



Byways

Journal of Arts & Letters
Spring 2012

"Not all stories have a happy ending."
Cobb

"Sometimes I want to cry about my past"
Coleman

"And so we've got these hooligans
'round here"
Thornton

"Now blinded, they join in Love's primal
rhyme... Death waits a while longer..."
Swalley

"No one but death anticipates the
importance of poison."
Chondie

"After she died, I bought a smaller gun."
Kwon

"Despite their ferociousness, do not fear
the wolves."
Omordia

CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE

Forward

Waiting

Curt Swalley,
Byways student editor

Hello to all Central Texas College students,

Byways is a student journal of writing and arts. It is open for all CTC students to submit their art work and their creative writing to be considered for publication. The only requirement to be eligible to submit work to Byways is that the artist or writer must be an enrolled CTC student. Byways is only open to CTC students for publication. I would like to encourage all of you to submit your creative written work, short fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, drama, art work, paintings, sculptures, metal works, etc., to Byways. Make sure that your work is well proofed. To submit artwork, send a digital photo of your work. Send any work as an attachment.

In order to submit your work to be considered for publication, send it to my email address: Mike.Matthews@ctcd.edu

Include your contact information with your submission: Email address, phone number, and physical mailing address.

I begin taking submissions at the start of each Fall semester. The deadline for submissions is the end of the second week of February.

Mike Matthews,
Professor Communications, CTC Central Campus

It wasn't however. It kept on going. The fighting and the abuse got progressively worse. I had finally found the courage to walk away one day when someone who cared stepped in. All it takes is one moment. I blinked, sitting in my car, listening to them chatter away. I heard the hum of my engine. I heard the singing of the radio in the background. I heard him say I'm sorry. I watched as she wrapped his arms around him and they locked lips. I heard her whisper I'm sorry too.

As I put my car in reverse and pulled out of the parking lot, I thought to myself:

"Not all stories have a happy ending."

Byways

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Cover Art

Birds Nest - Curt Swalley

Poster Art

Behind Walls - Chondie

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As the beating stopped and the breathing slowed, I was let go, able to fall the rest of the way to the ground. I bowed my head down in shame and utter shock. 'I'm sorry,' I thought to myself, not being able to directly say it. I wasn't entirely sure of whom exactly I was saying it to. Maybe it was to God, for not being strong enough to leave. Maybe it was to him, for causing him to react the way he did. Maybe it was to myself, for being an extreme disappointment. I can't count the number of times I've tried to be someone better. I can't count the number of times I have failed, and instead tried to make everything go away. I can't count the number of times I've tried to disappear, because I couldn't bare living on this earth feeling so ashamed, like I didn't matter. How many times I've felt like a waste of space. I think my apology was to my son though, for letting him witness it, and me not being able to stop it.

I was told to put our son to bed. I stood up slowly and followed orders. I sang him to sleep in the crook of my arm, crying softly. I didn't want to lay him down. I didn't want him to leave my comfort. I may be his mother. I may be there to be his protector. I may be his angel, but he is also mine. I did in the end because I knew that if I didn't that he would come looking for me. I walked slowly, waiting for my impending doom, dreading what was to come. I've always been a stubborn person. I've always been a strong person. All of it faded the minute it came to him or the son we created together.

I stood at the entrance to the living room. My jaw was locked and though my eyes were puffy and stained red, the presence of down right attitude could be read from a mile away. I was told to come sit down. I did. I was told to lay my head on his lap. I did. My hair was being stroked. It was exactly the way I love, but in that moment, it seemed like it was being used as a tool. I listened to him tell me that he was sorry.

As my head was tilted toward him, I watched him inspect my face and I acknowledged that we would be leaving in thirty minutes to go out to eat with his friends. I was told not to cry anymore and to be happy when they got there. I pursed my lips together in defiance.

Suddenly I heard the sternness in his voice as he told me to lose the attitude and my entire body flinched. I locked up. Yes sir.

I sighed, as I did not dare to move. I closed my eyes as my hair started to be stroked again. I questioned my sanity and the safety of my child and me. I reassured myself that this was the only time it would ever happen and that things would get better, just as he voiced and confirmed them.

