell you what really happened. That’s what my Dad always told me. “If you wanna know the truth, you can’t listen to people, you’ve gotta listen to the news.”

Of course, I'm not saying all black people are criminals. That would be ignorant of me. All I'm saying is there are good ones and bad ones. Just like how there are good people and bad people; there are good blacks and bad blacks. It's just that all the bad ones seem to dress the same, act the same walk the same, and talk the same. Over the years I've realized you can usually tell the difference by looking at them. So, like I said, not all of them are bad, but I'm pretty sure most of the black people around here aren't the best people to be affiliated with.

This one time, I overheard a kid talk about the military and how corrupt he felt like *they* were. He was talking about some soldier that came back and decided to tell everyone how he killed innocent families and decapitated children. Wild, crazy things like that. I was outraged, except this time I just kept my mouth shut. It was hard to do, but I kept it shut anyway. I came home and saw my Dad on the couch watching Bill O'Reilly talk about some black restaurant he had walked into. Anyway, I was so upset. I told him all about the crap the kid was talking about. I didn't want to get him mad too, but I had to get it off my chest. "Listen Son," he said "I don't want you getting the idea that you shouldn't like African Americans, but you've gotta realize that a lot of them just don't know what the hell they're talking about, and keep it moving. Just yesterday I was on the internet watching something about how this rapper decided to take up poetry or something, and was talking about shooting guns at President Bush, and burning the White House or somethin', and they think that's politics. Think his name was Common Sense or somethin' like that, but I tell you, the way that grown man was talking, you wouldn't think he had any at all. Trust me. Sometimes it's better to let people be as ignorant as they wanna be. As long as there are kids like you that know the truth about our great country, our future is safe. I'm glad you're so passionate about these things, son."

It felt good to know my Dad was proud of me for knowing what was what. I think hearing him talk about politics all the time, and all that other stuff he so

passionate about really rubbed off on me. I'm glad too. I'm sure a lot for kids would've heard what I heard and just accepted it, but it's a good thing I wasn't raised by someone who believes everything they hear.

It's interesting that he brought up that rapper. A lot of kids live and breathe everything they hear in Rap. It was probably a guy like that other Common guy who said something about Reagan distributing drugs in a song, and had everyone believe it. I hate rap. My Mom thinks it's the devil. She hasn't heard it like I have though, so I know it's the devil. If people like Jay Z ran the world, what would this country be? There's that Kanye West too. Always talking about how great he is. Seriously. The guy really thinks he's God. How do you get so conceited? One of those blacks becomes president and they think they've got power all of a sudden to do whatever they want, and say what they want. I've never idolized those idiots. I look up to people more like Elvis. He's someone with class, and integrity. But apparently, he was a "racist". When you really think about it, if Elvis happened to be a racist, it still wouldn't make him a bad person. I mean, think about what time he was in? Everyone was racist then, and from my experience, I can see why.

You know what? They don't even have the right to get mad at me for saying things like that if I choose to. If I wanted to get up and talk about how ignorant and violent so many of them are, them getting mad at me would be hypocritical, 'cause all I hear in class is people talking about the white kid, and how the "white man" is trying to take them down, and how "stupid" and "crazy" white people are. How do you think I feel about that? I'm not crazy. I'm not stupid. I've never driven a tractor into the lake on video, but just because some guy does it on TV, white people are crazy. What about those ghetto videos they love watching so much? What about all those people in the street fighting? Know what I saw one time? I saw a grown man fighting an old woman. Fighting! They didn't even care how wrong it was. They were laughing and clapping and stomping like a bunch of Gorillas. It gets me so mad. All I can do is sit there and not

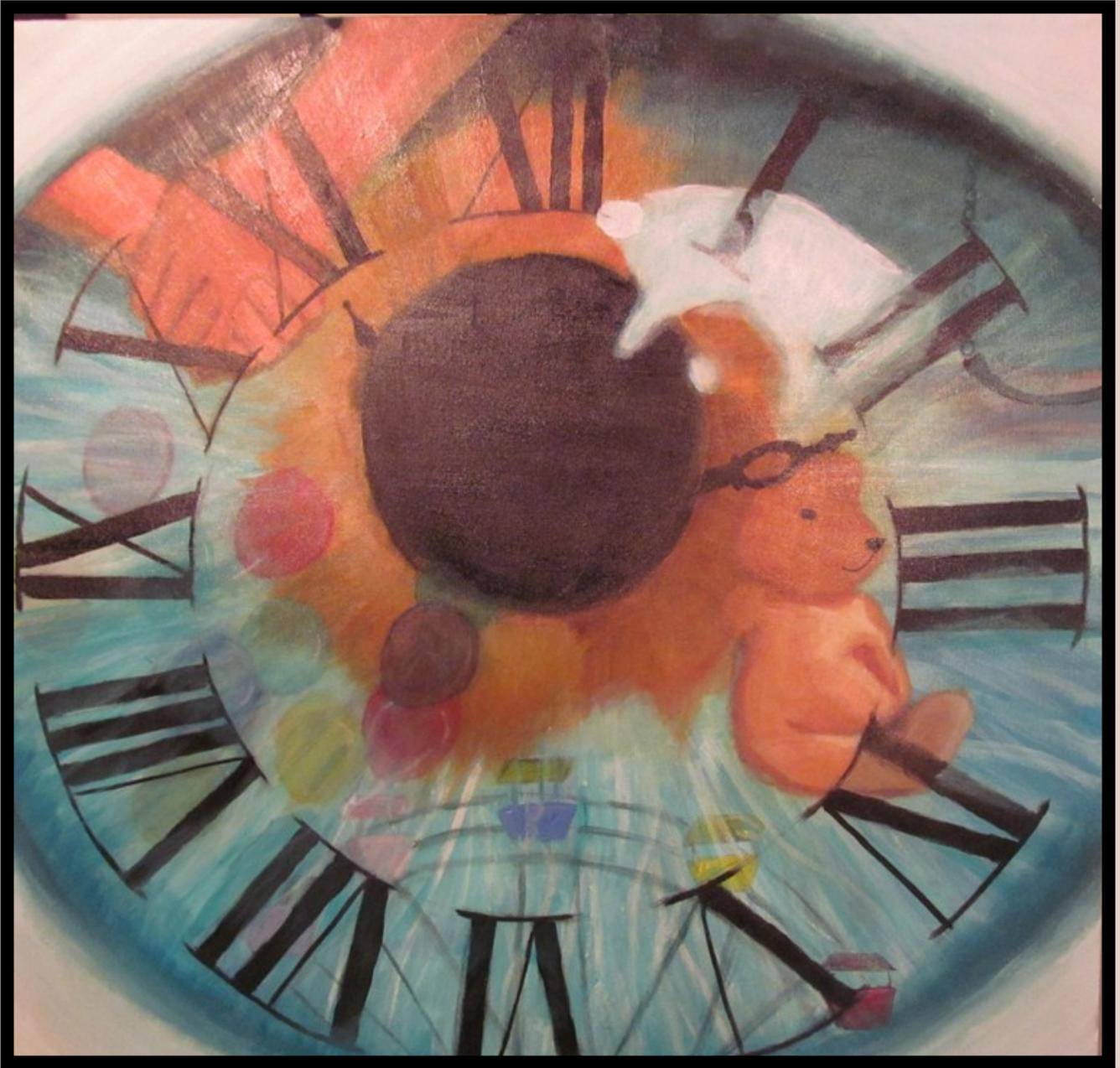
say anything, 'cause they second I say something, I'll be getting sued for a hate crime or something. I wish I was in the position Bill O'Reilly's in. He gets to say anything he wants and he can't be beat up and jumped or sued. He says what's true. He knows what I know. It's just that I'm not on TV. I know for a fact black people hate him, and it's just because he's not scared of them. Anytime someone's not scared for them, they don't know what to do, and they get violent. I see it all the time. Even when it's between them, they just can't take not being feared by someone.

