



Talking Leaves

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TALKING LEAVES

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Talking Leaves accepts original works of prose, poetry, and artwork from students at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus. Each anonymous submission is reviewed by the IUPUC Division of Liberal Arts Talking Leaves Design Team and judged solely on artistic merit. ©Copyright 2018 by the Trustees of Indiana University. Upon publication, copyright reverts to the author/artist. We retain the right to archive all issues electronically and to publish all issues for posterity and the general public.

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www.iupuc.edu/talking-leaves

From the Managing Editor

It is with absolute excitement that I present IUPUC's 2018 issue of *Talking Leaves*. This edition would not be possible without the assistance of an amazing team. Therefore, I first must thank Isabel, Alex, and Taylor for taking the time out of their busy schedules and contributing to the selection and editing process. I greatly appreciate your hard work and dedication, and this publication would not have been completed without your help.

I would especially like to thank Dr. Lisa Siefker-Bailey and the entire staff of the Liberal Arts Department who, year after year, work, support, and sponsor this publication. In the age of digital art and prose, IUPUC spends time and money to keep this magazine in print so students can have something tangible forever in their personal libraries. For this, I thank and commend this small, but proud, university.

I had a special theme in mind for this edition, but a sad, unfortunate circumstance that is occurring too often in our society has hit us here IUPUC. Alex Conrad, a former student and contributor to our magazine was lost last summer to an overdose. Therefore, this edition is dedicated to Alex, and cited on the last page of this edition is a heartfelt biography written by his sister, Lora, and numbers to call if you feel you need help. Our hearts are with Alex's family and anyone struggling with substance abuse or depression.

Last year's edition conveyed tragedy as well, and I would like to help end this awful trend by urging all who feel lost, depressed, or are suffering from addiction to seek help immediately. Too many think they are alone in the world, and I am here to tell you that you are not alone. There are wonderful people and programs out there that can help you if you reach out and take the first step.

But we as a society must claim responsibility and do our part to stop this trend as well. If we know someone suffering with addiction or notice sudden behavioral changes in one of our friends or family members, we must take a second, step out of ourselves, and ask them how they are feeling or offer help. It may just save a life!

"There are no problems; only solutions." ~John Lennon

Michael Donohue

From the Faculty Sponsor

I'm thrilled that the Division of Liberal Arts and IUPUC's Vice Chancellor and Dean, Reinhold Hill, continue to support the expression of student voices by publishing this magazine. Special thanks go to all the instructors who encourage students to submit work and to Vicki Kruse who keeps those submissions anonymous. We also greatly appreciate Sally Jamerson's help with polishing the final galley.

The pages of this edition are full of authentic expression, and it's a privilege to share these original pieces. I hope you enjoy a glimpse of our students' creativity and that you hear the passionate resonance of each voice.

We remind our readers that *Talking Leaves* is a student literary magazine which encourages IUPUC students to find empowerment through self-expression. We have kept copyediting to a minimum to preserve the authors' unique voices, personae, and ideas.

Thanks for listening.

Lisa Siefker-Bailey

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Cover Art by Michael Donohue

Front Cover: Sharp Beauty

Back Cover: Hang On

Poetry

Magical Dark Woods

During the day, the woods are asleep,
but in the midst of the night is when everything comes to life.

The floor begins to move and sounds come from above.

What lurks in the night is not what you should fear, but rather the darkness that will come near.

It will leave you guessing and double checking.

Your imagination is bound tight and becomes as real as the night.

You watch your shoulders and your back

Because once you let your guard down it will all go black.

The darkness in these woods is no being, but rather your inner demon.

These woods are special; indeed, they are.

During the day, it shines so bright.

Keeping the evil in the night.

Step foot into these woods of the dark and you may never leave all in one part.

Make it through alive and you will be complete.

Your darkest enemy will no longer be at your feet, but trapped in those woods.

The woods that are asleep during the day, but come alive during the night ready to prey.

Chantz Morris

Winter Work

The sun shines bright and warm.

It heats my skin and turns it red.

The work is hard, but needs to be done.

Thick calluses form on my hands.

It needs to be done.

The sun burns red hot now, but will hibernate in the winter.

The house will become a frozen wasteland, if the work is not done.

With one swing, the log splits into pieces.

I can feel my muscles ache from each swing.

It needs to be done.

The wagon is full of hickory, ready to be ricked.

The work is done, winter can come.

Chantz Morris

Black Wolf

Dark and empty night
Not a single thing in sight
Except for red eyes.

Chantz Morris

Alone in Time

Together you stand
Alone I fall,
Depending on nothing,
But expecting it all.

Freed from a crime
But guilty of the sin,
A sadist of self,
Trapped from within.

The scars of life
Shine brightly on my skin,
Like trophies of failure,
To prove that I've been.

I grow weary of performing
Wearing down with age,
The wealth of living,
Is just a passing phase.

I'm a symbol of time
A specter with a whim,
A shadow of endurance,
Lost on a limb.

But soon I'll be placed
With men like me,

Who held onto nothing—
And nothing I'll be.

Michael Donohue

Doormat

You walk in and out.

You crawl inside

Begging to shut out those

Who help you, yet you hurt yourself

By locking it all away.

You spew the same lies—

Empty promises echo

From a hollow heart.

Bare and barren

You lie in my sheets.

The only warmth

Comes of my own juice:

A single exchange of love.

Soon you'll grow uneasy;

Peeping outside the hole

That leads to nowhere.

And we both know

That nowhere is where

You must go to fill that void

That can never be filled.

Hinged,

I'll be left to stand

Waiting for you to return.

To repeat the same lies,

To pretend, to believe, and
To love the coldness
Against the hardness
You've created.

Michael Donohue

It Doesn't Bother Him

They pretend to understand. She pretends too.

The agony of withdrawal, the relief of
grief, the fear of relapse, but still they
enter with arms jiggling asking if
It bothers him.

So alone he sits. The explosion of cans
squishing open, caps twisting off, ice cubes
rattling, stir him as he side-eyes foam overflowing
before thirsty lips guzzle and bellies belch.

That flavored twelve-year-old fragrance floats
to his flared nostrils. That bouquet of
bottled ruin tours the room, telling his
taste buds a reunion looms.

Their laughter ricochets off the walls,
pounding his drums, piercing his wet brain. Shrill and
sharp is the laughter he once shared, the laughter
he lost; the laughter that once consumed him.

So alone he sits—
It doesn't bother him.

Just One Wish

He was a strange boy,
Or that is what they said.
He wanted to be alone,
But he knew they were there—
Watching him.

In the winter,
When the air was cold and clean
And the bright, white flakes
Hovered across the sky,
The boy jumped like a frog
With his magical tongue shooting in and out;
Snatching every drop,
Savoring the moisture,
The freshness of every flake,
But never quite quenching
His endless thirst.

In the spring,
When the flowers began to bloom,
They allowed the boy to run free in a prairie
To use his magical tongue like a net.
To engulf the newly transformed
Who were just learning to fly.
He held them captive,
Feeling their wings
Flap against his cheeks,
Begging him to unlock his lips

And open the gates
So they could soar
Back to their mythical kingdom.
He so yearned to follow.

One warm, summer night
In an open field,
He waited for hours
Surrounded by dark eyes,
But comforted by the distant lights
That constructed the constellations.
Until finally, that one light
Shot across the dark sky
And he lassoed it
Into his eager mouth,
Closed his eyes, and made a wish.

Michael Donohue

Check Mate

Two Players, both alike in Dignity and Grace,

Play a dangerous game at an even pace.

The first, Life, in all her sworn innocence, represented with polished marble White.

The second, Humanity, in all their struggle, seen to be the Obsidian Queen, the Black Knight.

The white pieces play their part as Life swiftly takes away our choices, our pawns.

She has no mercy behind her white eyes; eyes no bigger or innocent as a fawn.

But she kills Humanity slowly, our Darkness no match for her false Light.

She takes our pawns, our rooks, and bishops, laughing in cruel delight.

But Humanity remains unshaken, our knights and royal heads untouched.

As we slowly cross the squares, our opponent seeing as much.

We take her pawns, her rooks, and bishops, a storm unhindered by pleas.

Our Dark Knight and his Queen all Life sees.

The squares are empty, shiny and fair.

The pieces lay scattered without a hope or care.

But Life pleads with us once more, asking for a change in our Fate.

To which we simply smile and reply, "Check Mate."

Isabel D'Allura

Come Away to the Mountains

Come away to the Mountains, my Darling, my Love.
Let me behold a face so fair as the morning Dove.
Sit beside me, rest, let the painted light bathe you.
Let my heart burst and eyes water at a beauty so true.

Come away to the Mountains, my Dear, my Soul.
Sing forgotten fairy melodies as I'm made whole.
And when you look at me with Sapphire eyes,
I'm swept away and do not despise.

Come away to the Mountains, my Dream, my only Light.
Come watch the waves of Blue Birds take flight.
Where they go, you wish you were too.
Lead me and I will follow you.

Come away to the Mountains, my Future, my Wife.
Come away with me and begin our long and everlasting life.

Isabel D'Allura

Fear

Much like Hades and Persephone, it takes us to a world, a palace filled with pomegranates and routine comfort, desensitizing us, making us blind to what could break.

Lurking around in our hidden corners and crevices

Waiting for the opportune moment to come forth

We give in, not knowing where to turn

Behind us, flowers grow in our steps and that palace constricting us with quakes and crumbles

nothing more than black ash in the wind.

We don't look back. We don't worry.

And so, Hope leads us forward again, warning the palace would be rebuilt over time.

It would be rebuilt and it would be destroyed over and over and over

Because we are strong and we do not give in to Fear.

Isabel D'Allura

Moonlight

What does it sound like, Moonlight?

What do we hear when you paint us in silver?

Is it a fairy bell or a sonata?

A haunting voice or utter silence?

What does it sound like, Moonlight?

When you walk a cobblestone street, do you hear the violins in your silver rays?

Do you hear the melodies washing away our sins?

Or the earthly dreamers lost in a daze?

Moonlight, you sound like a beautiful violin with its haunting song;

Like two fluid dancers who sway and step along.

You sound like the synchronized heartbeat of two lovers

before they trip on the cobblestones, their hearts aflutter.

Moonlight, you are a story to be told.

An unending tale of love, adventure, and spectacle: things we miss.

It's no wonder the Sun loves you so, Moonlight. It's no wonder He gives you up so

We may bask in your mystery. So, we may hear you endlessly.

Isabel D'Allura

Pieces of Me

What is it like to be a writer?

I see the world differently, the colors more vibrant. Even the moon and stars shine brighter.

I take pieces of people I love, of stories I've read and seen

And turn them into my royal Queen.

Maybe it's because reality is easy to become invisible in,

My steps already taken and choices buried within.

But I create with my mind and hands

To forge a new path, my everlasting stand.

The characters I create are pieces of me, you see.

They are the personalities, the halves I wish I could be.

Some have courage, others live a tale of glorious fantasy

In a place I wish I could disappear to and live happily.

They are warriors, my pieces of me.

They fight the wars raging where no one wants to be.

They live and love and breathe like you and I,

Living forever in my Mind's Eye.

My pieces are scattered, some stories cold and unfinished.

Some sit in my private bookshelf, the words faded and diminished.

These are the pieces of me, whether they be faded or full of Light.

There will come a day when I will no longer Fear and read those diminished words in full
delight.

Isabel D'Allura

The Stag

Amongst the snow he stood, unwavering and strong
Paying no heed to the winter mist cloaking him.
His large, velvet eyes hold me captive, persuading me to come near.
The cold no longer embraces me with long, willow fingers of fear.

We stand he and I, two souls brought together by death.
But he remains silent as he takes me home, frozen is my breath.
Kiss me on the brow, his touch warm and nonexistent
I watch him disappear in a cloud of crystal flakes.