Happy Endings

Ashley Cobb

It's been three years now. It was never who I would have expected it to be. People tell stories about it all the time. They warn less knowledgeable and naïve "kids" who think they are invincible; The kids that remain oblivious to the actual realm of the world and what it really is. No one is safe. No one is untouchable.

I relived it while watching a couple in front of my car. They were fighting, arguing about something petty like whether or not they could afford to buy toilet paper.

"I'm so tired of you always wanting to go out! You never want to spend anytime with your son and me! What's wrong with me? What do you not like about me? What's wrong with your son?" I screamed at him, tears were rolling down my face.

As he answered me with a deliberate amount of force not wanting to leave anything out or spare me of my feelings, all I could think about was how much I wanted him to just care about me again, just like the old times when we first fell in love. Before I got pregnant and we were forced into adulthood without a choice.

"As soon as you get home you're out with the guys, and as soon as you are done it is off to work! You lie about spending money on a t-shirt! A damn t-shirt! What about diapers? I've been asking for some. What about things we need? Why do you insist on lying?" I sputtered out, clinging on to pure hope. There was nothing else to cling to.

My son grabbed a hold of my leg and I shook him off. I guess it looked like something different. Next thing I know I'm being swung around to the other side of the room. Fists were clenched into my cardigan. I tried to look up as I was being pushed down, tripping over my own feet into a wooden bedside cabinet. I knocked into the corner and braced myself.

A fist greeted my eye. Next my nose. As screams were being spouted I couldn't hear a thing. Time slowed down in that second. It was like I was floating outside of my own body.

My one-year-old angel brought me back to reality because he started crying near the doorway. 'It'll be okay. Sh. don't cry,' was what I wanted to coo to him soothingly, but I couldn't because I couldn't find my voice.

Fangs

Chondie

As my life begins
I know that death
is the only end
of all that is within me
what was unexpected – poison
eating me with malignant fangs.

Small imperceptible fangs
no time to notice when it begins
too busy to feel the poison
seeping in, seeking my early death
drowning the life inside me
down to fathom's end.

Too young to see my end
I ignored the blunted fangs
not sharp enough to scare me
when the end begins
no one but death
anticipates the importance of poison.

Sharp is the poison
determined to end
and sever my plans. Splice my death
with ravenous fangs
cut short my fight before it begins –
No chance to save me.

I am willing to risk me
and fight poison with poison
before my mind begins
to comprehend my own end
by seeking green fangs
dripping death.

But what death
Is to me...
Defying the fangs
Running at poison
Hoping to end
What it begins –

Slow death by poison
may speed me to my end
I will fight the fangs sunk deep – and it begins.

Pow!

Nicole Fischer



Charcoal

Jason

Angelina Carter



Charcoal

Moon Over Savannah, GA

Trish Argumaniz



Digital Photography

Calaveras

Angelina Carter



Digital Media

9/11 Sestina Chondie

Look elsewhere for surrender.
May your hate
Keep company with the fires
Wrought that 11th day,
When Americans fell from death planes
Reigning heroes.

Murderers cannot be heroes.
Bloodied hands try forcing surrender
With peopled planes,
Innocent tools of hate.
We must never forget the day
Two cities disappeared in fires.

We watched boiling fires
As they engulfed our heroes
Leaving trails of death. a day
None would surrender
To black plumes of hate
Killing mangled planes.

Who would have thought planes
Would ignite buildings of fires
Belching viscous hate
Down, covering heroes
Unseen. would you have us surrender
On another day?

Will you forget the day
Murderers on planes
Held hostage our surrender?
Captive people in fires
Creating heroes
From the inadequacy of hate.

The belly of hate
Bloated the day
It fed upon heroes,
Gutting planes
With daggered fires
Too hot to surrender.

Although hate flew planes
On the 11th day, remembered fires
Baptized fallen heroes. America will never surrender.

Still Life Fabric

Nancy Suarez



Charcoal

First Day Dead

Joseph Thornton

How do you know what to expect
When you're doing something you've never done?
Why would you think you should know?
What would make your first day in high school
Any different from your first day dead?
As you're falling down through Limbo,
Just another gumball on the track,
You can't choose where you go.
The track is your helmsman, and gravity your copilot.
To go right when the track goes left,
To go up when gravity goes down,
Are things forbidden.
But as you go down to Heaven —
Or is it up to Hell?
Can you really argue where you're lead?
You forged this track — do you remember?
Every day you crafted it,
Put your blood and tears in it,
Poured your soul into it,
And now your soul is on it
Going where you chose for it to go before;
But now the time for choices is past,
The time of consequence is here,
And you should know what to expect,
Although you've never done it before.