Like I said though, they're not all bad. I remember one kid that was a really nice, decent guy. He followed the rules, stood up for the pledge of allegiance every day like a good American, and he studied his butt off. His grades were great. I don't even think he listened to rap like the rest of them. Great guy. He got bullied all the time though, and that's what I can't stand about them. As soon as one black guy sees another black guy doing something he's too stupid and ghetto to be doing himself, he's gotta make him look bad. This kid started hiding his studying and everything. I even remember him pretending to like rap one time, but he couldn't fool me. I think he moves or something. Not sure what happened to that guy, but he gave me hope that maybe all these people weren't so out of control. Not anymore though. His parents got lucky or something. Maybe he was part white, or Asian, or something. Like Obama. I think that's the only reason he got in. He was raised but I nice civilized white woman. I've met some really nice old black ladies, but not any younger girls, or guys. All the people around here that are my age just don't know how to act like good American kids. That's probably why this countries education isn't where it used to be. It's not the good neighborhoods. It's the bad ones. The kids don't want to learn anything but how to make quick money selling drugs or rapping or something dumb like that, and then they all get arrested. Even the rappers. Rapping isn't even against the law. That's something I can say with confidence though. Not all black people are thugs and criminals, but all rappers definitely are.

Actually, I remember that same guy that talked about the military, talking

about Tupac! He called him a genius! Can you believe that? Tupac. Thug Life, shoot 'em up Tupac; a genius. Wildest claim I've ever heard. I don't even think that guy could read, and he's supposed to a prophetic intellectual? That's what I said to him too. I said "Tupac could read?" and you wouldn't believe how angry this guy got. You would think I had insulted a President. His fist were clenched up and all. I could swear I saw his veins pop out of his head. I don't see why it was that big of a deal to him, but that's what's wrong with so many people. They idolize these rappers to the point where it's like you're talking bad about their religion. Yes, I do admit, I get pretty upset when I hear them talk about the government, and the cops, and the military, and all that other stuff they slander, but come on. Those are American heroes; the reasons that this country isn't full of corruption and crime. That's probably why so many of the kids around here hate the cops so much. They just can't help but commit crime, and break the law, and then when someone puts a stop to it, they get upset.

I really wish I could move out of the crap-hole. It's so ghetto here I can't believe it sometimes. There are times when I can barely sleep, 'cause our god damned neighbors won't stop blasting Jay Z or whoever the hell it is they listen to. It pisses me off so bad. I wish I could just walk over there and break their radio. I'd call the cops on them, but I thought about it, and they'd probably try to turn it into some kind of revolution, and tell everyone to turn up their radios at night, and yell "Justice for Jerome!" or something stupid like that. Everything's a revolution around here. They don't even know what the hell a revolution is. The Revolutionary War. That was a real revolution! They probably don't even know that happened. The Civil War! That was an attempt at revolution, but still. It was done for the right reasons. I'm not really sure who to side with when it comes to that. When I look at what Lincoln tried to do, it's cool that he kept this great country together but... well... I'm not saying I wish we still had slaves, but the way they act around here, they might as well be slaves.



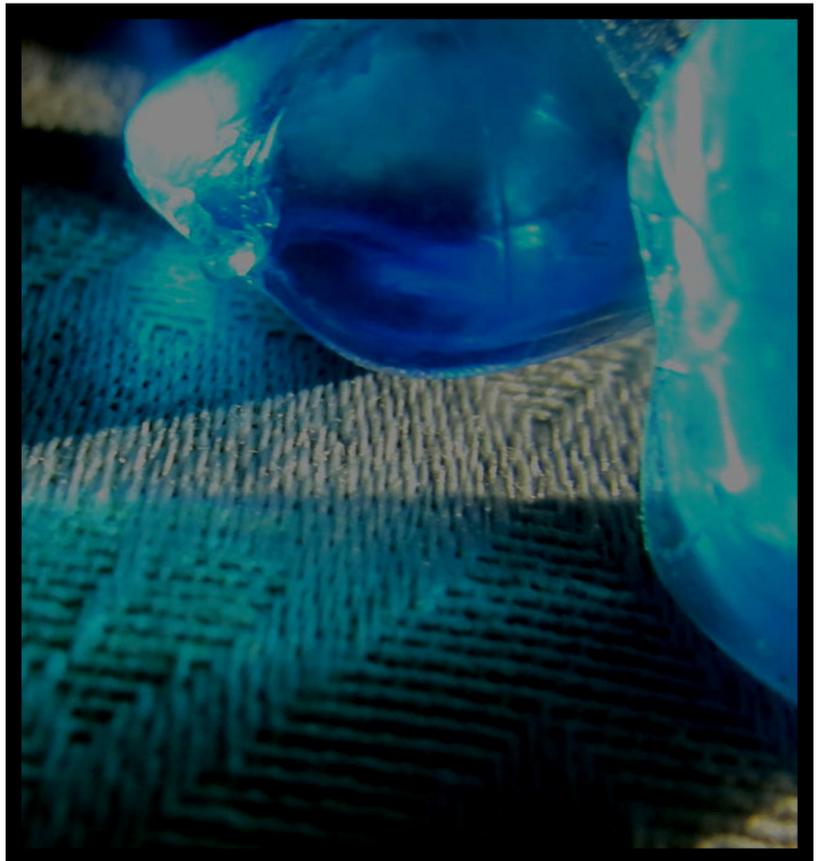
Art By Sandy Collado Estrada

The Thing

Ellis Edwards

I am a tornado
With no calm eye at my center.
Bound by the skies but I roam free.
I am a pretender when things get rough.
I am bright red surrounded by blue hues.
I entertain because I live for it.
I am of independent yet suffocating thoughts.
I distress when others are not direct.
An ear for gossip
A carrier of good news
A verbal diarrhea with no
nearby toilet paper
Observant as a blind mule
A brave hero with no damsel
to rescue
I am a voice that no one re-
members
I am no feast for monkeys.

Art By Kelly
Bishaw



The Influence

Imani Jones – Williams

G - 18. The heaviest smoker in the group. Tall, nappy hair, twisted hair.

Al – 18. The heaviest overall drug user. Thick, nappy mini afro.

Ragz – 19. The oldest, next to Nino. Heavy, with long tied back dreadlocks.

Hodge – 17. The youngest of the group. Goes to church often, and is overprotected by his mother. Long dreadlocks and slight mustache.

Myles – 18. Paris' twin brother. Shortest in the group. Messy black hair.

Paris – 18. Myles' twin brother. Neat upstanding hair.

Josh – 18. Tall, skinny, with big lips, and a small head. His hair stand up and out

Nino – 19. The oldest of the group.

In a basement in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, Hip Hop plays aggressively. A group of young men are take seats on chairs, a couch, and the dirty white carpet floor. The television is on, but the volume is muted. Each one of them are under the effects of the marijuana smoke that clouds the room as they pass it around, skipping their friend Hodge, the only member of the group who chooses not to smoke. They're currently discussing what took place the night before.

Al - Look y'all, I wouldn't really stress it too much, aight? *Al passes G the tightly rolled blunt.*

G- That's what I'm sayin'. She knew what she was gettin' into messin around with us. I mean, I ain't sneak it in her drink or nothin' like that. I gave her options. *He inhales the marijuana.*

Hodge - OK, so how did y'all mess this girl's life up like that in one night? When did it get that serious?

G – *Stares at the smoke, gathering his thoughts.* Oh, that's right! Hodge bounced early when his moms called.

Everyone – *Remembers him leaving.* Oh yea. That's right. He did leave.

Myles - Aight. I'mma tell you the story Hodge.

Ragz – *Rises from his seat.* Hold up! I'm tryna tell him the story.

G - Aight. We'll go around the room then.

Al - I think I should go first though.

Paris - Man, you always tryna do something first. Selfish. Go 'head G. Tell the story.

G - Aight, so we got to the party, right? Everything was goin' right. After like the fifth track they played, that's when you had to bounce.

Hodge – Right.

G - Aight, so then after you stepped, that's when Nino finally showed up.

Ragz – *Laughing.* That's when we found out why he was so late.

G – Right. So he walks in with this girl I ain't ever seen before. I wish I had though. I probably could'a cuffed her before Nino had a chance.

Everybody turns to Nino for his reaction, but they see him asleep next to the couch.

Al – So anyway, for whatever reason, Nino stepped too after a few minutes. But before he did, he brought her over to us. Now, that was his mistake.

Nino – *Wakes up.* What y'all talkin' about?

Josh - We're talking about the party. Hodge doesn't know what happened.

Nino – *Sits up, and stretches.* It's only right. I brought the girl y'all messed up.

Al - Wait your turn Nino. I got the floor. Now, like I was sayin'. After Nino left with half the weed, this girl was still hangin' around, so I went up to her and started talkin' to her.