He is never always here, my friend and companion;
Only when I need him most.
But today is not that day,
The ground dead and new formed in every way

I see him standing there, his hair blanketed with snow.
His knowing eyes and beating heart telling me so.
The stag beckons me to follow and so I do.
Sprigs of green mint and holly filling our white footsteps,
Their leaves covered in a Spring dew.

Coffee

I open my eyes, weary from the restless night
And all I can think about is you
I yearn to taste your sweetness against my lips
And the warmth you give my body
My head dances like wild banshees
Until your creator can call upon you
I must wait until you are ready
Like an infant for his mother's milk
I cry out thirstily for you
I can't think, I can't speak
Not until you are inside of me
I may not live, not without you
My head spins with confusion
How am I supposed to go on...?
Alas! You are ready for me
You are my drug of choice
My addiction, my sanity

Brandy Gilliatt

Culture with Crackers on the Side

I am THE most generic brand of white there is;
 I am this hazy mix of German and Danish
 where the lines between my German heritage and my Danish heritage are unclear because
 there basically are none.
 If my culture was a crayon it would be white.
 I have never met my Danish grandparents, and my German side has been Americanized for
 generations.
 My father's Danish accent was about as much of my basic middle-European culture as I've
 experienced first-hand.
 Still, I have what my mom refers to as a black girl butt and what my gram calls a Jewish nose,
 and yet I do not try to normalize their culture even if it would look bomb on me.
 I am not criticized in the same way other cultures are;
 you see, as bland a saltine as I am, I have the ability to recognize that I am not looked upon in
 the same way
 Indian kids, black kids, Hispanic kids, Asian kids are.

I can wear a bindi and be complimented for my acknowledgment of other cultures
 I can get a henna tattoo and it's cute! Temporary fun!
 But the girl wearing the clothing originated by *her* culture gets harassed
 I learn Spanish for four years and it's supposed to be useful
 But the kids that were raised to learn two languages are constantly told, "Speak English! This is
 America!"
 And sure, I can wear clothes that are tribal patterns and try to talk and fit in amongst black
 culture
 But I will never be told to watch out for cops due to the color of my skin
 The privilege that comes with my skin color is vast and envied by mothers with girls who are
 teased for their head wrap or boys who are killed for their hoodie
 The privilege that comes with their henna ends at the ink
 The privilege that comes with their Ebonics ends at the vowel
 I am beyond the point of fighting for equality in these areas of cultural slander if that culture
 isn't being represented by white skin.

I stand with other cultures fighting for their right to use their own traditions.
 I stand with other cultures fighting for their lifestyle and their parents' dreams for them.
 I stand with them
 until the same man that sleeps with, sexualizes, and harasses women of Hispanic decent can't
 criticize and demonize their culture and still have a chance at the presidency.
 I stand with them
 until people stop trying to justify shooting an unarmed black boy for his hoodie and his nerf gun.
 I stand with them
 until black women are praised for their "black girl curves" just as much as white girls are.

I stand with them
until traditional Indian jewelry can be worn by Indian women and be appreciated for its beauty.
I stand with them
until white celebrities don't try to strictly hang with black celebrities but pipe down when
something tragic happens in the black community
I stand with them
until fourteen-year-old white kids stop pulling the phrase "they use the n-word, why can't I?"
as if it's entitled to them to use a word rooted in hatred that has never been spit at them with
the fire behind oppression
I stand with them
And when I stand with them, I am not gonna be some white girl with dreads and lip injections
trying to be another culture
without realizing that I have the freedom to choose who I want to be
but not everyone has that luxury.
When I stand with them, I will help how they tell me to,
because this is not my fight.

When I stand with them, I will NOT use words that they don't want me to use because
I AM NOT ENTITLED TO OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE.
And when I stand with them, I stand for their rights as humans
Just as much as their rights as Indian, black, Hispanic, Muslim
Or any other culture that wants or needs my support.

Chloe Jorgeson

Numbers

I didn't take math this semester

In fact I haven't taken math since high school

It was calc 3 and I loved the numbers and I loved the pace

I loved getting out of physics and heading straight into a world

Where rules and equations were law

And with this law, the entire outside universe was created

When I was 17 I took the SAT and got a 2070

My mom said

to get a 2100 I needed to wake up at 6:15

Study for an hour before school

Pay attention for 45 minutes 7 times

And leave

Workout for 60-90 minutes

Leave the gym and study for 60-90 minutes

Take 30 and divide it by the salad and the healthy dinner option

Take 10 and multiply it by however many things were on my to do list

To keep the house 100 percent clean

And then homework until 10 so I could get a full 8 hours of rest

And start again the next day

I took the act and got a 32

My brother said

to get a 33 I needed 60 mg

30 minutes before my next attempt

My mom said

when I applied for college

I would need a full pie chart

I needed the grades

The test scores
The extracurriculars
and when I decided to take 365 away from school
because my mother got stage 2
I realized these numbers meant nothing
The calculator in my head stopped moving
And I knew that all 60 in all 24 in all 30 of every 365
Meant more than a number
They were worth something almost unlawful
In their own realm
And these moments all had their own rules
And their own equations
And you can find the curve of any graph
If you have the right tools
But how do you find the answer to a person
How many milliliters of tears did my mom lose
When her 10 inches of hair soon became zero
How many ounces of pain can a heart hold
At 65 degrees outside how many layers of clothing would
Keep her frail bones warm
On April 16 2017, my mom got the answer to an equation she had been
Struggling with for months
How many sessions of chemo would solve her problem
After that every number created her universe
Two hours a day of cooking just because she loved it
4 kids to fill her heart
And a 6 pound dog to fill her bed
We all have numbers that create us

Who we are

But don't let them add up to less than their worth

Don't let them become greater than the content

And more than anything else

Don't let them subtract from who you are

Chloe Jorgeson

Your Mom's Vagina

It was my junior year u s history class and my class had every notorious asshole boy in my grade
Eerily and not easily i built the courage to raise my hand

and ask

“Mr speer may i please use the restroom”

Because periods are not courteous

And they do not wait for a convenient time to break thru all barriers

Like the great flood of central indiana in 2008

And i, naturally, grab a tampon to bring with me when mr speer says “you may”

But the hunters are out

And i forget that catering to my bodily functions makes me prey

“Ohhhhh watch out for chloe this week”

Which also like kinda pissed me off because they didnt know what day i was on? It could have
been like my last day which it wasnt but still

Anyway by this time they are feasting on my double bleeding corpse

“This is why women cant be president!! Too many hormones”

OHHH MY POOR BONES

“Girls are so dramatic abut periods it cant be that bad”

AHHHHHH THEYVE GOT MY LEG BETWEEN THEIR TEETH

“Men get cramps too we just aren't as weak”

And there it is

The knock out move

And im gasping for my last brain cell after this low i q attack

Y'all little no pussy having

Cheap beer drinking

Doing molly at prom

Parent foolin

Barely passin ya damn classes

W/o cheating of us weak dramatic females

gotta be quicker than a meninist account after hillary makes a typo to get ya damn act together

And remember when kimmy in the 9th grade wore a tank top to school

And y'all made this 14 year old pregoddess into some sick sex icon for your own twisted ass
fantasies

Its fine to look at a women and see sex, see tits, ass, vagina
But the second any of those body parts are put to use its a damn travesty
I have LITERALLY WITNESSED females being ashamed of pooping
POOPING

because its viewed as unfeminine?

When did shitting become men only?

When did periods become filthy?

When did breastfeeding become something other than nurturing human life

Because just like tupac taught me at a young age

“We all came from a woman, got our name from a woman, and our game from a woman”

And im guessing when ya momma popped u out of her fresh pink pussy

You came out w some blood on ya.

Chloe Jorgeson

Holes

There are holes inside my head

Where memories used to be

And I sit and question...

Were they even supposed to be?

Where do they come from?

These damned holes in me

I like to think about the holes inside my head

Where those memories used to be

So I sit and question...

Could anyone else be like me?

After a while I resolve to get some,

Those answers that I seek

I beckoned her over to me

That woman who spent her time in my bed

I asked her, among many things,

To be honest with me

Yet, when I arrived at the thing I so needed

She shook her head and said "You already know the answer to the question."

The falsity of her words made something break in me

She would know where I'm coming from

How it feels to have these holes inside my head

Where my memories used to be

I arose from my bed

Not a trace of anyone to be seen

And I sit and question

Were they even supposed to be?

The holes inside my head,

They are worse than they used to be
As the crimson drips from a formerly white sheet,
I wonder about the holes inside my head

Dakota Mullikin

Tanka for Lost Lives

Darkness melts to black
A heavy heart wastes no time
Trying to reach it
When lives are lost to the void
We wish so hard for them back

Dakota Mullikin

It's Time to Cry

You hear strange, loud noises coming from outside,
Nights and days full of screams and cries.
It's time to fight, they say;
The time to talk has long since passed, now it is the time to show we are brave.

You walk alone on the streets,
Children talking excitedly about it, almost as if it was a concert and they had the best seats.
Fake guns pointing at each other, the sound "bang," "bang" falling easily of their lips;
Innocents falling to the ground, brothers against brothers; you can't help but see how real this seems.

You watch from your window, mothers rushing almost as if they had a sin they wish to announce.
The mother on the left, the one whose son was declared brave, with an almost imperceptible bounce;
The mother on the right, the one whose son was declared safe, with her head high but full of dread;
The mother on the middle her walk as slow as a funeral march, the mother whose son is already dead.

You wait in the stairs for your father to come,
You see your mother come, tears in her eyes; he is gone, you read in the eyes of your mom.
You hear again the noises outside, and their voices screaming that it is time to fight,
But in your heart you know that the time has come to cry.

Clara Villalon Partida

Peace in a Piece

Quickly they come, flowing out of the flute,
Almost running over each other, the notes accelerate
Like water rushing down a chute
The tones ringing with dissonance, coming to a stalemate

When the phrase is ended, silence is suspended
Slowly, notes come forth once more
The trills ringing, an open hand to a friend extended
Emotions rising up, and beginning to soar

As the player continues, the anxiety fades
In the middle of music, everything is okay
She confidently steps forward, and the music cascades
Feeling like stepping into a cheery, sunny ray.

The world stops spinning, life slows down
And it is impossible to find a frown.