The Dead for President

Jason Siddoway



Digital Art

Floral Ripples

Trish Argumaniz



Digital Photography

What Do You See?

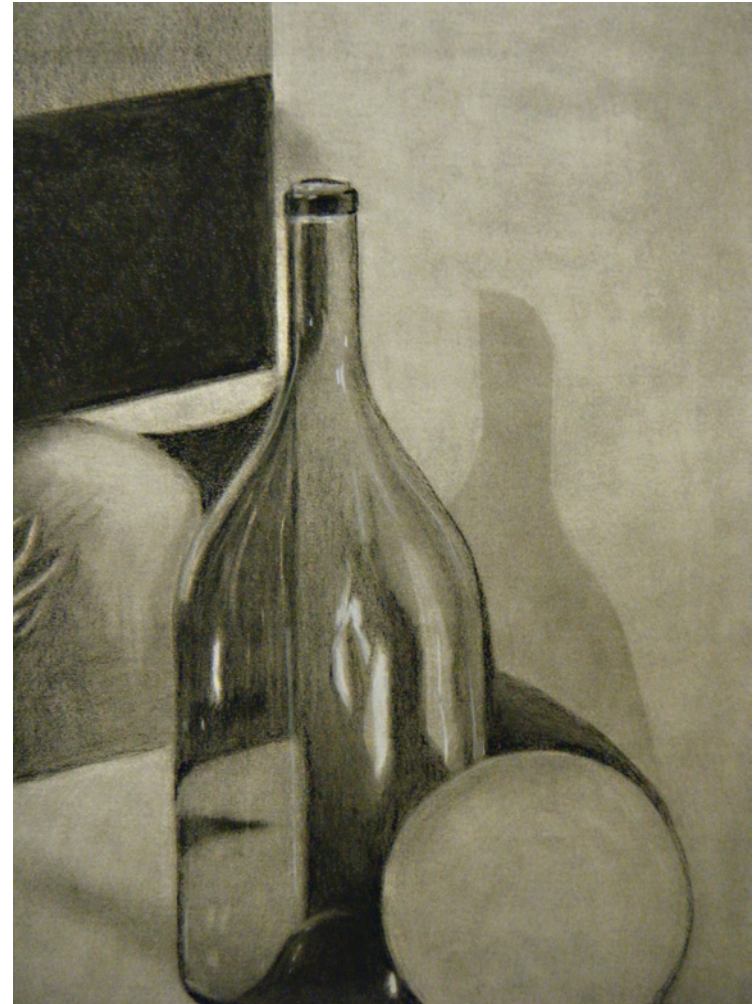
Chondie



Oil on Canvas

Still Life

Jose A. Melendez



Charcoal

Bite

Danielle Omordia

Rachel was fourteen when her grandmother was murdered. Granny Linda's official obituary said death by dog attack, but Rachel wasn't blind. The Mayor had never liked Linda, not since the day she survived Wolf Run and become a town hero. After that day, Linda was evicted from her home and forced to live in a cottage by the woods. Rachel spent years skipping through the woods to see her grandmother and listen to the story of how she survived Wolf Run. The town children would flock to Linda whenever she appeared in the market square and festivals would be in her name.

The townspeople revered her more than their own Mayor, and well, that just wouldn't do. When the news came that the greatest hero to have ever lived had been attacked by wild dogs, the town went mad with grief. Shops closed, lights were snuffed out, and every able bodied man, woman, and child walked the streets in mourning.

Rachel mourned at first, but when she saw the scene of the "attack" and witnessed the triumphant expression on the Lumberjack's face and looked upon his blood soaked ax, she ceased her mourning. The Mayor might have fooled the rest of the town with the notion of this being a "freak accident", but she couldn't dupe Rachel.

Dogs don't hack people up, after all.

After Linda, no other candidate survived Wolf Run. Five years after her death, Rachel was prepared to turn the tables once again. Granny Linda's stories hadn't just been about how she had survived, but how anyone could make it out with their lives intact. The guidelines hadn't made much sense to Rachel then, but as she stood before the townspeople tonight, waiting for the second participant to be called, they came back to her clear as day.