Ragz - Shot down too!

Al - Man, shut up. I ain't the only one she wasn't tryna talked to. She was too stingy.

Myles - She shot me down too, bruh. She was cold.

Ragz – *Laughs*. That's not 'cause she was too stingy. That's 'cause you ain't got no game.

G - Then when she didn't want you you started talkin' about smackin' her.

Myles – *Shrugging*. She shouldn't have been talkin' wreckless.

G - Anyway, that's when I stepped to her, and I could tell she was feelin' me already, so we had a little conversation, and after some time passed I had her high off at least two blunts.

Hodge - I thought you said she O.D'd or somethin'.

G - We gettin' to that, bruh. Be patient. So she was sittin' there, high. I was sittin' next to her, high, and everybody else was doin' whatever doin'.

Al - High.

G - Of course. So then after a while we found out where the bottles were. That's when I asked her if she drank. Now, she actin' all shy, tellin' me 'Yeah... sometimes... maybe a little.' She was laughin' like I told her a joke. I knew that was BS but I was like 'If she down, then she down.' So we headed to the drinks. I was drinkin', she was drinkin'.

Everyone stops speaking. Each member of the group avoids eye contact, except for Hodge.

Hodge - Ok... so what's up? What happened then? Y'all didn't rape her did you?

G - Hell no, man. You crazy? Look. After that I just asked her she was down to pop some pills, and she was still actin' all childish, but I figured if she said she was down, she was down. She supposed to know what she can and can't take. So then, we popped some Xans, and some E. She even took some Percocet.

Hodge - Damn, G. People got limits, man.

G - Man, I was just tryna have some fun with her. So this is when things started to get real. I couldn't find her for like 10 minutes. I was walkin' up to people askin' them if they seen her, and no one knew anything.

Paris - I was scared bruh. G looked scared too. But he ain't gon' tell you that. All y'all were scared. Don't front.

Al - I thought she ran away, or died in a closet, or somethin' crazy like that.

Paris - That ain't funny bruh. Either one of those things could've happened.

G - It was a scary situation. Anyway, turns out she was in the bathroom with Ragz.

Ragz - Yea, but I was just as scared as they were, bruh. She started throwin' up blood right in front of me. She was bendin' over the sink spittin' it out. I thought she was about to die. I didn't know what to do. I wasn't tryna leave her there alone throwin' up, but I didn't wanna be on the news for druggin' her either, so I was about to bounce.

Josh - We all did after that. Who knows what happened later in the night.

Al - She's probably straight.

Hodge - Y'all just left her there, throwin' up blood? What happened to her? Why would you just leave her there?

G - 'Cause bruh. We could've all gotten bagged for somethin' like that. It's a good thing we left when we did too, 'cause I heard the cops came like 10 minutes after we left.

Hodge - So she could be in jail?

Al – Look bruh. I wouldn't worry too much about whoever she was, or whatever she's doin' or wherever she's at.

Hodge – Ok. Whatever. So Nino, who was this girl anyway?

Nino – Man, she's this girl I've been talking to for a while. I was lookin forward to comin down here, 'cause I was tryna come over.

Hodge – So you just dropped her off at this party?

Nino – Nah, man. I was spending a little time with her. She skipped school to see me to bruh. She's too easily swayed. I had to take advantage.

G – That's what I'm sayin'.

Nino – You know what? I told Ragz not to let her meet G, 'cause I knew he'd get her drugged, and y'all know G don't know about limits.

Al - But you was gonna let her meet me?

Nino – I knew she wasn't gonna go let you talk to her bruh.

Hodge – Look. It seems to me like y'all are ignoring some big things right now.

Everyone goes silent.

Ragz – Like what?

Hodge – Ok, well first off: This girl could be in jail, considering the cops showed up, she could be dead from losing all that blood, she could be dead just from taking all those drugs she wasn't used to. A lot of things.

Al – *Takes another hit of the weed.* Man, stop talkin' like that. She's aight. Don't worry about it. Plus, we weren't the only people in that house. Anybody else could've helped her. Everything's straight, man. Stop worrying about it.

Hodge – I'm a little worried about y'all considering that's so easy for you.

Al – I don't know why the hell you expect me to be so bent about somethin' I can't change.

Nino – Al, you can't really be that selfish. And G, you too bruh. Hodge is right.

That was careless of y'all. *Pulls out phone to find out where the girl is.*

G – Aight, well look. I don't know what it is you want from us Nino. You want an apology? Sorry. That good? Is she safe now? Did I make everything better?

Nino – *Reading the message he receives.* “Hey Nino. No. Last I heard she wasn't ok. I heard she's in ICU or somethin'. Your friend really went far last night.”

Silence covers the room once again as each member of the group is struck by shock.

Al – Stop playin' Nino! That ain't funny bruh.

Nino – Oh ok. You think I'm messin' with you? That's cool Al. Believe what you want. I'm leavin'. See y'all.

G – You for real Nino? Be real with me dawg.

Nino – Peace. See y'all later.

Nino exits.

Josh – I believe him.

Ragz – Yeah. Me too.

G – I think I do I too. I just really don't want to.

Al – That's bull. Ain't nobody in the ICU!

Al exits.

Ragz, Josh, and Hodge wait for G to respond.

G – Damn. I was just tryna have some fun with her.



Art By
Andrea
Sanchez

Waiting

Jennifer Erazo

I am a mixture of mysterious origin
Only known by tragic history of exploitation and discovery
A voice that has a switch
For different sounds for the same words
A mere leaf in a tree
That observes much but wishes
For the wind to blow it away far
I am a dreamer waiting for reality
to become beautiful
'til then I am a weaver of stories
and pictures
That show that about anything
can be beautiful yet...
I am a paradox that wants to be
consistent
I am also a teetering scale desir-
ing balance.



Art By Jennifer Erazo

Remedial Ruin

By Lance Morris

What came first? Creation or ruin?

Was the empty formless darkness cause or effect?

Did the almighty cartoonist decide what it means to be human?

Or did he turn aside, teaching us what it means to neglect?

When or where did everything deviate from the established order?

And was it an act of defiance or no?

Is disorder meant to inspire terror?

Or is it from discord we ultimately grow?

They say destruction keeps it all going.

But the destination doesn't look that great.

The germs of struggle are always growing.

Treading for peace and choked by hate.

Ultimately it's all a big question.

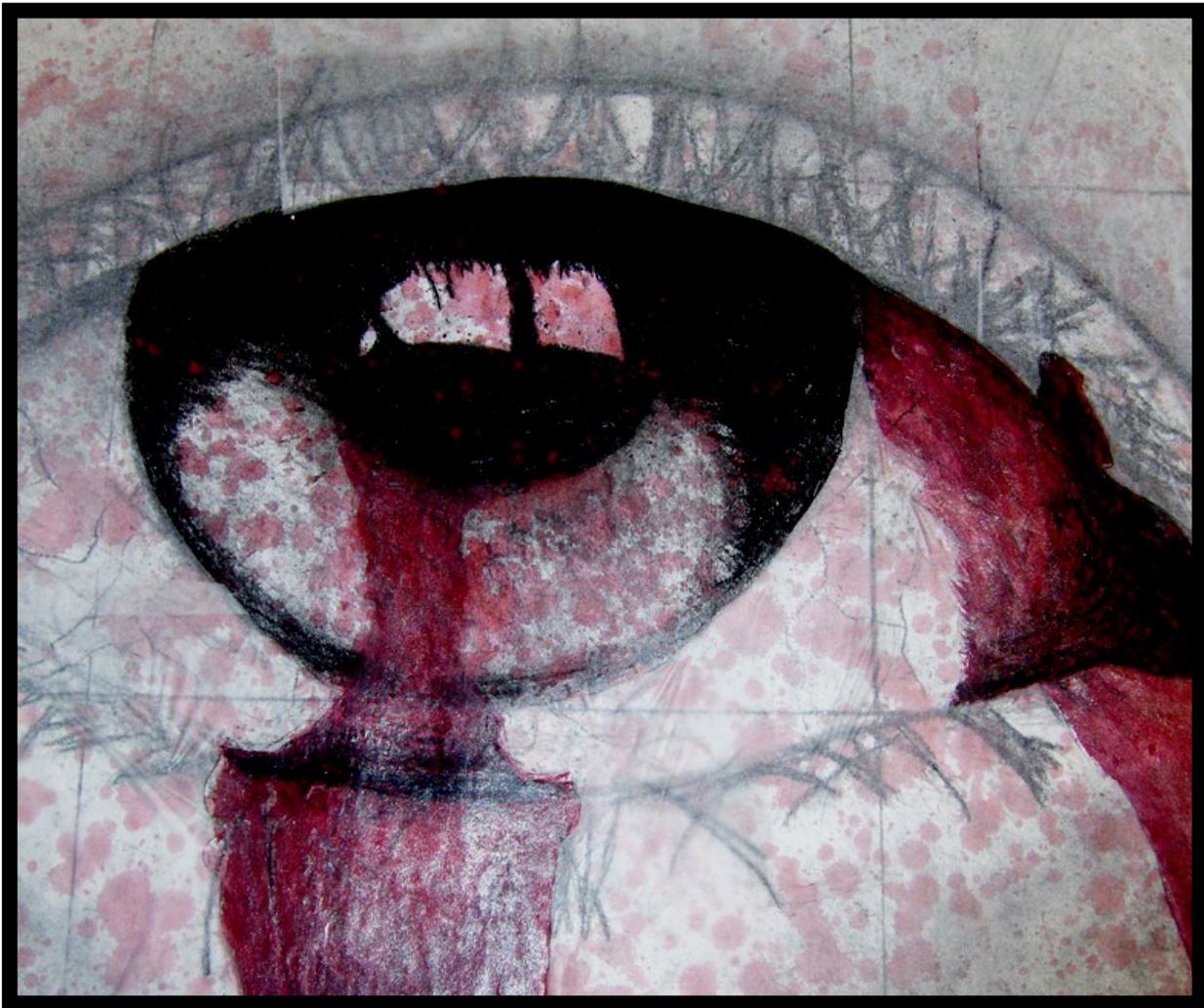
In a sequence that makes no sense.