Jennie Stuart

Voyeur

darker hours
empty rooms
silent hallways
that lead to groaning staircases
hardly better lit than
all those rooms
with no one in them
I broke into the house
through one of the rooms
as a matter of fact
it was my childhood bedroom
long since freshly painted and refurnished
foreign to me but for the
trick spring action of the
antique lock on the window
and the feel of that window
sliding effortlessly upward
assisted by a system of ropes
pulleys and weights
within the walls
I climbed
in
uninvited
much as I had climbed
out
unpermitted
many years ago
made my way towards
the door to the hallway
finding the knob as easily
as I had thousands of times before
in the dark
I opened it to a
startling silence
that can be found within
homes that have been
empty for some days and
will remain so for several to come
the family who had come after mine
bought the shabby farmhouse
with lofty goals
grandiose dreams and a

healthy ambition
which was an absolute prerequisite
for purchasing a house that had
seen the Civil War
and had been lived in
for the decade preceding their purchase
without a single repair
having been preformed
the shutters draped
the plaster was cracked and
even falling from the ceiling
in the kitchen
a dark creeping mold had
invaded the nooks and corners
the pipes groaned with effort
when the water was turned on
and the security was
a bit lacking
but the new owners had
come in here
and begun the process of making
long-needed repairs and had even
put their own stamp on some things
I caught wind
that they were out of town
through some bizarre coincidence
of offhand conversation
and although I had not broken in
to a stranger's home
in ten years or more
I could not resist the temptation of
the voyeur
I just had to sneak
one last peak
and as I made my survey of the
empty rooms
the silent hallways
I found myself half revolted and
half pleased
that these interlopers
were doing away with what was
and making this place their own
but I couldn't shake a
certain sorrow

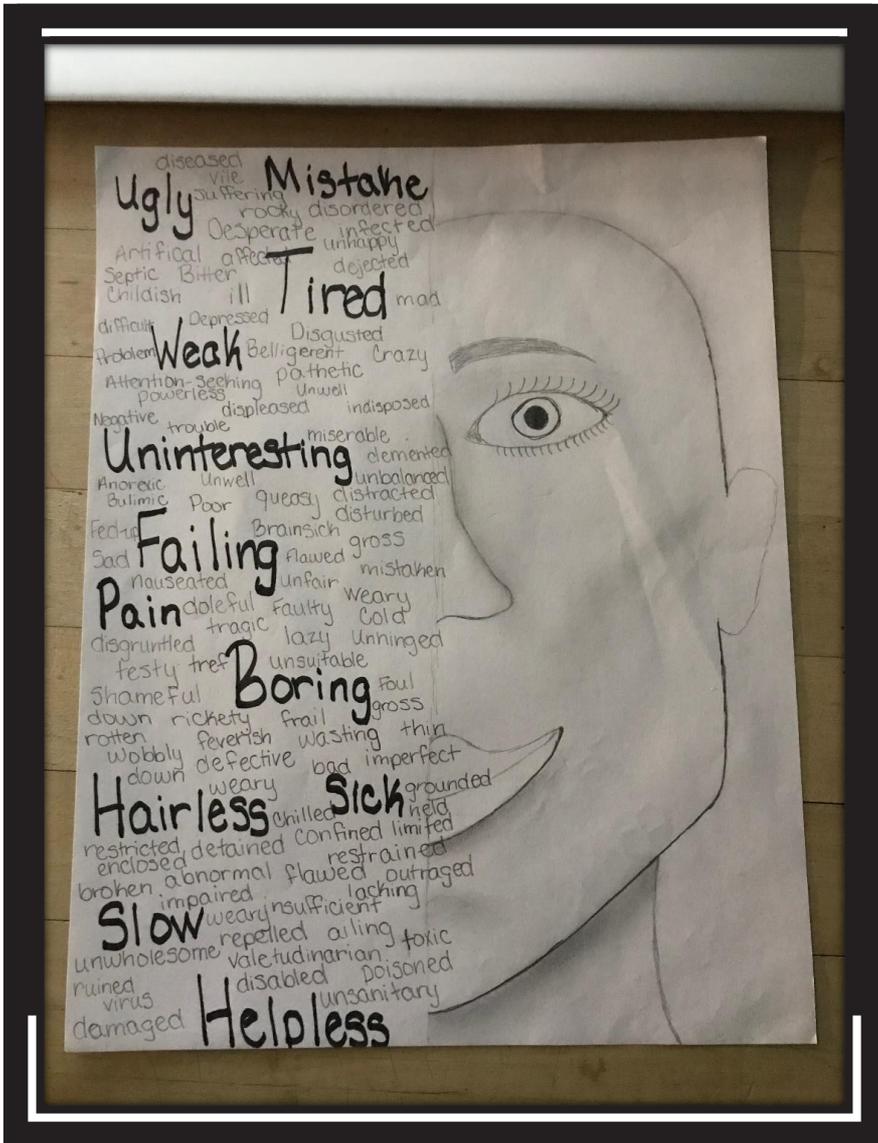
that had fallen over me
I made my way into the kitchen
rooted through the drawers
found a pen and a
scrap of paper
and having now seen all that
I needed to or
all that I could stand
I went back to my old bedroom
turned on the light
closed the door
scribbled a note on a desk
that was clearly placed
where a desk
did not belong
and in the middle of that room
is a loose floorboard
that for years had served to hide
all that I needed to
keep hidden
I put the note there
face up
unfolded
replaced the board
shut out the light
and snuck back out the window
for the last time
all the note said was
Hello Stranger
and I dated it
for an added
eerie effect