Keep your comrades close.

"Even if you're stuck with a limp wristed bookworm who has never seen a day of work in his life, you're better off with him than without him," Linda would use to say.

Rachel wasn't too sure about that, but she hoped she wouldn't get a "limp wristed bookworm". If she needed anyone watching her back, she was going to need someone strong of will.

"Joining Rachel will be Becca Tauber," the Mayor said. There was no clapping, no cheering, just a hushed murmur as the crowd parted to let Becca take the stage next to Rachel. She was everything Rachel was afraid of: a trembling, petite, teary eyed young woman who had probably never seen the Sun for how pale she was.

I Can Love...

Ashley Cobb

I Know I mess up from time to time. I know when I do mess up, I mess things up badly. Go big or go home right? I'm not excusing myself from my downfalls. I'm not covering up the slip-ups in the future that are bound to happen from time to time. I'm not saying I'm perfect and I'm not saying that it won't ever happen again... because it probably will.

But I Can Love...

I can be brave. I can be smart, superstitious, exciting, vulnerable, I can be everything you want me to be. I can do the waking up at the crack of dawn to walk the dogs and getting the kids ready for school while putting on a cup of coffee. I can do the dinner surprises for when you get home from a long day of work. I can be the one who voluntarily folds the laundry. I can be the one who lifts you up when you are down. I can be the one who writes I love you notes all over the house while putting a kiss from my lips right next to your pillow. Who makes you laugh when you need it most. I can be the one who holds you close at night, and I will never forget to whisper to you just how much I need you...Because I do. I need you badly.

You can catch me singing in the shower or humming while doing the dishes. You can see me dancing in the rain and attempting to plant flowers in the garden while swearing that this time I will keep them alive. You can watch me attempt to be somebody and fail, but I know that you will be there to make me get right back up.

I can be passionate. I can be abrasive. I can be charming. I can be persuasive. I can be pensive, impulsive, compulsive... and as long as your heart is beating back for me, I can be leisurely... because...

You calm me down. You stop the time. You breathe me in and exhale out all of my worries. I need you... I know I am independent, stubborn, naïve, gullible, apprehensive, fickle, bitter, and vain. I know I have a heaviness in my head and an unbearable knack for running away at times when I should stand. I know I can be a pain in the ass and that I have maybe a 2 second rebound rate before I'll be a pain in the ass all over again...but..

I can love you like no one ever could.

Nick Bell

Gracie Olivares



Charcoal

Rachel hid her disappointment by looking at the Mayor. She was a short, spiny woman with a cunning smile and wickedly deceptive eyes set in an almost angelic face. Standing beside her was the Lumberjack and the Huntsman. Both were tall, ripped, and armed to the tooth. Both were fiercely loyal to their Mayor.

"Congratulations," the Mayor said. "You two have been chosen to complete our wonderful town's annual Wolf Run. Remember, ladies, all you have to do is survive the night without getting bitten, or dying." Her smile widened. "Good luck. I hope to see you both in the morning."

"Oh, you will," Rachel said, loud so everyone could hear. "Count on it."

The crowd began to whisper and the Mayor's smile fell. "The Wolf Run begins. Now!" Rachel and the Mayor shared one last glare before Rachel jumped off the stage and headed for the forest. Behind her, hiccupping loudly, Becca followed.

Evening was fading fast, but Rachel wasted no time burrowing into the heart of the wilderness. She knew she would need to cover as much ground as possible before the last few vestiges of light faded. Then, there would be a terrifying short window of time before the moon was fully illuminated and it was during that time that the wolves would start to move.

"Why do you hate the Mayor?" Becca's question came out of nowhere and it made Rachel jump. She glanced over her shoulder, but Becca was ripping the hem of her skirt out of a bramble bush.

"Who says I hate the Mayor?" Rachel shot back.

"You stood up to her," Becca said. "No one stands up to the Mayor."

"She took someone very important from me. I want to beat her at her own game."

Becca nodded sullenly. "The Mayor took everyone who was important to me, as well." Rachel stopped and Becca looked up at her. "She sent her Huntsman to arrest my parents for selling illegal medicines, but those medicines were helping prevent diseases and cure illnesses."

"That is why we can't let her win," Rachel said. "She's corrupt."