We're all the legacy of aggression.

And our bewilderment is the consequence.

Filled with questions and dread,
I'll continue to pointlessly withstand.

While I lament over the unsaid,
And fight for reasons I don't understand.



Art By Keannu Richards

LOVE

Xiomara Castillo

When I first met you
I knew you were the one
I'll be the one to stand by your
side & fight
Waiting by the phone for your
reply
Knowing you're the only one
who can make me smile
Scared by the idea of never
talking to you again
Could this possibly be the
end?
Every second my heart beats
faster
Finally get your reply and I can
breathe again



Art By Sara Palacios

The Life and Times of Henson Vega

By Lance Morris

The combination of a bowl of Cap'n Crunch, an Amazing Spider-Man Comic, preferably from the Romita era, and the sweet dulcet tones of the television is a religion that dominates my Saturday morning. Hell, it's basically sacred. True, a lot of people don't really understand how I can possibly focus on all three at once, but that's because they lack the talent to focus on the things that really matter in life. I pity them, really.

With my cereal in one hand and a comic in the other, I staggered over to my ancient, contemptible excuse for a couch and, trying my best not to spill the golden glory within, lazily collapsed. You should have seen the thing in its prime. Now it resembles the crumbling statue of Ozymandius, a colossal wreck decaying from years of uneventful evenings and sexual encounters, none of them mine. But it wasn't all that bad. My routine was a simple one, devoid of stress. I proudly surveyed the piles of filthy dishes and pulp fiction strewn about the flat surfaces of my humble dwelling. This was why Saturday was my favorite day of the week. Nothing to do, and all the time in the world to think about it. My gradual descent

into apathy was suddenly interrupted by a noise at the door. It sounded like my door was having a sparring match with Apollo Creed. Not wanting to disturb my usual custom, I tried to ignore it. However, after about two minutes of the same ceaseless commotion, I decided that it was probably worth looking into. Annoyed and about five percent intrigued, I grudgingly removed myself from the familiar, rough cushions of the couch, cradled my cereal bowl in one hand, and stumbled towards the unwelcomed excitement, trying my best not to trip over anything on the way.

“You’d better have a damned good reason to disturb my...serenity,” I yawned menacingly.

I opened the door and the first thing that hit me was the cold. The blast of air violated my very being, and I stood helpless as the frigid aura gripped my throat and pierced my insides. The second thing that hit me was a fist...I think. Yup. Definitely a fist. Unapologetic and swift, the dense mitt clashed with the most central part of my face, right between the eyes. Pain now engulfed my face as I was flung backward. I howled in agony. The one out of three things that mattered to me on a Saturday had been laid to waste, its contents now spilled all over the ratty welcome mat. I felt the tears coming. I heard a thundering voice interrupt the wind.

“Where the hell have you been?! I’ve been out here forever trying to get your attention you miserable piece of shit,” it growled viciously.

My heart began to quake uncontrollably. I recognized the grating, surly tone of the visitor. Knowing him, I was lucky I only got punched in the face. I got to my feet abruptly, wiping the bloody nose on the sleeve of my bathrobe. Standing in the doorway was a marvelous example of a man, but not in the way that you’d think. He was a freakishly tall individual who towered over everyone. He was also slightly scruffy and careless in appearance, with his shirt half tucked, his hair an unholy mess, and his dress shoes tarnished by nature and possibly urine. He wore a pitch black tie with little white skulls scattered all over it. At the moment, he was the glowering portrait of malevolence, his eyes glowing red and dense vapor pouring out of his nose and mouth. To anyone else this scowling, fearsome, and sloppy leviathan would probably be considered a savage, or quite possibly a Wookiee in a suit. But I simply called him Henson. And he was my best friend in the entire universe.

“That is a bitchin tie,” I slurred admiringly.

Henson moved as if to reprimand me again, but he then looked down at his tie as if he had completely forgotten about it. There was a brief pause before he shook his head in resignation. He picked up the overturned cereal bowl on the

welcome mat and held it out to me. This was his way of apologizing.

“C’mon let’s get inside,” he grunted, “it feels like Hoth out here and I’ve got a lot to tell you.”

I shrugged and shuffled back into the house, “Sure, make yourself at home. Mind the puddle of milk, blood and drool...”

“There any more cereal left?”

“I’ll tell you after I find my nose,” I mumbled.

.....

The envelope was in horrible condition. The edges of the thing were dripping wet and deathly cold. I lifted the letter to my nose and inhaled, the unmistakable scent of crappy perfume and bile filling my nostrils. A boot mark was also imprinted on the envelope, complete with some mud and other refuse that came from the culprit. And finally, under all of the grime and unpleasantness was a simple name: *Betty*. The handwriting was the best looking thing on the whole enclosure, like a diamond underneath a crap load of slop. I continued scrutinizing the letter even when I heard the sound of unrepentant pillaging coming from the kitchen. I guess obliterating a man’s peaceful existence just isn’t enough for some people.

Upon learning that my fridge was just as devoid of sustenance as I was, Henson walked over to the couch and sat down in defeat.

“Dude, did I destroy the only source of food you had in this place?”

“Maybe...,” I said absently.

“You wouldn’t happen to have anything to snack on, would you?”

Without taking my eyes from the letter, I plunged my hand into the disgusting bowels of the couch and rummaged around. I pulled my hand out and offered him two things: a menu from a Chinese take-out place and an ancient jawbreaker that had hairy gum stuck to the wrapper. There was a slight pause before he made his choice.

Trying not to touch the wrapper too much, he looked over at me and said, “Thanks for the jawbreaker”

I nodded, still looking at the envelope, “I was offering you the gum”.

Henson scoffed as he continued to struggle with the tenacious wrapper. I finally placed the envelope down and watched as he threw the wrapper across the room and placed the jawbreaker in his mouth. He stared rigidly ahead, focusing on the uninterrupted stream of nonsense that darted across the television screen. His back was ramrod straight and he was perched right on the edge of the couch. This

was an odd thing to behold, since Henson has and always will be a chronic sloucher and couch potato. His right hand began to fidget; the trigger finger twitching sporadically. Something was definitely gnawing away at him, unless he was actually finding the Animaniacs unbelievably riveting, but he sure as hell wasn't about to tell me what it was unless I went about it the right way. So I started with the obvious question...

“Who’s Betty?”

Henson continued staring at the television, “a woman.”

I scoffed and prodded him with my elbow, “go on...”