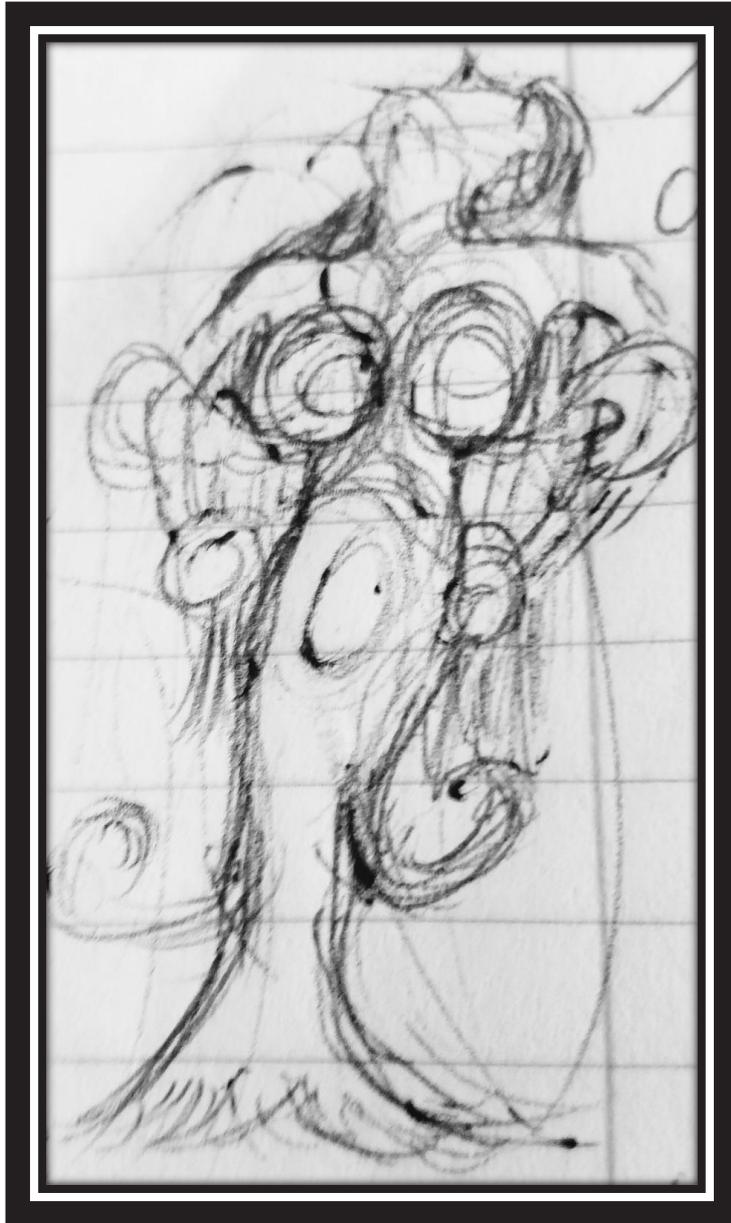
Alex Conrad

Art



After the Rain - LaWanda Tidd





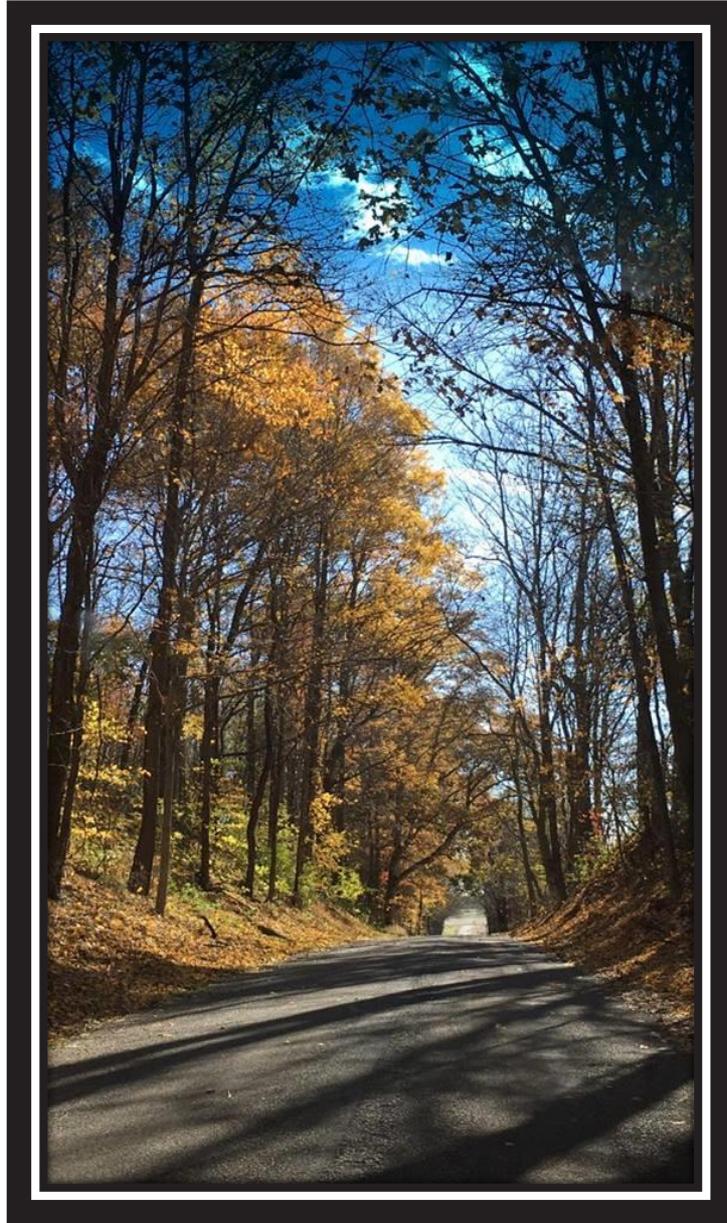
Something from Nothing – Liston



Self-Portrait Kind Of – Emily Krider



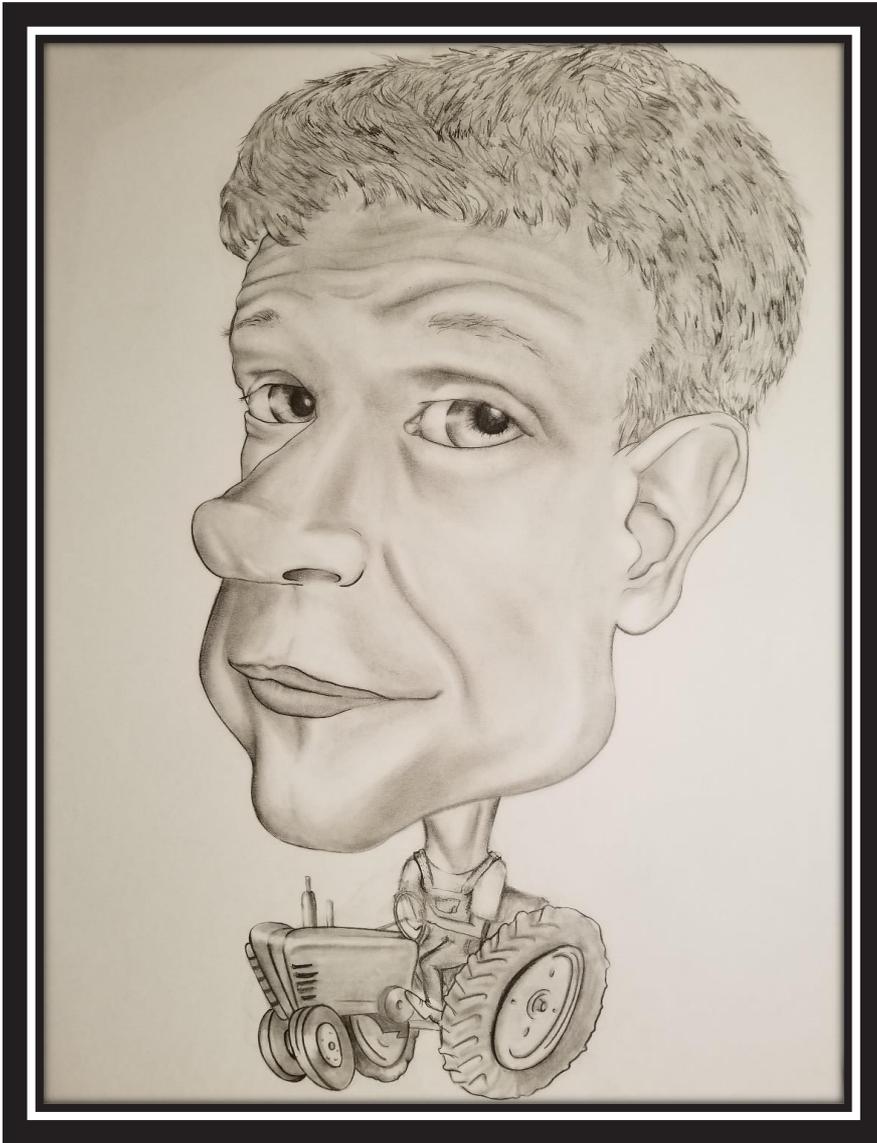
Salt Dough Ornaments – Kaitlyn Simon



In the Stillness – Lindsay Jordon



Flowers by the Courthouse – Laura Hole



Dad's Doodad – Lily Thompson



Colors of Nature – Kyra Jessie



Coming Together as One – Paige Webb



Spring Has Sprung – Kyra Jessie



Greenhouse Rain – Kyra Jessie

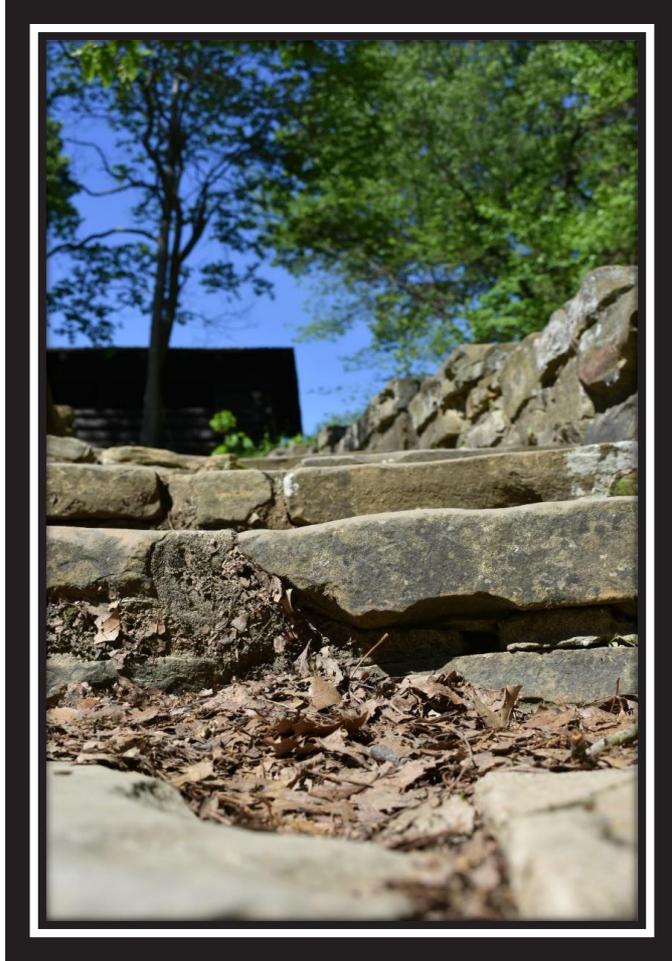
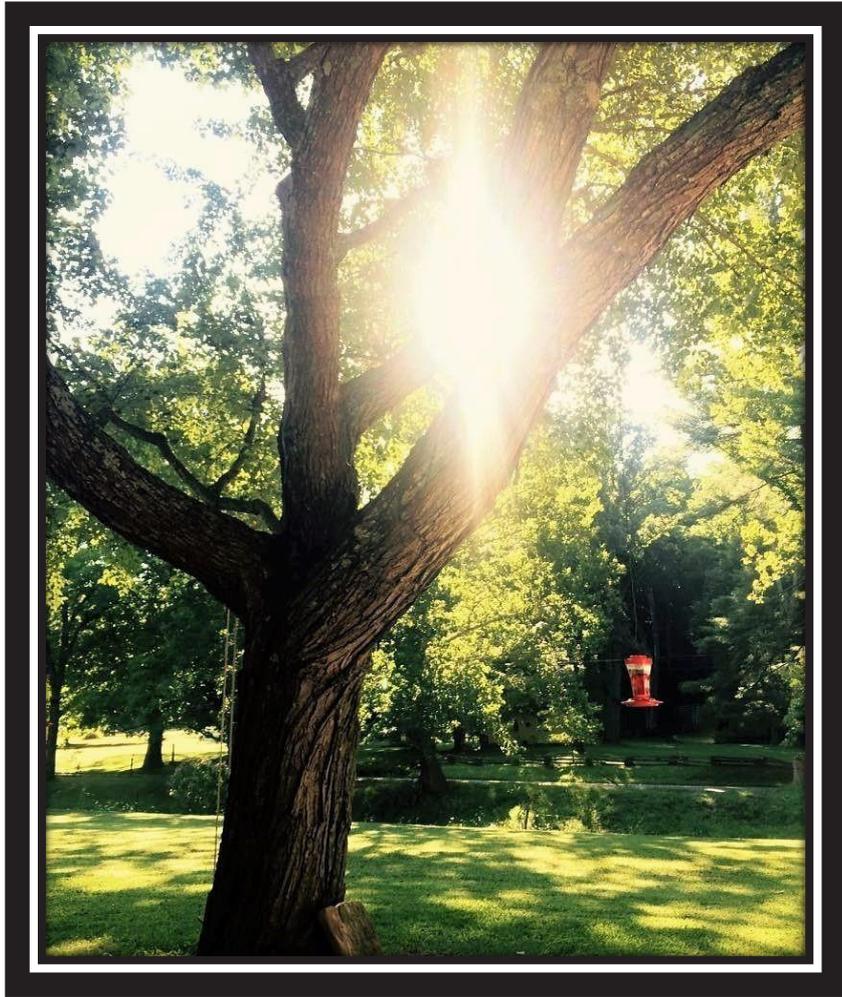


Photo Works – Clifford Floyd



Brown County Morning – Kyra Jessie

One-Act Plays

One More Round

Act I

Scene 1

Present Day: The abandoned complex of POLIX STORAGE, a collection of crumbling buildings in the outskirts of Washington. The inside is covered in grime, mold, and incoming erosion from the elements; metal racks sit rust covered in solitary silence. Twelve people inhabit the building, ten of which are of insidious nature against two agents caught in the crossfire.

(F.B.I. agents JOCELYN HOLLOWELL, 30's, and ELIJAH SILLS, 30's, sit crouched behind a dilapidated rack holding old boxes and tubs rundown and exhausted. JOCELYN inspects her supplies, finding only one more round of ammunition to hold off ten attackers and hold her partner's back. ELIJAH curses under his breath after seeing the single round of bullets.)

JOCELYN

Shit. We are in deep, unending shit, Eli!

ELIJAH

Oh, come on, Jocelyn. This is a normal day at the office for us. Where's your sense of perilous adventure?

(BANGING on the entry door echoes throughout the warehouse.)

JOCELYN

Hmmm...I must have left it at home along with all my common sense when I agreed to come on this mission.

ELIJAH

This isn't so bad...we've had worse.

JOCELYN

Ten people. Ten people are trying to kill us! This is definitely the worse we've had!

(BANGING continues as voices shout.)

JOCELYN

I knew I should've resigned when I had the chance. I could be living off a nice pension on some remote island somewhere sipping fruity drinks or something. But no!

ELIJAH

But, you're here with my sorry ass to keep me from being killed, right?

JOCELYN

I'm here because my partner is stupid enough to challenge the entire Belvout Family human trafficking cartel. By himself. With no backup.

ELIJAH

I have you don't I, princess?

JOCELYN

Don't call me that or I'll shoot you where you sit.

ELIJAH

No, you won't.

JOCELYN

(Cocks gun)

If you had just followed our orders, we wouldn't be having this conversation in the first place.

ELIJAH

And let a chance to bring these criminals down go by? I don't think so! It'd be a cold day in hell before I let these maniacs go another day.

JOCELYN

They're going to have that day if we die in this godforsaken warehouse! Your pride and ego is going to kill you someday.

ELIJAH

(Thoughtfully)

Your pride and ego will leave you alone and bitter.

(Long pause before the door breaks free, allowing STEPHAN, BELVOUT and his men to enter the warehouse.)

STEPHAN

(Shouts)

I know you're in here, you filthy blue bloods! By the time I'm done with you, your own mothers won't recognize you!

(They crouch down.)

ELIJAH

Stay down and quiet, understand? I'm going to find you an opening and you're going to take it.

JOCELYN

Absolutely not! I'm not leaving unless you do!

STEPHAN

Isn't this sweet, boys? A lover's quarrel...too bad your boyfriend is a coward, eh sweetheart? Should've stayed where his large nose doesn't belong.

ELIJAH

My nose isn't that big. You should turn yourself in, Belvout! We're obliged to offer you a deal if you cooperate and come quietly!

STEPHAN

I would rather rot in hell than give myself over to you. Bring me their heads. I don't care which one dies first.

(Belvout's MEN surround them.)

JOCELYN

Elijah?

ELIJAH

Yeah?

JOCELYN

(Holds out her shaky hand.)

It's been an honor...to serve with you. Even more so to have been your friend.

ELIJAH

Don't get sentimental on me now, Hollowell. You can thank me later for the perilous adventure.

(ELIJAH raises his gun, barrel pointed toward the ceiling.)

ELIJAH

Ready?

JOCELYN

Let's give them hell.

(End Scene)

Scene 2

Two weeks earlier: ELIJAH and JOCELYN sit in their office in the F.B.I. building. JOCELYN focuses on her work, while ELIJAH sits on her desk.

JOCELYN

*Do you mind? I'm trying to finish up work. I don't want to disturb you and your apple.
(ELIJAH bites into the apple in his hand, chews loudly.)*

ELIJAH

No, I don't mind. Please continue working.

JOCELYN

I feel pity for whoever takes my desk beside you.

ELIJAH

You don't have to leave, you know. You could take a desk job or work in the underground. Something here has to interest you.

JOCELYN

Elijah, it's been almost 10 years I've worked here. In those 10 years, I've made great friends and seen so much.

ELIJAH

Will you ever stop?

JOCELYN
(Looks up from her work.)

Stop what?

ELIJAH
Hedging around how you actually feel, dammit. Christ, Hollowell, we're friends aren't we?

JOCELYN
Yes.

ELIJAH
Then when are you going to tell me what has you so scared to pick up and leave everything we...I mean you have made here?
(DERRICK STRIDER strolls into their office with two folders in his hand.)

DERRICK
Sills, Hollowell, got a job for you.

JOCELYN
Not for me. I'm out, remember?

ELIJAH
How could we ever forget?

DERRICK
Your resignation is frozen as of now, Hollowell. We have a Class-A case and I need my two best minds on this.
(Elijah grins at Jocelyn, who shoots him the finger.)

DERRICK
Your other cases and busy work will be given to others to be finished. All your efforts, all your thoughts, should be focused on this.
(DERRICK hands them the files and exits the office.)
(JOCELYN stares at the files; feeling deflated, she sinks into her seat.)

JOCELYN
You did this, didn't you?

ELIJAH

What did I do?

JOCELYN

You manipulated the situation in order to get us on another case as I'm about to put in my resignation!