"But how can we?" Becca said, her eyes sparkling. "No one has ever survived Wolf Run."

"Someone has." Rachel gritted her teeth. "My grandmother survived, so we will, too." She turned around and continued trudging through the undergrowth. Becca struggled after her. "Becca." Becca stopped, her breath held. "In a little bit, we are going to run." Rachel turned around and grabbed a handful of Becca's skirt.

"What are you-Rachel!" Becca squeaked as cloth tore. Rachel held up a large portion of Becca's skirt while surveying the change of fashion. Becca tugged on her now scandalously short knee-high skirt and glared at Rachel. "Why did you do that? I want to die in dignity, not, this!"

"I told you, we're not going to die," Rachel said, stuffing the extra cloth material into her pant pocket. "Besides, you're not going to have to worry about your dress snagging anymore. Like I said, we have to run. The wolves have probably already started moving."

Becca gasped and looked around. "How do you know that?"

"Let's just go now," Rachel said. "The faster we move, the less likely we'll be ambushed." She grabbed Becca's arm and started to rush through the forest. The sudden crashing around startled birds and sent small animals racing. Darkness had already descended and Rachel struggled to navigate through the trees. Still, seeing was not as important as moving at this point. There could be no breaks. They didn't have two weeks to get out of this forest, they had one night to run for whatever their lives were worth and pray that they would see the morning Sun.

Rachel shook that thought from her head. They would make it through this. Becca made a strange noise, but Rachel didn't need to stop to figure out why. All around them, it seemed the forest had erupted with the hair-raising bays of hunting wolves.

"This way," Rachel gasped, pulling Becca with her down a slight incline. Rocks met their hands and knees more than once, but they made it to level ground without further incident.

"I can't, I can't run, anymore," Becca said in-between gasps when Rachel stopped in front of a cluster of trees. The wolves had stopped howling, but that meant nothing to Rachel. With the forest devoid of even a cricket's chirp, she knew it was only a matter of time before they came face to gleaming tooth with one of the beasts.

Ahead of them, a river glistened. From what Granny Linda had told her, it was a straight shot to freedom on the other side of the river. Sweat rolled down Rachel's side as she considered how long it would take before they could start moving again. Becca could run, but they had barely gone a mile in. The stretch from here to there was much greater and decidedly more dangerous.

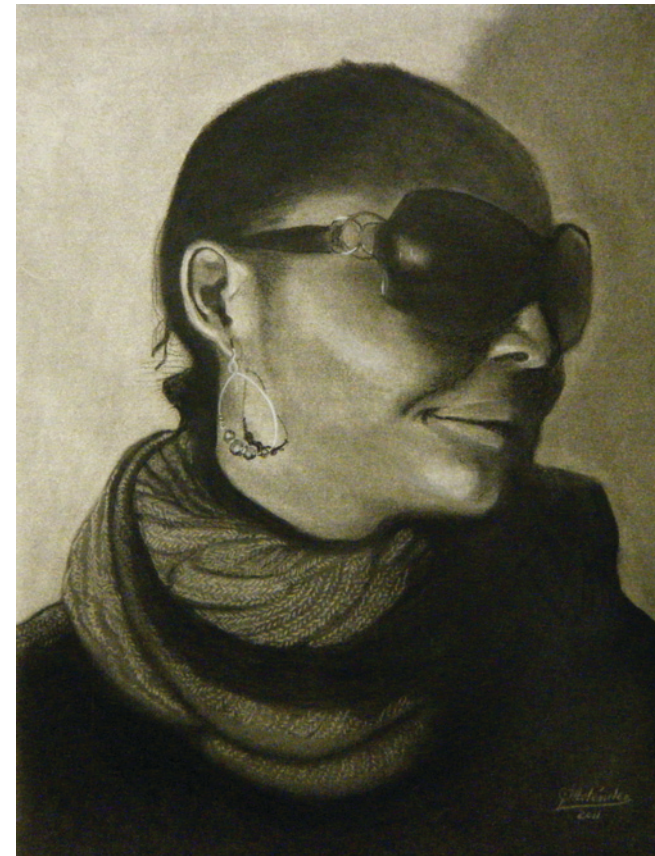
Becca grabbed her arm with such roughness, Rachel jumped. "What?" Rachel hissed, annoyed that Becca had caught her by surprise twice already.