Henson clenched his jaw in annoyance, looking like he wanted to punch my lights out again. After a short pause, he suddenly blurted out his description of the dame, the words coming out clumsily and swiftly, “she was younger than I was. A college student probably, or a waitress. She had on one of those simple, short sleeved plaid shirts. Her hair was long; the color of red wine, but it looked like it was soft before. And she was about 5’4 in height...I liked her immediately.”

I whistled and nodded energetically, trying to put all the pieces together in my head to form a mental image of her. Who wouldn't? I should have known from the hand writing that she was gorgeous. Hearing stuff like that actually makes me want to get out of the damn house. Man, some ugly idiots get all the luck. That was

her handwriting on the envelope, right?”

He nodded, still staring ahead. I was surprised he hadn't burned a damned hole in the TV by now.

“So, what's the deal? Did you find out that you're the father of her kid or something?”

That got his attention. He turned his head, agitated and fuming, “No! Nothing like that...”

I chortled, cupping my hands and putting them over my mouth and breathing asthmatically. I dropped my voice about three octaves and uttered, “Search your feelings, spaz. You know it to be true!”

“Get bent!” he retorted venomously.

Still laughing, I lowered my hands and focused on the television, trying my best to avoid the hazardous glare he was giving me.

“I'm just joking, man. We both know that women find you repulsive. But seriously, what's the story with her?”

“There is no story.”

“What do you mean?”

“I had to kill her this morning.”

That statement changed the entire atmosphere of the room. Whatever smile I had plastered on my face dissolved and morphed into a bitter line. I could feel the whole illusion of apathy crumble and collapse around me. I tend not to concern myself with the horrors of reality; it brings nothing but apprehension, stress, and resentment. But that's the thing about Henson: I can always count on him to show me the ugly side of life.

I looked at him again, trying to hide whatever it was I felt, "You kill all women you like?"

He sniffed, continuing to gnaw on the jawbreaker, "No, not that it matters. I kill whoever they tell me to kill."

I didn't like that answer. It made him seem like these people, his employers, had ruined him. Pulled the man I knew out and stuffed something else in. I found myself looking at the envelope again.

"Why'd you give me this envelope? What's in it?"

He turned away again, his face contorted into a toxic expression of shame
"That's her note."

"Why'd she leave a note? "

"What do you mean?"

“Was she expecting someone?”

“...No, she couldn't have been waiting for me to show up when I did...or maybe she was...” He uttered the words with an unrecognizable whisper.

“What the hell happened to you? You look spooked as all hell...”

Henson coughed, he ran his hand through his greasy hair, “...I saw something terrible today...but I don't really know how to ...deal with it”. He coughed, looking at me with a face abundant with profound bewilderment. It was hard to look at. I'd known the guy since elementary school. He grew up to be a discounted murderer. I grew up to be a college dropout without a purpose. Both of us were failures in our own way. I grabbed the remote positioned on the couch cushion and turned off the television. I then reached for the envelope, but Henson slapped my hand away. I didn't say anything. In time, I'm sure he'd let me read what was inside.

I sighed, feigning indifference, “terrible, huh?”

He didn't respond.

“Let's hear it, Henson”

There was another long pause. Henson gulped, steeling himself for the story he was about to recount. He then slumped into the couch, assuming his usual

position, and finally spoke...

“They told me that I was supposed to be killing some successor to some bastard’s damned fortune. I was to break into the target’s place, find them, look them straight in the face, and tell them why they were going to die and how. My employers didn’t want me to just shoot the guy...they wanted to send a message to the predecessor, the guy who actually owns the fortune, that he made a huge mistake trying to take the money out of the syndicate’s hands. It’s all about money with these people...”

I interrupted, “Did she owe them money?”

“You owe money, and you’re not dead yet.”

I shrugged, “They’re probably going by alphabetical order”.

He turned his head; regarding me with a skeptical expression, “I don’t think that’s how that kind of thing works.”

“Alright, my bad...continue”

“So the target was set. And they wanted me personally for the job. No backup, so I wouldn’t have to split the pay. They only wanted me to have a silenced handgun for this sort of thing, since the target was apparently living in an apartment building. It was pretty run down. A wretched crater complete with

wretched people. It didn't seem like the sort of place she belonged...not that it mattered. I was to show up there early in the day, like at around 3:00 am. The job sounded great. Everything was supposed to work out the way I thought it would."

"Didn't it though? She's dead."

Henson continued as if he hadn't heard me, "I was happy to have gotten this job. I never get chosen for the high level shit. I'm basically an assassin understudy, if that's an actual thing. It's, like, the most miserable job on earth, next to being a Wal-Mart greeter. I felt like I was justified in celebrating the whole thing, so I did what anyone would do--"

"And got fucked up." I said matter-of-factly.

He sniffed in compliance, "Didn't think it would be so hard to deal with the booze, but I don't think about a lot of things. Anyway, I was completely wasted that night. I could hardly stand; much less plan a successful murder. But I wasn't going to go to sleep; I would have been next if I'd missed the window. So I wandered the streets, dazed and mumbling about what I was going to do with the money once I'd gotten it. Piss it away in all probability...I roamed the streets for a long time. At one point, I was sure I had gotten lost in the endless concrete

abyss she lived in. Now that I think about it, it's like we were both trapped there. By the time I made it to the complex, my brain felt like it was trying to crawl out of my skull. My eyes were burning. I had to pee. What was supposed to be one of the best nights of my life had totally gone to shit. She lived in 109, the very last door in the corridor. I kept stumbling on my own trench coat, blaming the sub-standard architecture. The first thing I noticed when I blundered past the door of 109 was the clock. It was a defaced grandfather clock. Its mirrors were shattered, some of the shards missing, and its wooden surface had an abundance of initials and other obscenities carved on it. The little hand was pointing at the number four, and the big one pointed to nine. The second thing I noticed was not the woman herself, but the revolver in her hand. I noticed it mostly because it was the shiniest thing in the whole room; the lamp from the desk she was leaning on made the thing shine like crazy. Hell, it was nicer than my own gun. My eyes followed the gun as it abruptly positioned itself...it was now aiming at my stomach. There are a lot of important organs in that area. It was after all of this that I finally noticed the woman. Like I said, she was gorgeous, half engulfed in the shadows of the room. But she wasn't looking at me she was looking down at something. I fumbled for my own gun, but then I heard the revolver click.

“Please don't do that,” She said calmly.

I sure as hell wasn't about to argue, so I kept both hands hanging at my sides. I cursed myself silently. She kept the gun positioned at my abdomen.

She said 'Thanks. I just need another minute, if that's ok...'

I said, 'No problem. Take all the time you need.'

"I know that you don't exactly know me, but could you do me a gigantic favor?"

"Only if you do me one..."

"Sorry. I asked first, plus I don't exactly have a lot of time here, y'know?"

"Besides the extra hour I gave you, you mean?"

She smiled, then winced holding her stomach, "Again thanks, that was just what I needed. Oh! God..."

She stopped looking at me and resumed to look down again. This time I followed her gaze, and finally saw my real target. Her stomach was inflated to a colossal size. It was like she had eaten a boulder or something. I'm sure it probably weighed as much as one too. She didn't look miserable though. She wasn't in pain, as far as I could tell. She was actually smiling. It was the kind of smile that would normally light up the whole damn room. I hated it, because it made me feel sick to my stomach. Everything I had drank that night instantly whirled

around inside my stomach. I could feel it trying to snake its way up my throat...

“Hey, stay with me, tough guy. You’re almost through this I promise...”

I opened my mouth to speak, but I didn’t have anything to say. Instead I did the next best thing and threw up. I doubled over, retching and coughing uncontrollably, hitting the small desk beside me. It was terrible. After I was done, I stayed down there, not wanting to look at her. I’d never felt so humiliated. But then she spoke again.

“Yeah, the throwing up part sucks at first, believe me. Are you ok?”

I didn’t respond.

“Hey, I know you’re still beating yourself up down there, but could you still do me that favor?”

I looked up, “what is it?”

She pointed to a small desk.

“Could you hand me the envelope you threw up on?”