ELIJAH

You're crazy if you think I had any ulterior motives.

(ELIJAH throws the apple into a trashcan.)

JOCELYN

Am I? You're the one who's been moping around these past weeks, repeating the same argument about me staying!

ELIJAH

(Growing angry)

I'm sorry my show of emotion is upsetting to you, Jocelyn. Not everyone is as lonely as you are.

(Both agents glare at each other in a few moments of tense silence, the resignation papers sitting beside the case files. JOCELYN picks them up.)

JOCELYN

One last case.

(JOCELYN puts the papers in her desk, avoiding Elijah's comment.)

ELIJAH

(Calmer, more concerned)

Jocelyn I—

JOCELYN

I'll help you solve this case and then I'm gone. Call me the unsentimental bitch or terrible friend all you want but I'm done after this. *(A quick hug to make up.)* Let's see who it is this week, shall we?

(ELIJAH opens the folder and stares at it.)

ELIJAH

Shit. Say hello to Stephan Belvout, the head of the Belvout human trafficking Cartel.

(Chuckles) Not much of a looker, is he?

JOCELYN

According to the intelligence, we've managed to gather, he was born in 1960 France and made his way through Europe before coming here. Damn.

ELIJAH

What?

JOCELYN

He was involved in the Venice Scandal of 1985. He helped kidnap and sell the Italian President's daughter. They never found her.

ELIJAH

Looks like his track record dates back to his teenage years. Even as a young kid, he was always in trouble for theft and violence.

JOCELYN

(Disbelief)

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree then. His father was an abusive drunkard. Beat his wife and child until he died under mysterious circumstances when Belvout was fifteen.

ELIJAH

Looks like we have a full load. There are more than just personal files in here. There are blueprints and map layouts of his usual routes, warehouses, and territory lines across D.C. His range of rule is substantial.

(ELIJAH and JOCELYN sit in silence as they skim over blueprints.)

(They sigh tiredly.)

JOCELYN

Hey, look at this. He owns a section of old warehouses in the slums of D.C.

ELIJAH

So, what? A lot of people own warehouses.

JOCELYN

No shit. But look where it's located.

ELIJAH

It's in the center of his enterprise. Polix was abandoned years ago though.

JOCELYN

Exactly why he chose it. It's in the middle of his territory and it's no longer in use so no one will be suspected of conducting business there. Eli...what if this is where he's making the deals?

(ELIJAH grabs a chair and a stack of case files.)

ELIJAH

We've got a long night ahead of us.

(End Scene)

Scene 3

Present Day: *Jocelyn and Elijah stand against Stephan and his men in the Polix Warehouse.*

ELIJAH

Ready?

JOCELYN

Let's give them hell.

(Both groups begin their assault. In the midst of the fight, Jocelyn takes a bullet to her right shoulder.)

ELIJAH

Jocelyn. Jocelyn, hang in there. We're gonna be okay.

(ELIJAH pulls Jocelyn against him to keep her behind the rack and tubs they still sit against.)

JOCELYN

(Holding her shoulder in pain)

You need to go. Go get help. Leave me here.

(JOCELYN and ELIJAH cower as bullets continue to hit the rack and area around them.)

JOCELYN

Eli, you have to go.

ELIJAH

I can't leave you here. Not like this.
(JOCELYN *hands him her gun.*)

JOCELYN

You can and you will.
(ELIJAH *frantically scans his surroundings. A large tank and collection of pipes catches his eye across the warehouse.*)

ELIJAH

In the files we went over...

JOCELYN

We're in the middle of...

ELIJAH

Shut up and listen...

JOCELYN

Yeah?
(ELIJAH *points to the tank.*)

ELIJAH

In the blueprints, there are gas lines over there.

JOCELYN

That's our way out. We have to blow up this entire operation and everyone in it. But how?

ELIJAH

Leave that to me.

JOCELYN

I got shot in the shoulder not the leg.
(JOCELYN *grabs her gun from him.*)

ELIJAH

That's the spirit. Follow my lead. (*Slowly stands.*) Stop! Stop!

62 (BELVOUT stops his men. All is quiet.)

ELIJAH

We surrender.

JOCELYN
(Sarcastically)

Really? REALLY? That's your plan?!

STEPHAN
(Laughs)

Finally, someone who has common sense. You both wouldn't have lasted much longer anyhow.

ELIJAH

I believe you! But before we hand ourselves over, I want to make a deal.

STEPHAN

You poor little man. What kind of deal could you offer to interest me?

ELIJAH

Let my partner go. She's injured and won't get you much for a price or entertainment. Take me. I'm sure I could give you a run for your money.

(Silence.)

STEPHAN
(Snaps his fingers.)

Take them both. Bring me the woman.

JOCELYN

Elijah?

(Belvout's MEN move forward.)

ELIJAH

On the count of three. One.

STEPHAN

There's nowhere to run to, *mon amis*.

ELIJAH

Two.

(ELIJAH *grabs Jocelyn's hand.*)

STEPHAN

Take them!

ELIJAH

Three.

(ELIJAH kisses Jocelyn; then shoots at the gas pipes. Bullets fly around them as they run for the exit, JOCELYN makes the final shot to ignite the gas. The warehouse blows up, killing all inside except two.)

LIGHTS OUT

Isabel D'Allura

My Chair and IACT I

The stage is dark for a moment, just long enough for the audience to begin to feel uneasy then...

A SPOTLIGHT shines on JACK MOORE, center stage. He's an elderly man confined to a wheelchair.

(Through thick eyeglasses, JACK stares at the audience with discontent.)

JACK

Well, this is it. This is what it comes to. After years of working, fighting to get to the top and here I am alone in this chair. I don't deserve this. Maybe life just goes in reverse and we go back to the bottom when we get old. It sure as hell seems that way, doesn't it? Get that damned light out of my eyes! Oh, I'm here in darkness. Turn that damned music down! Oh, there isn't any playing. What the hell are you looking at? Oh, there's no one here. Why am I alone? I should be surrounded by my family and friends. But I suppose this is the price you pay for being a man. What? Speak up, I'm old and don't hear too well. That's right. I regret nothing. I lived the way a man should live and did more than most men dream of doing. I have money, power, and of course all the benefits that come with the two. Where is that nurse? She should have been here an hour ago. You get what you pay for in life and now I have to sit here in my own shit and piss and wait for someone to come and wipe my ass for me. *(Laughs)* If that isn't ironic, I don't know what is.

The LIGHTS go up and behind Jack, is an old, decrepit brick wall.

(An elderly, black NURSE enters stage left.)

JACK

You're late!

NURSE

I am not.

JACK

Yes, you are. You should have been here an hour ago.

NURSE

You're crazy, Jack.

JACK

I'll call the hospital and have your black ass fired.

NURSE

Go ahead and see what happens. You've used, abused, and fired all they got. There ain't no one left that wants to take care of your white, smelly ass.

JACK

Liar!

NURSE

Then call them you old fool. Nobody else will come. You'll be here all alone.

JACK

I have a son and daughter...somewhere.

NURSE

And you pushed them away just like everyone else. Face it Jack, I'm all you got.

JACK

Don't fool yourself woman; you'd be lost without me.

NURSE

You're just a crazy old fool.

JACK

Exactly. I'm a crazy old fool that gives your meaningless life meaning. A crazy old fool that gives you that sense of power that we all seek like addicts, and deny we need it just as they do. Power over people is most dangerous and fulfilling drug known to man and we all desire it one way or another.

NURSE

There's thousands of helpless people out there that could use my help.

JACK

Yes, but none of them are me and I am your drug of choice.

66

NURSE

What the hell happened to you, Jack?

JACK

The same thing that happened to you: there was too much life and not enough time. But does there have to be a reason?

NURSE

Yes.

JACK

Why?

NURSE

Without reason, what do we have?

JACK

What do we have with it? It doesn't change anything. It just creates more questions that will never be answered.

NURSE

You don't know that for sure. If everyone was as cynical as you, we wouldn't have progressed this far.

JACK

(Laughs)

Progressed? Progressed how? To prolong life until we wither away to become helpless children once again. I wished I died thirty years ago when I was strong and still able to wipe own ass. Which by the way...

NURSE

So, why didn't you?

JACK

Progress, remember? Look out the window and look at your progressive world.

NURSE

I can't. You don't have windows anymore.

JACK

Oh, that's right. I live in darkness.

NURSE

Maybe if you let some light in...

JACK

No! I've had enough light for one life. It blinded me. Made me see things I didn't want to see. Do things I never wanted to do. You can't trust the light. It deceives you. Don't you know anything? How can someone live to be your age and still be so naive?

NURSE

I'm not naive Jack, I just have faith.

JACK

Faith in what?

NURSE

God.

JACK

First, you speak of reason and now you're going to talk about faith.

NURSE

Why not?

JACK

They don't belong in the same conversation.

NURSE

Well, I have both.

JACK

And I'm the crazy one. So, tell me, what does this god do for you?

NURSE

He brings me hope.

68

False hope. JACK

He gives my life meaning. NURSE

Then I'm your god. JACK

He helps me do the right thing. NURSE

Matter of perspective. JACK

He will bring me salvation in the end. NURSE

Fairy tales. JACK

And you're so certain that he doesn't exist? NURSE

Yes. JACK

How? NURSE

Because I have a brain. JACK

Why? NURSE

I was born with it. JACK

How? NURSE

It came with the package, unlike some... JACK

That's no answer. NURSE

I don't know. JACK

Exactly. NURSE

That proves nothing. JACK

It proves uncertainty. NURSE

But yet you're so sure. JACK

No, but it brings us back to faith. NURSE

And what has your faith brought you? JACK

Peace and happiness. NURSE

Fleeting. JACK

NURSE

Maybe, but at least I can say I've had it.

JACK

You've had nothing. You need lies to make you happy. Intangibles that are meaningless. Praying to nothing and giving your hard-earned money to thieves and liars who control your life, your thoughts, and actions. No, thank you.

NURSE

Yet here you are with me.

JACK

I have no choice. That was taken away from me.

NURSE

Why?

JACK

Because life is unfair, or are you going to quote something from the Bible.

NURSE

No, I was just asking.

JACK

Well, enough talk, come clean me up. I need a nap after all this.

NURSE

No.

JACK

No? What do you mean, no?

NURSE

No means no. Doesn't that brain you got from you don't know where know that.

JACK

Of course, I know. Don't play games with me, woman!

I think I need a nap first. You've tired me out. Don't worry, I'll be back...eventually.
(The *NURSE* walks away from him.)

JACK

Wait! You can't just leave me.

NURSE

Wanna bet? (*Stops and turns back towards Jack.*) I'll make you a deal, Jack. If you can tell me what my name is, I will clean you up and put you to bed.

(*JACK stares at her blankly, then angrily.*)

(*The NURSE exits.*)

JACK

Stop! I demand you to come back here this instant.

LIGHTS go DOWN. After a moment, a SPOTLIGHT shines on Jack again.

JACK

Oh, the torture of wanting what once was but will never be again. Why do you do this to me? Don't I pay you a fair wage? There's no work ethic left in this country. There's nothing left but my chair and I. How can you justify your actions? Whom am I talking to? Her? Her god? No, I am alone. Again. But haven't I always been babbling to deaf ears that pretend to hear until they get what they want and leave without a trace. All blemishes caught in a broken mind that's been tuned in for too long. Hazy pictures of what once was, if ever it was, and what I now pretend to see. She'll return and soon I'll sleep. Would someone turn on some music? Oh, I forgot, I told them not to play. Maybe someone could help me? Oh, I forgot, I want to be alone. Perhaps then just a little light? Oh, I forgot, I chose to live in darkness.

LIGHTS OUT

Michael Donohue

Short Stories

Pain Don't Hurt

It was a clear day in the summer of 1985, a good day for riding. The wind ran over Dennis as he span in and out of traffic. The engine thrummed its life through him. The roar of the exhaust was music to his ears and the smell of rubber was a perfume when yah dumped it at a stop.