"Didn't you hear that?" Becca said, trying to hide behind Rachel. "Something is coming."

Rachel tensed and started to canvas the ominously dark forest when a twig snapped. "Becca, we have to cross the river. Then, we're going to have to run fast."

Zena

Jose A. Melendez



Charcoal

Flies Ain't Got No Respect

Joseph Thornton

Have you gone and spent some time outside
In air that's thick with heat and Southern Pride?
If you have, you know what to expect
'Cause them dang flies don't got no respect.

You know it's true—I've seen you over there
Flickin' them dang suckers from your hair.
Then they go and fly up in your face;
They don't care about your private space.

Last week I went to a barbeque—
They weren't invited, but they came and flew
On food that we failed to protect.
Man, you know those flies got no respect.

You'd think their parents would teach them to be
More polite, but apparently
Twenty-four hours ain't very much
Time to teach them good manners and such.

And so we've got these hooligans 'round here
Without a way to make them disappear,
And everything they land on they infect
'Cause you know them flies got no respect.

"I can run fast," Becca said.

"Good," Rachel said. She looked both ways even though she could hardly see past her next step, then, the two women burst from their cover and bolted for the river. "Don't worry if it's cold," Rachel said as she jumped into the water. Becca had let go of her for some reason, but she wasn't far behind. "Just run straight through it."

"Oh, I wish you hadn't ripped my skirt up," Becca said when she hit the freezing August water. It was only knee-high, but still they struggled against its fast undercurrents.

Rachel made it to land first, tendrils of moonlight finally brightening the forest in a silvery glow. Her pant legs were stuck to her skin and she fought back the urge to shiver. "Come on, Becca," she said, turning to see how close her companion was. What she saw instead made her blood run cold.

Despite their ferociousness, do not fear the wolves.

Granny Linda might have been on to something when she came up with the guidelines she wanted her granddaughter to keep, but seeing the wolves now, sneaking up on Becca with their huge, ugly forms and glowing eyes, Rachel couldn't make any connections to the wolves and surviving the Run.

"Becca!" Rachel screamed.

Becca stopped and looked up, her mouth open in confusion, but her expression seemed to ripple with change. Her eyebrows shot up into her hairline, her nostrils flared, and her lips drew back in a scream.

Rachel didn't even have time to turn around before something wooden was being pressed against her neck, attempting to cut off her air flow. For a second, Rachel panicked. Becca must have seen the wolves because she screamed bloody murder this time. The wolves snarled, but all Rachel could hear was the pounding of her own blood in her ears. She wrapped her hands around the broom handle, or whatever was choking her, and bucked like mad.

Her attacker laughed and pressed harder. "I bet you thought you were something, talking down the Mayor. Too bad those were just empty threats."

Rachel tried to throw in a few elbows, but her attacker was rock solid. The moonlight was going hazy, but Rachel put all she had left into one last move. She drove the heel of her shoe as close as she could to her attacker's groin. A heartfelt moan said she had found the family jewels. The pressure on her neck loosened just enough for her to breathe. What she had not anticipated was that the man would be standing so close to the ravine. He stumbled back and Rachel couldn't get away fast enough. A terrible sinking feeling turned into a gut-twisting falling sensation and she just hoped Becca would be okay by herself for a while.

Becca, on the other hand, had her back pressed into an ash tree, a large branch in her hand as the wolves circled around her. There were so many of them; too many to count. Saliva hung from their gums and their teeth-so frightening!

She couldn't stop crying. It was strange that they hadn't attacked her yet, but she knew it was coming. They would lunge upon her and eat her. "Go away," she said, waving her branch. The wolves snarled and made false lunges, the dance of their eyes threatening to hypnotize. "Please, help me, someone," she whispered.

The Huntsman, she was sure it was him, had probably already killed Rachel. And though she knew no matter how hard she prayed for help that would never arrive, she knew with even greater certainty that without Rachel, she would not survive this Run.

One of the wolves edged toward her and Becca shrieked, holding her branch out. Even with tears in her eyes, though, she could tell this wolf was different. It wasn't snarling at her, for one. Becca rubbed her eyes as quickly as she dared, but kept her branch up. "Go away," she said, voice trembling.