I looked at her, trying to see if she was serious. She motioned with the gun. I slowly got up, minding the puddle of mess on the floor. I stepped over to the desk and grabbed the envelope. It already read *Betty*. I guess it fit her. I walked around the desk and towards the girl and the gun. She didn’t move an inch. The closer I

got the more nervous I became. She was still smiling that sickening sweet smile. Finally, we were within arm's length of each other. I extended my arm cautiously, offering her the envelope. She took it graciously. Without lowering the gun, she took a piece of neatly folded paper from her front pocket, and slipped it inside the envelope.

She offered it to me, saying, "take it, please."

I wasn't really in any position to refuse, so I took the envelope, wondering just what the hell was happening. After I placed it into my pocket, she lowered the revolver. The room wasn't dark anymore; the sun was starting to show itself. I winced when I saw the revolver flash again, but when I opened my eyes I saw the butt of the gun pointing at me instead. This whole situation could not get more perplexing. She was not smiling anymore. Without saying anything, I snatched the gun away from her hand, my mind in a complete haze. Before I knew it, the barrel of the gun was aligned with her face, right between the eyes. But then I remembered...she wasn't the target. My eyes were fixed on her engorged belly. The haze in my head started to fade. Everything finally made some sort of sense. But none of it was right. I looked the mother in the face one last time, trying to keep the hand holding the gun from shaking. Suddenly the arm went numb, and all I could hear was the deafening clattering of the gun hitting the floor of that damn apart-

ment. We kept staring at each other without making a sound. I finally wiped the mess from my mouth with my sleeve. I felt better. I wasn't really sure what I could say after all of this. It had been a very strange morning for both of us.

Finally, after about two minutes, she said, "You want some coffee?"

I sniffed, "No, I gotta go...somewhere"

I turned and made my way back to the door. It was almost 5:10 in the morning. I ran down the hallway, not looking back. The second my hand touched the doorknob of the exit door, I heard a muffled crash come from 109. I stopped moving, my hand still on the doorknob.



Art By Adrian Balderrama

What You Wish For

By Vihbi Dao

Characters – Cupid, Medusa, and Hercules

A cabin in the woods furnished with a simple wooden table and a few chairs. There is also a bed and a bedroom area and place to prepare food. Medusa is sitting at the table reading a Cosmopolitan magazine.

There is a loud knocking at the door.

Cupid: Medusa! Open this door! Right Now!

Medusa opened the door

Medusa: ...cupid?

Cupid rushes into her house and starts flying around in her living room without her asking for him to come in

Medusa: ...what's your problem man!?

Medusa is clearly upset by Cupid's disturbance.

Cupid: MY BOW! YOU TOOK MY BOW! I WANT IT BACK.

Medusa: I did no such thing! Why does everyone in Greece accuse me of taking their things??! I barely even see anybody. I turn everybody who isn't a god to stone.

Cupid: One of my guards told me that YOU took my bow out of its case while I was sleeping! So how can you possibly deny what you did when I have evidence??!

Medusa: Where's the guard that saw me in the Castle?

Cupid: I would bring him BUT your ugly ass would just turn him to stone like everyone else.

Medusa: Alright, what if I did take it. What are you bouta do? You haven't even hit puberty yet.

Cupid: that's something cool to say for someone with an expired AARP card because you're TOO old.

Medusa: Alright whatever man.

Cupid: Yeah that's what I thought.

Medusa: I have a proposal for you though...

Cupid: What could YOU want?

Medusa: Unfortunately I'm the ugliest bitch out here and any guy that even tries to look my way; turns more stoned than cheech and chong put together. So I need you to find me a man and make him fall in love with me. It's been over thousands of years since I slept with anyone, I'm pretty sure they're some cobwebs and spider eggs hatching up in there so do me a solid Baby C and get me out the way.

Cupid: Educate me, Medusa, how am **I** supposed to do that? It's not like guys just nonchalantly pass through the middle of boomduck nowhere.

Medusa: Uh ya actually they do just pass through here. I actually have a collection of them...

She opens her king sized closet and cupid peers in

Cupid: Well GOD DAMN...You got more statues than the Pope does.

Medusa: Yah, I know.

Cupid: Well how am I supposed to find you a guy? Maybe I'm cupid but I'm not no fairy god mother that just shits out happy endings. I make people fall in love. I don't make guys appear.

Hercules enters the scene through Medusa's bedroom by crashing in her window. Cupid gets frightened and hides under the table while medusa grabbed the bow from underneath the couch.

Hercules: MEDUSA! I KNOW YOU'RE IN HERE. Come out; come out where ever you are.

Breaks a lamp for emphasis

I won't hurt you I swear. .

Pushes over her bedroom night stand because he tried to look intimidating

Medusa looks at Cupid and throws the bow at him

Cupid: You had this shit the whole time?! (He aggressively whispers to medusa) I'm bout to have to slay a bitch today.

Medusa: Yeah, yeah whatever but, theirs your chance! Shoot him! Do it and make him fall in love with me before he kills us both!

Cupid: oh shit aight.

Cupid hides behind the kitchen table and waits for Hercules to come into range.

Medusa: Who's there? What do you want from me???

Hercules walks into the middle of the stage with his sword drawn. He passes close to the kitchen and right by cupid who he does not notice.

Hercules: You know, I thought it was gonna be hard to defeat you but you don't look so tough. Good thing I'm half god so I'm immune to your ugly ass.

Cupid jumps out behind Hercules and shoots him in the butt cheek with an arrow.

Hercules: Whoa what the... ***looks at his butt, than looks at Medusa.***You!

He falls down

Medusa: Did it...work?

Cupid: Yeah only for him because he's like half a god or something. It won't be long until he regains conscious. Just make sure the first thing he sees is you when he wakes. That's how the magic love arrows works but you got me messed up if you think you can just pull this shit again. I knew you was thot plotting the moment my guard got me hip that you took my arrow. Do it again and trust me, love is not the only thing you're going to get.

Medusa: What does thot plotting even mean? And I'm sorry I had to, the

cobwebs man, they're getting to me. It was the ultimate scheme...I hope it works, ooooo I'm so excited for this.

Cupid: Only the youngings are hip, I guess you too old to keep up with the slang. But yeah don't be too excited, you're gonna get sick of it. Whatever shawty, im out and stay away from my crib!

Cupid exits the scene. Medusa holds Hercules in her arms, caressing his hair as he lies in her lap knocked out.

Medusa: As soon as you awake from your slumber, we shall live happily forever and ever.

She leans in to kiss Hercules on the forehead to show that she cares for him. After she kissed his head, he started to awaken.

Hercules: sigh* shakes head *, where am I? – Oh shit – ***looks medusa in the eyes*** – I don't know who you are but you are insanely beautiful and I just want you to be mine and give you everything, forever and ever and ever my gorgeous queen.

Medusa: Okay, a little extra then I expected.

Hercules: What do you mean extra? Like the gum?

Medusa: No, ha-ha, never mind. So you're like in love with me or something right?

Hercules: Of course my queen! I will never go anywhere without you because spending one second away from you is like spending all my money in one day. I would feel like I've lost everything. C'mon babe lets ditch this dump and go back to my place so I can introduce the folks to my new beautiful queen!

Medusa: Okay. Pause. First off, my house is not a dump. You can't just crash into my window spontaneously, fall in love with me, and then call my house a dump. That shit ain't right so you need to take your weapon and step back. I lived here for more than 100,000 years. Second, I can't come with you back to your place even if I wanted to really badly. I would love to leave this place but I can't.

Hercules: What do you mean? All you have to do is take a few steps out of this house and you'll be free to go.

Medusa: You don't understand! Your father banished me from the Greek kingdom because of my supernatural powers.

Hercules: what do these powers do that make it so supernatural? I mean I'm supernatural. My dad is freaking Zeus for goodness sakes.

Medusa: I turn regular people stone once they take a look at my ugly face.

Hercules: Then why haven't I turned stoned.

Medusa: You're half a god. My powers don't work on Gods. Even with a little bit of supernatural blood coursing through your veins, my powers won't work.

Hercules: So are you coming with me or not

Medusa: I can't man; you just have to understand that. I don't want to cause mayhem and danger to people, especially the little ones.

Hercules: That's a bullshit excuse! You're obviously lying to me! You're seeing another man aren't you!!

Medusa: No! What are you talking about? You were just here for not even 20 minutes? I'm not coming with you because I can't. Do you want to see how dangerous I am?

Hercules: what do you mean?

Medusa walks towards the closet and opens it up to show Hercules.