It's 1985 and the women looked at you like they want you, or totally fear yah, depend on how close daddy is...

He'd been pushing some small weight for a business man. But he did what he had to do get by; he was good at collections and pumping everything else. Pot, coke, crank, acid, maybe a gun here and there; business was good enough to have ample cash on hand for fines and lawyers.

When yah deal in cash, yah gotta have a gun. Several, even....

He was on his way to collect some cash for goods. He had a couple of road dawgs with him for back up. Still gonna be a nice day. Bob Segar's 'Ramblin' Gamblin' Man" was jamin' in his head.

You have to pay attention when entering an intersection. Not everyone notices motorcycles and some drive like they're the only ones on the road, some are just mad at you for being in their way.

The bitch cut him off.

Two against four. Guess who wins?

She hit the back end of the scooter as Dennis tried to lay it down after she'd cut him off.

Man, it seemed to take forever to fall over. He wondered at the same time if he was headed for a soft spot. Grass would be a good place to land.

The median flashed by his line of sight, then all he saw was concrete road.

He was about nine years old when he came home from school one day after getting into a fight. He remembered it clearly. It was three against one and they had put a first class hurting on him. He had come home in tears then his dad lit him up almost as bad as those kids had hurt him. The old man told him to go get more than even and never come home a loser and shoved a baseball bat at him. Dennis' first real lesson about violence; you had best fight to win. You keep hitting until he stops moving. Dennis had learned to be mean and cruel by his pops. Tough, mean, and cruel was all his pops allowed, and he made damned sure Dennis learned that lesson.

He felt the footrest tear into his ankle and hook him. He felt that but was surprised that it didn't hurt. It was as though someone had driven a blunt stake through his ankle with a sledgehammer real fast. He wasn't getting apart from his scooter. The bike landed so hard it cracked the gas tank and the gas started flying everywhere. He could smell it all over his clothes as his back and head smacked into the pavement.

He could feel his ass and back become part of the road as he slid across the intersection. The bike spun around twice taking Dennis with it, tossing him around like a rag doll. The bike had become the puppeteer for Dennis. He felt his arm wrap around his back as he flipped around.

It was a 1975 Roadking, rebuilt, of course. The motor was busted out to the max and would outrun anything in its class. It was sky blue, freshly washed and waxed. The chrome was spotless and so shiny you could comb your hair looking in it. The tires were fair and had plenty of sole left to them, but there's never enough tread on the side of the tires. He had just bought it to replace the one he wrecked. That accident resulted in a smashed pelvis and a broken leg. Ten pins in his right leg later he was up and riding again.

Great to be on two again.

It was summer in Arizona. The heat was beating down in Joe's pink prison and it was h-o-t; 113 degrees in the sun and 114 under the tents. All the prisoners were allowed to watch were cooking shows and the weather channel. All of them were wearing those damned pink prison uniforms.

He finally got some serious attention. He dodged the bullet up until now. He had been accused of assault and battery enough times, two of them had come close to getting him jail time, but the complainants and witnesses had come up short at trial time, so those charges were dismissed. Of course, he had nothing to do with that, and he didn't. Maybe his road dawgs had something to do with it, but he didn't have a clue, since he had been behind bars for two weeks and had no contact with any of them.

You could tell the prosecutor was really pissed about this, but his hands were tied. Dennis walked out of court twice, now, a free man. Oh, there were other events with other folks, but a dealer didn't go whining to the law about how they got beat up for a drug deal gone wrong, or, how they were threatened at gun point. Regardless his neck had slipped the noose those times.

This time it was different. The witnesses had come forward and he ended up with two assault and battery charges with sufficient evidence that he walked out of the back door of the courtroom instead of the front door. The judge gave him the maximum: one year in county lockup with three months suspended.

There were a few folks in there that he had crossed paths with before, business-wise. Yes, sir, they sure remembered him. There was no back down in him and he confronted them

right off the get. He put one in the infirmary with a broken arm while two others had broken noses with each sporting a closed eye. He had made his point. He was just as mean in here as out there. He didn't take their shit in either world. They were just fucking punks. He tended to treat anyone he didn't know with contempt. He had gone looking for trouble and found it and took care of it.

He made it a point, then, to be smarter than it was whatever he was dealing with. He was thinking about expanding his business, but he was going to do it quietly with a low profile. He didn't much care for Joe Arpiao's particular taste for colors and wasn't going back. He did his three months of probation and got the hell out of Arizona. It was a scorcher the day he left, got on his scooter and headed as far as he could go, but stopped for a minute in Indiana and stayed.

He couldn't feel it, but the bike began to slow. He smelled gas everywhere. The car that had hit him started to speed off but got stopped by traffic. The sound of squealing tires from the traffic around him was a cacophony of off-notes, but all he could really hear was the sound of grinding metal being dragged across the surface. His head bounced up and he could see that he was almost to the curb. It seemed like an eternity to get there. A car whizzed past his head and he could hear the tires squeal, but he didn't know if it was from braking or dodging. Gas, the smell of gas was so strong, it burned the inside of his nose.

The sweet sound of a purring engine was gone, and replaced by the sound of the accident and the traffic around him, but the loudest was the metal dragging on the street, his metal, his scooter.

The sound of destruction is always the loudest when you're in the middle of it. It was a long slide to the next stop. Before he could get another thought, he realized there were sparks coming off the scooter. It happens when metal is dragged across pavement.

Those are impressive arcs, almost rainbow-shaped.

Dennis smelt something burning. It was a smell he would carry to his death. The sparks had ignited the gas that had spilled over everywhere. He realized he and his bike were on fire. Everything became red and hazy when the fuel ignited around him.

As the bike crashed into the curb, it lifted slightly, enough for him to free himself. He rolled around on the ground screaming and trying to put out the flames that enveloped him. He tried several times to stand up but could not. The bike had taken the lower part of his left leg with it as it crashed into the curb, but he failed to connect this. He thought he could get up to escape.

Darkness began to settle around him. He felt someone drag him cross the ground, but his back and ass hurt with every inch they moved him away from the bike and away from the fire. He sensed someone was putting out the fire that was consuming him. He almost didn't feel the new pressure on his leg from the tourniquet. Then it all went dark.

His mind wrestled with the torture his body was going through. His dreams were a mixture of violence and pleasant calm. His mind tried many times to focus on something, anything, but all single thoughts were swept away every time the torture began. He dreamt that he was still on fire, of being consumed with an envelope of searing pain. His mind tried to deny the fire his skin felt, but it was fruitless. In the end, his mind won out, eventually responding to the cooling sensation as the fires were extinguished.

He heard his name whispered. The voice was muted like trying to cut through a heavy fog. He kept hearing his name coming closer as the fog slowly faded away. He heard a clap then the fog was gone, but it was so bright that he was blinded by it.

Did I burn my eyes out?

He heard sounds but had a hard time connecting them. Then he heard voices, two female and one male, but he could hardly hear what they were saying. A connection seemed to be gone between knowing was said and understanding it. This new light was still blinding to him plus he couldn't understand the muted voices. He started to get angry. He fought to focus as he squinted his eyes.

Squinted?

He felt his eyes start to water up as fresh torture hit him in waves. He groaned and struggled against whatever it was that held him back, wanting to flee this hurt, this torture. It was agonizing. All of a sudden, his brain made the connection. With another groan, he forced himself awake. It was still cloudy, but his eyes started to work again, and tried to focus. It was a ceiling, he realized. Then he sifted his eyes left and right, slowly taking in the picture.

Dennis! Dennis! The call seemed to pull him further from the darkness and to ward being here, where ever the hell here is. DENNIS!!!! There was another clap, right in front of him. His mind snapped back, his eyes began to focus better, and he could feel himself breathe.

Breathe, breathe, breathe again....

“Mr. Fuel? Mr. FUEL!”

His head slowly moved towards the voice. It was agonizing, but he did it. He focused his attention on a man in a long white coat. He sensed they were not alone in the room; that there were others. One had move to the other side of him and was doing something.

The man spoke again, “Mr. Fuel, do you know where you are?”

“Where’s my bike, where’s my scooter?” Dennis asked, in a rather demanding tone.

The man in the coat, who Dennis now realized was a doctor, replied, “There wasn’t much left to it, but several of your, ahem, acquaintances were allowed to remove it from the scene after the police were done with it.”

“Mr. Fuel, you’ve been in a very serious accident. You are in the intensive care burn unit. You’ve sustained some very serious burns to your arms and legs. Mr. Fuel, you’ve also lost the lower part of your left leg.” He had placed his hand softly on Dennis’ shoulder as he spoke those words.

My leg?

“You were lucky, Mr. Fuel, but you have some serious injuries that will require extensive recovery time.

My leg??

“Nurse? He needs his sleep now. Mr. Fuel, we’ll talk again in the morning.”

This time the feeling was fuzzy and warm instead of fiery, soothing instead torturous.

my leg.....

It took six months’ worth of surgeries and healing, five skin grafts taken from his now-healed back and butt were used to heal his arms and right leg. His face had healed without scarring, but from his neck down, he was still scarred. He was still very sensitive to the direct sunlight. They had replaced his leg with a prosthesis that caused him grief from time to time. The visits to the hospital corrected any issues he was having. That was the physical aspect; for all intents and purposes, he was healed. It was anger that forced him through all of this rehab. His anger at his pops, his mother for not defending him, Sheriff Joe, hell, he was angry with everyone and the world, but he was as angry as he could get with the bitch that did this to him and then tried to run.

His road dawgs were part of that world. They were his brothers on two wheels. They had always had his back or he would have beaten the hell out of them, too. Hell, they got drunk together, got stoned together, piped crank together, got drunk and laid and shared the women. They were his posse and he was part of theirs.

The bike was tossed on a flatbed and delivered to the shop. There wasn’t much to it, but the frame was still good and the motor could be rebuilt, while the rest of the stuff could be replaced and finished like it was before the accident.

Pegleg strolled out of his last PT and got into Sterns’ car. They were on the way to the shop. Pegleg (a.k.a. Dennis) was girding himself to face his one last demon; The Blue Bitch. They had taken pictures of it when it was brought in. Everything that was not metal was burned away. All of the paint was burnt and peeled. There were no tires, just bent and twisted rims and cables without coatings accented the damage. The battery was melted all over the motor and there was even a small bit of foam left on it from when the firefighters had used heavy CO2 to put the fire out dripping off of what was left of the handle bars.

The Blue Bitch tried to kill me. She's got a lot to learn.....she took my leg, now I'm gonna break her in right...BITCH!

Nine months after his accident, he went back to the shop. They had called and told him she was done. She was all cleaned up, waxed and shiny and ready for the road. He got out of Sterns' car and limped towards the door. The boys out front looked right at him and one of them said, in a clear voice, "Boss, Pegleg is here for that blue scooter."

Pegleg....he chuckled.

Jumbo rolled the bike out through the garage door. She glinted in the afternoon sun almost as inviting Pegleg to do another round. She was fixed, Pegleg was fixed, "Let's do this," she whispered to him gently, "let's get this over with."

Peg walked over to the bike and stared for a minute. In his mind he replayed the last nine months of torture and rehab, learning to walk again, going through the skin grafts and looking death in the face.

He leaned her upright, threw his right leg over the seat, making sure his left was well placed, caught the balance, hit the starter, and looked towards the road. Of course, he was scared to death, but his anger for what had been done to him was greater than his fear; he turned the key, snarled, put the gearshift down, and started to let off the clutch.

"Don't it hurt?" asked Jumbo. "I mean the leg and the burns. Don't it hurt?"

Pegleg looked at Jumbo and said in a steady voice, "Punk, torture hurts, but pain? Pain don't hurt."