The wolf, a dusty brown and gray, regarded her with yellow eyes. Becca stared back at it, snot running down her upper lip. The wolf bowed its head and whined. Instantly, all the other wolves stopped growling and stood very still, their gaze focused on Becca. The dusty brown wolf whined again, this time dropping to his belly and crawling forward. Becca gaped. The wolf was acting like a dog. "What?" she whispered.

The wolf crawled closer still, his ears against his skull and his tongue licking his nose. His tail swept across the pine needles and fallen leaves. Becca watched as he began to turn on his side, tail still wagging, whine increasing. She lowered her stick and stared at the wolf's cream colored underbelly. What was going on? The other wolves also began to whine and dip their heads, wagging tails making the bushes rattle.

Becca was trembling violently, but her curiosity was getting the better of her. She reached out; wishing her fingers wouldn't tremble so, and touched the wolf's chin. His fur was soft like a house dog's, but somehow even softer, like a baby rabbit's foot. The wolf rolled over slowly, eyes narrowed as he edged even closer until he had his head against Becca's ankles. Becca almost didn't know if she could breathe. She knelt down and the wolf moved his head into her lap, whining, wagging his tail.

As if a spell had been broken, the rest of the wolves left their positions and came up to Becca with tongues licking and tails wagging. They sought her hand for a simple pat on the head and

Burn

Shaun S. Lane



Oil on Canvas

Opening Up

Jason Siddoway



Pen Ink

rubbed against her like she was a long, lost friend. Becca didn't know whether to laugh or to cry, so she chose both. "What is wrong with you wolves?" she gasped, trying to rub as many heads as possible. "Why are you being so nice?"

"Becca!"

The shout made the wolves crouch. One of them growled, but it was tackled to the ground by two other wolves. The scuffle was loud, but Becca ignored it in her disbelief. "She's alive," she whispered. The wolf in her lap whined, licking her hand.

"Becca!" Rachel's cry was closer this time, and more desperate.

Becca's pulse quickened as she scrambled to her feet. The wolves were backing away in wary agitation, soft growls filling the air. "Rachel!" She started forward, but something had her skirt. She looked back at the wolf who had submitted to her first; she looked into his dark, intelligent eyes and wondered. "Who are you?" she said.

Even if the wolf could talk, he would have never gotten the chance. Bursting through the trees with a spear in hand, Rachel let loose a battle cry. The spear flew from her grip and hit the ground a foot away from the wolf holding Becca's skirt. He barked and jumped back, reproach in his glare.

"Becca, let's go," Rachel said, grabbing her friend and spear at the same time. Her tone of voice left little room to argue, but the blood on her face and clothes had Becca too stunned to speak anyway. They were running again, the wolves following on higher ground. Rachel gritted her teeth. The Mayor really didn't want anyone to survive Wolf Run, but why?

"It was the Huntsman, wasn't it?" Becca said.

Rachel stopped behind a tree. "It was him," she said after a while.

"D-Did you kill him?"

Rachel looked at Becca, at the silent hope in the young woman's eyes, and said nothing. The Huntsman was still alive; or at least, he had been when she left. They hadn't exactly tumbled down a ravine made of pillows and Rachel didn't know if anyone who suffered a head wound as severe as the Huntsman's lived to tell about it.

Becca nodded solemnly and bowed her head. "We should keep moving, then."

"Don't expect this to get any easier," Rachel said. "If the Huntsman was here, then we'll see the Lumberjack as well. The wolves aren't our only problem."

"Right," Becca said. She shivered and looked out into the forest. "Why is the Mayor doing this? Why does she want us to die?"

"I don't know," Rachel said. She tried to wipe blood from her face. "But once we get out of here, I'm going to find out."

They crept out of hiding and took off again, Rachel using the spear to beat back obstructive plant growth. She couldn't remember how long they had been running, but she guessed it had to be around midnight. That meant they had less than three hours before the moon lost full illumination and threw the forest into total darkness once more. If they kept running at this pace, they could make it out in time. But as determined as she was, Rachel knew even she couldn't do that.

Something darted out in front of Rachel and she stopped short, losing her footing. Becca caught her before she could fall on her face and Rachel used the spear as a support. "What was that?" Becca said.

"Not sure," Rachel panted. She looked around. The wolves were nowhere in sight and that only made her heart race faster. "Let's get out of here."