Hercules: Oh shit. Well theirs the problem. You're not cheating on me with one guy...you're cheating on me with all of them! How can you do this to me? After everything we've been through you're just going to throw it all away just like that? Do you not love me anymore?

Medusa: What? Are you insane? What on earth are you even talking about, I just met you recently when you busted through my window & these are just people that pass through this forest throughout the 100,000 years of my existence staying here. So I'm not insane. YOU ARE!

Hercules shuts the door closed and pulls medusa in closer. He stares into her eyes with great depth.

Hercules: Baby, I want you to be mine forever. I don't care what happened or

what you did. I just need you by my side or else I will have nothing left! I don't care if you cheated on me, I don't care if you slept with another man, just please save your heart for me. I can't live without you dusaaaa! I LOVE YOU!

Medusa: I never cheated on you and I don't think I can love you, you're kind of...I don't know...EMOTIONALLY PSYCHO!

He lets go of medusa and punches a hole in the wall out of anger.

Hercules: I'm willing to give you my heart, my soul, and everything! All I'm asking from you is your love! I'm so in love with you that I'm angry at myself for loving you. I would stack mountains and vacuum hurricanes just for you. I don't care as long as you're happy, I'm happy.

Medusa: Alright dude you're doing the most, I'm not attracted to white guys anyway.

Hercules: What? WHAT? MEDUSA! Are you freaking serious right now? I'm over here arguing and fighting for our love and you're not even giving two shits about anything I'm saying to you. Why won't you listen to me!

Hercules got violent and strangled medusa.

Medusa: *Gasp* *Gasp* stop! Stop it! You're killing me! *Gasp* *Gasp*

Hercules lets go of medusa and screams at the top of his lungs out of anger

Hercules: AHH!! I love you Medusa!! ***(Burst in to hysterical tears)*** If I could I would take my life for you Medusa! I love you so much!

Medusa: *Trying to regain her breath* you're crazy as shit you know that! You know what I'll do the honors.

Hercules: ... honors?

Medusas snakes on her head because to wild out and hiss at Hercules. He cowered in the corner whimpering and crying begging for mercy. She got closer and her snakes began to eat away at Hercules.

-The End-



Art By Claudia Crespo

Hijacked

By Kapreya Anderson

Calvin ran into the doors of the airport. He was anxious and sweating. His eyes darted in every direction. He wore a black suit with a red tie.

“I don’t want to get on this plane. I hate planes.” Calvin mumbled to himself while he nervously popped Xanax.

Calvin looked up at the sign that told him when his plane was leaving.

“American Airlines Flight 2013 leaves at 10:17.”

He looked at his watch.

“Its 10:10.” He said under his breath. “Where is Gate 209?”

Calvin walked around in a complete circle before he came to the realization that he couldn’t find his gate.

“Um, excuse me ma’am?” Calvin said tapping a lady on the shoulder. “Do you know where Gate 209 is?”

The lady turned around. Her facial expression clearly told Calvin that he needed to back off and leave her alone. Her lips were pursed.

“Well, hello Calvin,” she said sarcastically.

Calvin’s eyes grew big.

“Rebe—Rebecca?” He struggled to get the words out.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m going to Jennifer’s wedding? My best friend? Your cousin? The reason why we met? Basically were going to the same wedding in the Bahamas.”

“Oh. Can you show me where Gate 209 is?” Calvin said.

“Just follow me SpongeBob. I’m going there anyway,” Rebecca said.

Rebecca started walking.

“Hurry up.” Rebecca rolled her eyes.

Calvin walked faster.

“What did you mean by that?” Calvin said, finally catching up to her.

“You know why, don’t you?” Rebecca said.

“I really don’t.”

“Because you had no backbone while we were dating. You never spoke up for yourself. Or for me.”

“But you’re a grown woman.”

“Who needs a man,” she said looking him in the eye.

Calvin looked down at his shoelaces but his eyes caught the gigantic diamond ring on her left hand.

“YOU’RE ENGAGED!” Calvin yelled.

Everybody stopped walking and looked at Calvin and Rebecca.

“What the hell are you yelling for? Shut up! And let’s get going or we are both going to be late.”

Calvin ran behind her like a puppy finally seeing his master after a long day. His arms were flailing.

“No. don’t you run. Answer this for me. Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How?” he asked.

Rebecca stayed silent for a moment. She handed the airline concierge her plane ticket and boarded the plane. Calvin did the same. They quickly boarded and found their seats.

“Hello? I’m not talking to myself here.”

Rebecca sat down and shot an evil look at him.

“You’re not my dad. And for you to embarrass me just makes me want to throw you off this plane while it’s in the air.”

Calvin loosened his tie and sat down next to her.

Rebecca grabbed his ticket stub and studied it closely.

“Really, your seat is right next to mine?” she asked. “I must have been a Nazi in a former life to deserve this karma. Are you going to torture me the whole flight?”

“No. I’m sorry. It’s a bit of a shock. A big shock actually.”

“I honestly don’t really care about you anymore. Don’t get me wrong, I wish you the best of luck in everything you do. It’s just that the whole “friends” bandwagon you’re trying to get me on isn’t working.”

Calvin looked straight ahead and pretended not to be hurt. The plane started moving.

Rebecca plugged in her headphones. Calvin looked at Rebecca.

“Isn’t the pilot supposed to make an announcement before we leave?”

Rebecca took out one of her headphones.

“Yo. You’re still talking to me.”

“I’m sorry. It’s just that I have a gut feeling about something.

Rebecca plugged her ears back up. Rebecca and Calvin fell asleep. Rebecca awoke to Calvin sleeping on her. She looked at Calvin and smiled. She kissed the top of his head and fell back asleep. The plane started to shake and Calvin grabbed Rebecca tighter.

“We are all going to die,” Calvin mumbled in his sleep.

Rebecca mumbled. “I know you’re a wuss about planes, so I guess I’ll allow this.”

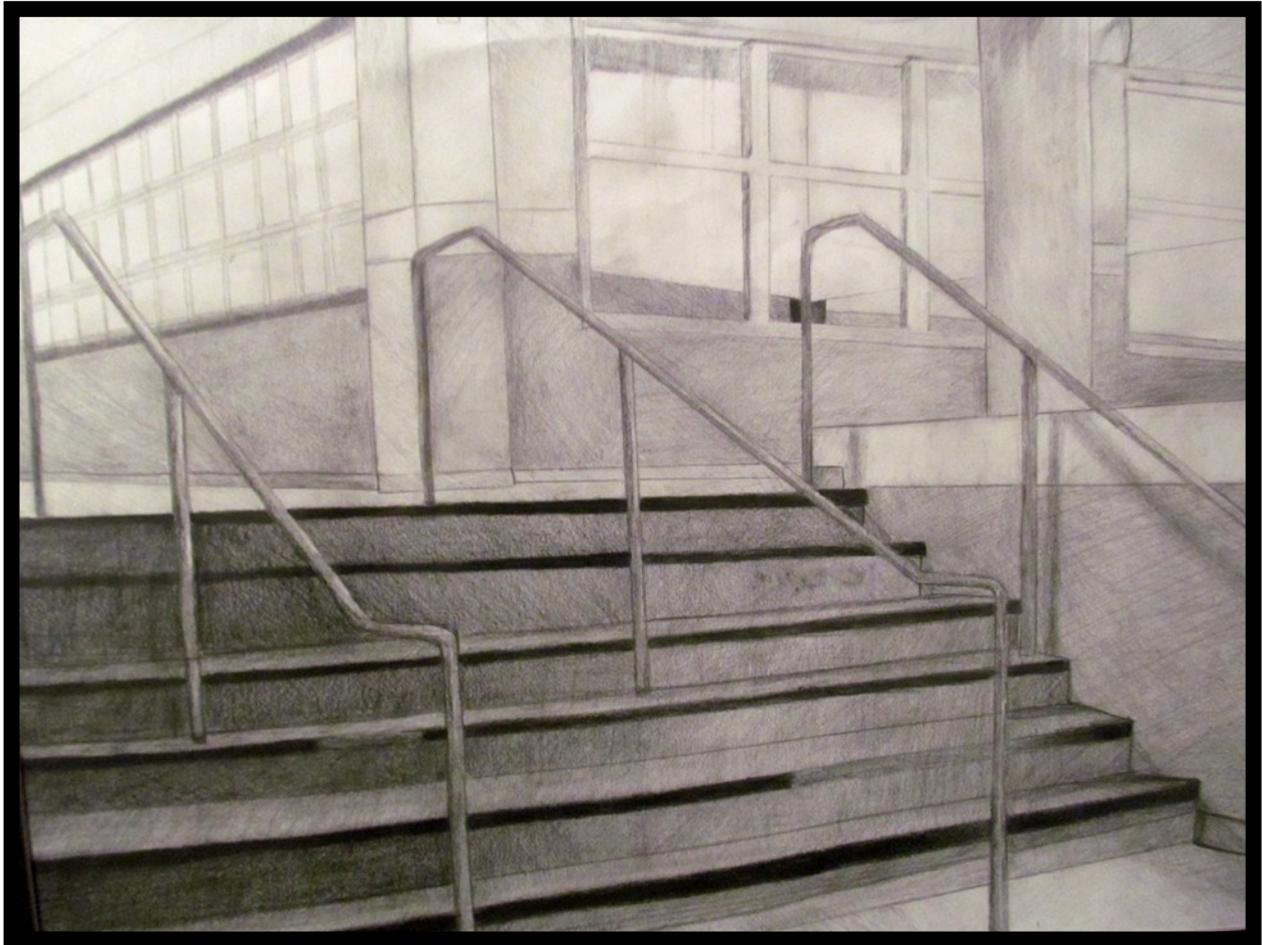
Calvin jolted up. He rubbed his eyes and looked at Rebecca.