Jim Reinert

See You Real Soon

It was Friday night and the few people in his family that still spoke to Frankie were coming over for cocktails. He spent the entire day drinking and cleaning in preparation for the arrival of his guests. He filled up the ice bucket and spread coasters around the coffee table and end tables in the sitting room. He set up the old phonograph with Irish records, so a new record would fall when the previous one finished. He filled up a large garbage bag with the empty beer and vodka bottles that scattered around the floors and tables and emptied the full ashtrays of cigarette butts in it as well. After showering and shaving, he slid on his wrinkled suit, poured a full glass of chilled vodka, and lit scented candles he had situated throughout the apartment. He sat and waited for his guests to arrive staring down the hallway at the closed bedroom door.

Mostly everyone had given up on Frankie, especially himself. His time was running out and he knew this, but still, he did nothing to change the path he chose to follow. His fear of living was stronger than his fear of dying. He lived in an infinite stream of madness and every day his mind and body flowed closer to the point that had no return. He was twenty-eight years old and every hour was becoming more and more of a strain. There was not enough vodka to help him sleep for more than three hours without awaking in tremors and hallucinations. It was routine for him to puke and shit blood in the morning, and the pains coming from his liver sometimes caused him to walk hunched over like Quasimodo. He lied about his age to those who didn't know him because the years of daily abuse had caught up to him faster than he anticipated, and he looked like someone who went all in against time and lost.

Out of pure pity, two old friends, Georgie and Smitty, occasionally dragged Frankie out of the dark, hellish prison he chose to live in, but lately he became more of a nasty, sloppy drunk, and a burden to take outdoors. So, their pitiful kindness dwindled with their patience and their charitable acts ended. Even Frankie's brother Jimmy started to miss his monthly visits to check if Frankie and their great uncle, known to them as Unk, were still alive. Perhaps he was busy lending his hand to those who wanted his help. On his visits, Jimmy would leave notes next to Frankie's vodka bottle to ensure he would get them, and they would have little tidbits from A.A. "Keep the Faith" and "Whenever you're ready" scribbled on them. However, Frankie was not ready to live on life's terms and, without invitation, death had already welcomed itself into Frankie's residence and being.

Frankie lived with Unk, who simply died one night in his bed for reasons still unknown. A few months earlier, to avoid homelessness, Frankie swindled his way into living with Unk by promising to do his grocery shopping, make his meals, and ensure Unk had and took his heart medicine. Frankie had every intention on keeping these promises, but he was too far gone to carry them out.

The apartment possessed the eerie feeling that many lost souls died there over the years and the sadness of an unfulfilled life lingered in the air along with a horrible odor. Other tenants' trash, which sat below in the courtyard that squared off four apartment buildings, attributed to the stench of the dwelling. The only windows overlooked the courtyard, and the surrounding

buildings would not allow any type of breeze or natural light to flow through the apartment. The air was stagnant and dead. It had all the charm of an open grave.

The layout was simple and the furnishings depressing. The entrance was a long, dark, narrow hallway, and to the left there was a large sitting room filled with mismatched furniture given to Unk by his sister. The room's sofa and chairs still had the original plastic coverings over them and if you had the misfortune to sit on them, you would have to peel yourself off because of the smoldering heat that always burned through the air of that apartment whether it was winter or summer.

Through another hall, off the sitting room, there was the bedroom and the bathroom. Frankie stayed away from the bedroom now because of the smell and he feared the pictures of Jesus dominating every square inch of the white washed walls would come to life and try to save his soul. Although the thought of a bearded man dressed in his robe and slippers trying to save him frightened him to no end, the most disturbing display in the room was a small framed photo centered on the top of the dresser. The picture was outside of a church and it had Unk standing next to a Catholic bishop and on the other side of the bishop was a frowning, fish-faced schoolteacher who Unk unsuccessfully tried to bang for fifteen years. The only smile protruding out of that photo was from the bishop because he had a large key stuck up his ass, which he believed was given to him by God and this key would allow him to enter through the pearly gates of heaven when he died. This key was his reward for his lifelong devotion to ignorance and for wearing a two-foot pointed hat that he liked to wear when he was teaching little boys to live in quiet desperation and guilt. Sadly, that was the proudest moment in Unk's life. Thankfully, the bathroom was off to the right of the small hall and Frankie did not have to enter the bedroom anymore.

Straight ahead from the entrance door was a narrow kitchen containing a small rectangular table and two wooden chairs with seat cushions that did not match. It had an antique gas stove and a refrigerator butted against the right wall that needed constant defrosting or the build up from ice in the freezer would leak all over the kitchen floor. Instead of defrosting it, Frankie kept towels on the floor to stop the flooding and the ice was so thick in the freezer, two ice trays and a quart of vodka were all that could fit.

To the right of the entrance door was the living room. It was the only room with a television set. A reclining chair that did not recline sat in front of it and an old day bed he bought from the Salvation Army laid next to the chair.

Frankie's mind wandered into the past. It was safe there. He thought about when he was a boy and he lost a pen. He spent endless hours frantically searching for a simple Bic pen. There were other pens in the house and he could have easily grabbed one of them and continued his homework, but he had to find that particular pen. He never found the pen or finished his homework that night because of it. He grew angry, just recollecting this incident. He never understood why he acted or reacted the way he did. His actions or his lack of action always baffled him. He could not trust himself then and he trusted himself even less now. The scented candles helped him forget his lack of action.

The doorbell snapped him out of his trance.

His father was the first to arrive sporting a full head of blond hair, gold-rimmed glasses, his favorite white sports coat, and his gold plated watch wrapped tightly around his wrist, negating each second until there were none. As always, he had two packs of cigarettes protruding from his shirt's pocket, and a couple of six packs of beer under his arm. His father would never come to a party empty handed. He plopped the beer on the kitchen table, sat down, and lit a cigarette.

"Is your mother coming?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"She won't talk to me either."

Sadness flew through his father's eyes. Frankie felt his father's loneliness and regret. Then Frankie saw the resentment he had towards her for leaving him after spending a lifetime of unhappiness together.

His father reached into the bag, pulled out a beer, and cracked it open.

"I just don't understand," his father said while raising the can to his thirsty lips.

Frankie did not reply because he did not understand anything either. He thought he was living the way he was supposed to be, but life did not turn out the way he thought it would. He was supposed to have a family, and his father and mother were supposed to be visiting him, his wife, and his children, but that did not happen. There were no plans made, but he felt his life should have fallen into place. There were people who should not have died, but they did. He lived his life wallowing in what should have been instead of concentrating on what he ought to do and now he must live with what he's become.

Frankie placed the beer his father brought into the refrigerator and grabbed one for himself. He cracked his can open and he and his father sat in deafening comfortable silence for a while. They were accustomed to silence because they built a barrier between them long ago to avoid arguments. Each day one of them laid a new brick and they continued to build this great imaginary wall throughout their lives until drunken silence was the only comfort they understood.

"Where is everyone?" his father finally asked.

"I don't know. They all said they were coming," Frankie said defensively.

"I was just asking. You don't have to bite my head off."

"I know. I have a lot of things on my mind right now."

His father busted out laughing. "Oh really, and what is that?"

"What? I can't have things on my mind?" Frankie shot back.

"Yeah, sure you can. I just can't imagine what it could be."

“Whatever,” he grumbled, not wanting to argue tonight.

Frankie changed the subject. “So, what’s new with you?” was the best he could do.

“Where do you want to start?” his father said.

“Don’t matter.”

“Did we ever start?”

Automatically “no” raced from his brain to his lips and it almost shot out into reality, but he hit the emergency break implanted in the tip of his tongue and sustained it long enough for it to become a thought that would muster into anger and resentment.

“So, I suppose that’s my fault?” Frankie came back angrily.

“You didn’t help.”

“I was a kid. I was the one who needed help.”

“You were off doing your drugs and God knows what else with your friends. You didn’t want anything to do with me.”

“Well, I wasn’t allowed into bars back then, so it was pretty hard to talk to you,” he quickly replied and then raised his can to his lips for another sip of courage.

“Don’t blame me for the way your life turned out.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re a grown man who is able to make his own choices.”

“I didn’t have any choices. I was destined to be just like you.”

“I gave you a good education, a roof over your head, and food in your stomach. What else did you want?”

Perhaps his father was right. He did do all those things for him and now he was relieved of all his responsibilities for his son. He expected too much from his parents. He expected them to love him and teach him to live responsibly in this world. But people cannot give what they do not have and he never realized that his parents were people too and just as fucked up as he was, if not more. They gave him all they could and just because he needed more, or thought he needed more from them, was not their problem. It was his problem, and in their ignorance, they raised the best child they could.

As a child, he did not know his parents were maladjusted. He saw them as perfect teachers and mimicked their every move. He wanted to be like his father. He remembered his biggest dream as a child was to one day walk into a bar and sit and drink and laugh with his father like men were supposed to do. He did not have dreams of becoming rich and meeting

the right girl and getting married. He dreamt of being a man and men drank. Now, his dream had become a nightmare, and he did not have the strength to open his eyes and wake up.

Frankie did not tell him this of course. He wanted his father to feel guilty for raising such a horrible son. He wanted to hear his father apologize and tell him it was his fault and he is to blame. He wanted his father tell him that he was proud of him, but nothing Frankie did ever made him proud. Perhaps Frankie wanted a pat on the back for all the times he went to jail or maybe he needed a peck on the cheek for all the jobs he lost because he too busy getting drunk and high when he was supposed to be at work. Maybe he just wanted his father to be his friend and not his enemy.

“So are you going to answer me or just sit there and stare at me?” his father demanded.

Maybe he was crazy, he thought. Perhaps it was all a hallucination, a figment of his imagination; this thing called life. He wondered if his thoughts were real or just fragments of someone else’s mind, someone greater than he who knew the difference between reality and make-believe. Maybe there was a higher power that held all the answers about this brief encounter on earth, but for some reason, keeps these answers hidden. Someone who could take away the pain of living and the fear of dying and who could bring hope when all hope is lost and who could bring rhyme when there is no reason. He wanted a guide to help him past his uncertainty and to bring peace to his restless existence, if he existed at all.

The guests arrived wearing their Sunday bests, and by eight o’clock, the party was in full swing. His father joined the festivities and parked himself next to his mother, who everyone called Sis. Sis looked frail, but was far from it. Her pale complexion mixed with her jet-black hair gave her face an angelic glow and, as she sipped her Seagram’s Manhattan, it beamed with perfection. She must have known this because she always kept a bottle of it hidden in her closet. Her voice was soft, but her words were strong and she was the only person his father would ever listen to and if you were fortunate enough sit next to her at a party, you would laugh for hours. They looked so alive sitting together and laughing.

Next to them, Frankie’s maternal grandmother, Nanny to her grandchildren, sat stirring her gin and tonic with her index finger. She was an energetic, plump woman who could do the work of ten men. She loved parties and being around people. Her laugh was contagious and she was always at her best when she was the life of the party. Unfortunately, his grandfather was a social misfit. It was no surprise that when they arrived, he immediately dashed into the living room so he could watch the baseball game away from the other guests. This secretly pleased his grandmother because she could be herself without him counting her cocktails. Next to her would be her older sister, Grace, who looked exactly like his grandmother except she did not dye her hair black. She had terrible arthritis, but it helped stir her gin and tonic with her index finger because it was shaped to fit right in the glass. They were so happy sitting next to each other again stirring their gin in synchronicity. It almost made Frankie cry.