“What did you just say?”

Rebecca took a while opening her eyes.

“I didn’t say anything. But I felt you touching me.”

“Well I’m sorry. I was sleep. How the hell was I supposed to know? I wasn’t freaking conscious! Get over yourself.”



“Are you getting in your feelings?” She said laughing.

Art By Jennifer Erazo

“You know what. I don’t even know why I ever loved you. You weren’t so perfect in our relationship either. I didn’t have a backbone, and you were never nice. But I looked past all that bullshit. I dug deeper. And you know what I found? I found some more bullshit. You’re just a shitty person.”

Calvin found another seat next to a big, sweaty, fat white guy. He took up al-

most both of the seats. His thighs were spilled into the seat Calvin was going to sit in. Calvin sat down and looked up at him. He gave him a very unsettling look. He stood up and sat in the seat across from Rebecca.

“Seriously?” Rebecca said. “You decided to move seats next to him?”

“Sitting next to—Excuse me? What’s your name?” Calvin asked the man next to him.

He turned his fat neck.

“My name is Bob.”

Calvin looked back at Rebecca.

“Sitting next to Bob is better than sitting next to the devil herself.”

Rebecca gasped.

“How dare you?”

“You’re a pain in my ass. A pain that I couldn’t get rid of with the help of a heating pack and some Oxycodone.”

“Too bad you didn’t overdose trying to get me out of your head.”

Suddenly a tall dark haired man stood up in his seat.

“I knew it!” the man shouted.

Everybody turned around. Rebecca looked shocked.

“What are you doing here Jack?” she gasped.

“I had a feeling you were cheating on me. All cuddled up with your ex-husband. You were never really over him were you?”

Rebecca stood up.

“Now listen here wise guy. The sleeping on each other was a weird thing. Even I don’t want to talk about that. But us getting seated next to each other was a complete coincidence.”

Jack laughed and reached into his back pack and pulled out a nondescript

brown box.

“You lying little tramp,” Jack screamed. “This is a bomb. You are going to regret what you did to me!”

“Jack! Why are you doing this? It’s just a coincidence. It’s not that serious?” Rebecca yelled.

“Don’t you dare call her a tramp. If she is such a tramp, why did you marry her? It’s not like you saw us kiss, hold hands or anything. Wow, while I was sleeping I fell on her. It’s not like it’s the other way around. So shut up and stop being so damn self-conscious. That’s probably your problem now. That’s probably why nobody wants to be with you. If I was her, I would’ve left to this wedding my damn self too so I wouldn’t have to put up with your jealousy.” Calvin said.

Jack’s mouth flew open.

“You got a lot of nerve you know that. I have a bomb and I could do anything with it.”

The plane grew as silent as midnight. Nobody made a sound. Mothers muffled their infant’s faces and it seemed as though every passenger was holding their breath. Suddenly, Bob took out his bag of family size Doritos. The sound of plastic ripping echoed of the plane cabin walls. He began to eat and each chip sounded like a gunshot.

“What the hell are you doing?” Jack asked. “Can’t you tell your life is about to end?”

Jack wheeled around and faced Bob.

“Whoa! Did you swallow a truck or something? You are huge.” Jack said.

“Hey. Stop talking about me like that. It’s not my fault I eat when I’m nervous,” Bob replied.

“It seems like you get nervous a lot.” Jack said.

Jack tried to snatch the bag of chips away. Bob looked at Jack’s hand, looked

at his chips, and then looked at his hand again. Bob stopped Jack's hand in mid-air and stuffed his chips into his fat stomach rolls. Jack paused with shock.

"No. don't you dare touch my Doritos, you thin little prick. It's already enough that you want to take my life, but now you want to take my last meal too? I ought to break your face. I got nothing to lose anyway."

"Except some weight." Jack said.

"That little smart remark can get you jumped by a fat person."

"You?" Jack laughed. "Please. You couldn't even get out of your seat without a crane. You can't even lift one arm up without it weighing you back down."

With speed that belied his size, Bob sprung from his seat, winded up his fist Jack right in his face. Jack fell to the floor. The shoe flew up in the air. Calvin jumped up and caught the shoe.

"I caught it everyone." Calvin looked inside. "And there wasn't even a bomb in here. But my god, this man's feet stink."

"Those are the shoes I brought him." Rebecca said.

"He seems to be out cold!" Calvin exclaimed.

"Hey Bob, come here and sit on him. Like put your entire weight on him."

Bob turned around.

"Can I bring my Doritos with me?"

"Sure."

Everyone just stared as Bob slowly sat on Jack, who let out a pained gasp through his comatose state.

Art By Sara Palacios



“Rebecca? Spending this day with you was a headache, but it made me realize that I want you as a headache. My headache,” Calvin said.

“I thought you said I was a pain in your ass?” Rebecca rolled her eyes.

“Oh, don’t get me wrong. You are a pain in my ass. No doubt about that, but I don’t care about that anymore. I want you.”

Calvin grabbed Rebecca’s hands.

“And I thought you said I was spineless?”

“You were spineless. You now officially have a spine. Here you go.”

Rebecca clapped Calvin on the back.

“Thanks. Can you give me a brief explanation as to why you’re starting to be nicer to me now?” Calvin asked.

“It’s complicated. Well, you remember how you stuck up for me earlier?”

“Well ye--.” Calvin said.

“Of course you do. Well I was sitting there and wondering why you would do that and he could have shot you or anything as a matter of fact. But I realized you did it for me. You did it without me even asking you to. Of course I still love you.”

“Well you didn’t act like it.” Calvin said.

“But what if you didn’t feel the same way? It could go either way. I haven’t seen you in 6 years. Who knows what happened since then,” Rebecca said.

“Well, my feelings are still there. You can’t get divorced and just automatically get over that person. It takes a healing process. My process just happens to be long.”

“What did you go through all this time I was gone?”

“I went through alcoholism, went to rehab. Started smoking weed, got ar-

rested. Started flirting with all the ladies, got labeled as a pervert. But that's just the beginning. I stuck my--."

Rebecca put her hand over his mouth.

"That's enough," she exclaimed.

Rebecca and Calvin looked each other in the eyes.

"Now I know what people mean when they say they have found their true love," Calvin said.

The pilot emerged from behind the curtains still looking a little shaken from the would-be terrorist attack.

"Excuse me everybody. We are landing on a nearby runway. The police will be boarding to take the criminal away. Thank you, Bob for your enormous help."

The captain disappeared and everyone clapped.

"Wait, stop clapping guys." Bob instructed.

Everyone stopped.

"I'm confused. Was that a fat joke?" Bob asked.

Everyone looked away and started laughing.

"That was a fat joke Bob. But it's okay Bob, we know you're slow."

Calvin's laugh roared through the airplane. Bob sat there with a defeated look on his face.

"Are we going to tell them that there was no actual bomb in the shoe?" Rebecca inquired.

Calvin rubbed his chin.

"No. Let them figure it out."