His Uncle Eddie sat across from them. He was a large intimidating man with a pear-shaped head that was too small for his body. He had a deep voice that would make any man think twice about tangling with him. He sat with a half-gallon jug of Fleishman’s whiskey next to

him to save him the trouble of constantly getting up for a refill. His paternal grandfather, Pops, sat next to his uncle with his hand covering the entire can of beer he was holding. Pops had a full head of thick black hair and he was a short, stout, man who worked hard labor his whole life. He could build and fix anything, but it was his way or the highway. If anyone questioned him, he would throw his tools down and walk out. Ironically, he also did all the cooking and cleaning around the house. Something that was very rare for a man from his generation to do. He would do anything for his wife and grandchildren, but his sons had to make it on their own. Frankie's father always kept a safe distance from him and stayed close to his mother.

His cousin Danny sat alone by the only window in the room. Danny was a few years younger than Frankie was, but much taller, and with him growing up in Long Island and Frankie in Brooklyn, they never really got a chance to get to know each other. Frankie remembered at one particular family gathering Danny told him of all the things he planned on doing with his future. Frankie was jealous because Danny seemed to have it all figured out and he did not have a clue.

Suddenly, the record changed to their favorite Irish tune, "Isn't it Grand," by The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Machem. They all stood up with their drinks held up high and sang together.

Then an old hen from down the hall banged on the front door. Frankie ran to the door and fumbled with the locks and chain until she screamed, "Don't bother opening it you crazy fool. Just turn that god damned music down before I call the police!"

Frankie babbled his apologies through the door and went to turn down the music. As he turned the knob on the phonograph, he glanced over to his grandfather watching the ball game.

There was something different about him. Frankie crept closer towards him. When he reached him, he shut his eyes in dismay when he saw that his grandfather was not the same young, pot-bellied man who entered earlier. He transformed into an old, pale, thin, sickly looking man. He gazed at Frankie with black, lifeless eyes and handed him a full urinal.

"Empty this for me," he demanded, then laughed loudly.

Horrified, Frankie dropped the urinal on the floor and scurried out of the living room with his grandfather's laughter chasing him from behind.

He ran into the sitting room where his guests were having the time of their lives. He stopped in haste in the center of the room when he saw his father sitting motionless, his skin burned from radiation and the left side of his face butchered away so he could squeeze a few more painful moments out of life. Sis's skeleton sat next to him, but she covered her bones in shame, for she wore only an adult diaper. He twirled around to see Nanny sitting, looking frail as a twig, and babbling incoherently to her legless sister, Grace. He spun again, his mind moving faster than his body, stopping where his Uncle Eddie sat, his mighty frame turned fragile and his eyes and skin yellow, yet still desperately trying to raise a glass to his lips for one last sip of whiskey. Frankie covered his face at the sight of the green glow surrounding Pop's hairless head.

He screamed in terror when he uncovered his face to witness his cousin, who had his life all planned out, staring out the window with his head split down the middle still chattering about his plans to no one.

Frankie ran out of the room, bounced off the wall in the hallway and into the kitchen. He pulled his vodka out of the freezer and a carving knife from the drawer. He pushed a chair up to the window, stared down at the empty courtyard, then at the knife. He could do it now and save himself a lot of pain. He twisted the cap off, and drank until his guests returned to the landfills they now called home. When the door shut for the last time, Frankie turned and lifted his bottle.

“See you real soon!” he yelled after them.

Frankie then rose from the chair and staggered toward the bedroom.

Michael Donohue

Nonfiction

The Sound of Trains

It was a big day for a couple of fellow firefighters and me. The alarm clock rang. Time to wake up and get ready for my shift. I slid out of bed, tiptoed through the house trying not to wake anyone. I then quickly put on my uniform and flew out the door.

This was the last day of our probation period. We were finally to become official firefighters by swearing an oath to serve and protect. I arrived at the station and the normal jokes and laughter filled the room as the previous shift expressed how their day went. I caught the normal rookie hazing.

A giant gray table with eight chairs filled the dining room that connected to the kitchen. Four teardrop pennant lights almost floating lighted the room. The lieutenant occupied one of those chairs as he read the newspaper.

“Hey rookie! What’s for breakfast?” the lieutenant shouted.

“Where’s the coffee, Probie?” another firefighter said in a humorously brash voice. I knew it was all in good fun though. Soon we all sat down and ate the breakfast I cooked before the calls started coming. As I took my plate to the sink to clean up, I was met with everyone else’s plates as well.

“Better get busy cleaning those dishes, Probie,” I heard as everyone strolled out to the bay where all our equipment was kept, including the fire engine.

I walked down the dimly lit hallway to my bunkroom. It was a small room with one lonely bed and a little old lamp sitting on top of a nightstand with a tattered shade. I went to my locker and pulled out my Class A uniform. The uniform was a dark navy-blue suit, almost black, with a bright, white button up shirt to go under it that was always pressed and clean—spotless. A shiny silver badge with a red center pinned to the left breast and my name badge on the right. With my white shirt and pants on, I slid my feet into the glossy black dress shoes, so shiny that I noticed my reflection as I was tying them.

“Come on, Probie!” I heard my lieutenant yelling from down the hall.

“We have to go!”

I grabbed my jacket and hat being extra careful not to get them dirty and ran down the long hallway out to the bay where my lieutenant and fellow firefighters were waiting in the fire engine.

We pulled out of the station, still laughing and joking around; we made our way to City Hall. The station I was assigned to was separated from the rest of the city by a set of railroad tracks

that stretched from one end of the city to the other. As we got closer to the tracks, we heard a train horn blowing.

“Well, I guess we are going to be late.”

As we turned onto the road that crosses the tracks, we heard our radio tones blaring with a loud beep to announce an emergency call. We looked up and saw that the train stopped and blocked the road. I thought to myself that we were not going to make it to this run. The radio dispatcher called out over the radio.

“Engine 22, Engine 21, Ladder 23, Battalion 2, Medic 22—need you to respond.”

You always knew it was something big when they dispatched everyone! Then the dispatch gave the location and finished the call.

“Train verses pedestrian.”

Silence overcame all the chaos as we looked at each other, knowing now why the train had stopped. Without time to turn sirens on, we pulled up and looked down the tracks; an unnerving sound filled the air as we stopped.

Silence.

I threw my pressed clean jacket to the floor, my hat onto the seat and put on my bunker gear to help protect my good pants. I grabbed the big red bag of medical supplies, threw it over my shoulder, and took off running down the tracks.

When I arrived at the scene, I saw a lifeless, limp body wearing jeans and a black hoodie. The hood was up, covering the head, and one shoe was missing. The body was lying face down in the grass next to the gravel about fifteen feet from the tracks. The time of the accident was just after school dismissed. The size and build of the body would indicate it was a school age kid. We rolled the kid over and saw the blood covered face of a twelve to thirteen-year-old boy with headphones still in his ears. I moved to his head to stabilize his neck. As my fingers wrapped around to the back of his head I felt the fingers of my right-hand sink into his skull from where it had been crushed. He was barely breathing and his vital signs were crashing fast.

We placed a neck brace on him and promptly moved him to a backboard to carry him to the ambulance that was a quarter mile back on the road. I jumped in the back of the ambulance. Lights on and sirens blaring, we made our way to the nearest trauma center. There was a chaotic calmness as we cared for this young boy on the twenty-minute transport. After we transferred care to the hospital staff, we stood in the hallway of the trauma center reflecting on what just happened. I forgot I had on my Class A uniform. I began looking myself over for any blood that might have gotten on my crisp, bright white shirt, to my surprise there was not a drop.

The ceremony was rescheduled for the following year at the annual city Christmas party. All the firefighters were wearing their Class A uniforms. As you walked into the room, there were twenty round tables with white tablecloths and flower centerpieces filling the well-lit room. I knew everyone there, except for three people standing off to the side, talking with the fire chief. They turned out to be a big surprise making that night particularly special.

Not only was I sworn in, but also my fellow firefighters and I were introduced to the kid that we helped save. I did not even recognize him; the only images I could remember were from the day of the accident. He looked good, healthy, and active. With his parents standing on each side of him, he reached out and shook my hand. Not a single word had to be said between us, the look in his and his parents' eyes said enough. He was able to graduate from high school and live a normal life.

Before that day, I thought I was beginning just another career, but that one run forever changed me and how I felt about the job. After caring for this young man, witnessing his struggle for survival and then being able to shake his hand, I realized how important this job was.

Daniel Kelly

Contributors

Alex Conrad

See special dedication on page 93.

Isabel D'Allura

Isabel is a Marketing major with a Creative Writing minor who never ceases to find inspiration in the most mysterious places. In the future, she hopes to become a successful businessperson and a published author.

Michael Donohue

Michael is a Creative Writing major at IUPUC and he hopes to graduate while he is still able to write and go to the bathroom without any assistance.

Clifford Floyd

No biography submitted.

Brandy Gilliatt

Brandy is majoring in Elementary Education. She enjoys reading and spending time with her four children.

Laura Hole

Laura demonstrates her artistic talent through this magnificent oil painting.

Kyra Jessie

Kyra captured her love of nature with these beautiful photos of Brown County. Her favorite pastime is watching the sunrise.

Lindsay Jordon

Lindsay took this photograph while driving around Bartholomew County on November 11, 2017.

Chloe Jorgeson

Chloe is first-year student at IUPUC. She swears like a sailor, but her message is in good nature rather than a bottle.

Daniel Kelly

Daniel is a former firefighter and paramedic and is now a freshman and an Engineering major.

Emily Krider

Artists with a muddled style inspired Emily's portrait. Conceived in an all-nighter, it is called *Self Portrait Kind Of* because it doesn't exactly look like her, but that wasn't the point of the piece.

Liston

Liston's piece is about having confidence in yourself. He first drew it as random lines and shapes, and then simply added extra lines to create the woman. This unique process inspired the title, *Something from Nothing*.

Lucie Lortz

Lucie's piece depicts the cruel words said to a girl who recently finished cancer treatments and moved to a new school. It expresses the lasting effect judgments might have on a person.

Chantz Morris

Chantz is sophomore at IUPUC majoring in Business with a concentration in Marketing. In his free time, he enjoys reading and writing.

Dakota Mullikin

Dakota is a sophomore interested in English and foreign literature.

Clara Villalon Partida

Clara is a recent graduate from IUPUC and her submission was part of her senior project.

Jim Reinert

No biography submitted.

Kaitlyn Simon

Kaitlyn's major is Elementary Education. The work she submitted is handmade painted ornaments, and is something she would like to do with her future students.

Jennie Stuart

Jennie is a student at IUPUC who enjoys all aspects of creative writing.

Lily Thompson

Lily is a freshman at IUPUC and always exhibited a passion for art.

LaWanda Tidd

LaWanda is a returning student studying Education. She has been married to her best friend for 23 years and is blessed with 3 children and 2 grandchildren. Her life's motto is to show compassion, love, and leave where you've been a little nicer than you found it.

Paige Webb

Paige's painting represents the hardships and difficulties of any relationship, and *Coming Together as One*, represents the great bond and connection between two people.

Special Dedication

This is Alex Conrad's second time being published in *Talking Leaves*, though this time he isn't here to see it. My brother died on July 3rd, 2017. He was 30 years old. He overdosed in someone's house and took his last breath in the presence of a stranger. He was homeless at the time, and died with very few worldly possessions. Aside from the clothes on his back and his signature pair of aviator sunglasses, he left behind a heavy binder stuffed with thousands of pages of his writing. It includes several journals, an entire book he wrote during one of three prison sentences, and hundreds of poems, including this one.

Alex's short life was a category four storm, but in the eye of it, in those fleeting moments of calm and quiet, he wrote. I'm not sure he knew it at the time, but each page he filled with his terrible handwriting was an act of self-preservation. I often didn't know where he was when he was alive, but now I know he lives in that big binder, in that book he wrote, in this poem. And I think he's happy here.

Lora Conrad

Hotlines

**SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration)
National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)**

Depression Suicide Hotline: 1-800-SUICIDE

Depression Hotline – Support Group: 1-800-826-3632

National Adolescent Suicide Helpline: 1-800-621-4000

National Suicide Prevention Helpline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