They started moving again, but with a different kind of urgency. The longer they stayed in the forest, the more dangerous it was going to become. The hours rolled into each other and so did the miles, but it was starting to show. Becca was lagging behind and an injury Rachel had suffered to her thigh from her fall was manifesting into a limp.

"Can we take a break?" Becca said.

Rachel didn't stop as she pointed at something in the distance. "Do you see that ridge? Once we get over that ridge, we're done."

Becca stared at the small hill Rachel was pointing at and sighed. It was close, but still so far away. Rachel shrieked, breaking Becca's concentration. "Rachel!"

"It's okay, I'm okay," Rachel said, appearing into view again. Becca hoped it was just because Rachel was dark skinned that she was having trouble seeing her, but everywhere she looked, the colors were fading. "I didn't realize the ravine extended all the way over here."

"If it does, how are we going to get to the ridge?" Becca said. She turned around to look for another path and screamed to find the Lumberjack instead.

"Becca, get down!" Rachel shouted, racing back up the ravine. Perhaps Becca was too terrified to see it, but Rachel's gaze was drawn to the ax. It was swinging for Becca's neck in slow motion, but Rachel knew she would never reach Becca in time. She chucked the spear as she ran. Desperation made her aim clumsy, but the weapon still managed to nick the Lumberjack's arm. His grip on the ax loosened so that he slapped Becca in the face with the broadside of it. The blade dug into her shoulder and she cried out, hitting the ground.

TEDDY:the guy was high. [realization]

[Pause]

TEDDY: [Firm change of tone] My brother got shot walking out of that convenience store on North Dickson.

[Pause]

TEDDY: You killed my brother.

[Guards One and Two Enter Room and stop in front of Russells cell.]

GUARD TWO: Lawyers here. Turn around and walk backwards toward the door.

GUARD ONE: Get up!

[Russell slowly gets up, turns around and gets cuffed][Teddy is talking meanwhile]

TEDDY: [Slowly, Calmly, Loudly] I think it took god to get a man,... You,... .hooked onto the drugs that came from inside *my* filthy pockets,... to kill my brother.... *HIGH*, and place me in jail the very day it fucking.. *happens and get put in a cell right next to you....* for me to realize that*my brothers' life?* Would've been the greater one.

[Russell and Guards are walking past Teddy's cell]

TEDDY: I hope we both get life.

[Russell, Guards One, and Guard Two are OFF stage]

[Lights off]

[Guard One puts handcuffs on Teddy.]
 [Guard Two opens the cell door. Teddy, Guard One, and Guard Two EXIT.]
 [Lights dim then turn off.]
 [Short Pause]
 [Lights come back on]
 [Teddy, Guard One, and Guard Two ENTER stage.]
 [Guards place Teddy back in his cell.][Guards One and Two walk OFF stage.]
 RUSSELL: [Russell grabs his toothbrush and taps on his bars] Ted ,....
 how was your mom?
 [Teddy sits down]
 TEDDY: She's alright man... I had a little brother too, she just told me my little brother just died.
 [Pause]
 TEDDY: She said some guy came into the street in the middle of the night and shot up her neighborhood. They killed my little brother at one in the morning. The morning I got locked up.
 RUSSELL: The morning you got locked up? Five years? Your mom waited five years to tell you? What the hell man.
 TEDDY: She wasn't waiting.
 [Pause]
 TEDDY: She said that the police just found a suspect. Guys already in jail...
 RUSSELL: Damn.. here?
 TEDDY: Definitely here because on the way out the guards told me they're moving me tomorrow, 'cross state.
 RUSSELL: What?
 [Pause]
 [Russell is staring to his left at the cement wall separating him from Teddy]
 TEDDY: The old ladies from the building said the guy fired 50 times. I know those old ladies exaggerating but that must mean he emptied his clip.. she said the guy was high. [Suspiciously look towards Russells wall] She said it sounded like....
 [Long Pause]
 TEDDY: [slowly]...She said it sounded like...like
 [Pause]

"Becca!" Rachel said. She went for her spear, throwing it in front of her lengthwise to fend off another swing of the Lumberjack's ax. The spear was cleaved in half and Rachel dropped the non-lethal end in favor of jabbing at the Lumberjack's exposed arms and legs.

Becca, shivering hard as she attempted to staunch the blood gushing down her front, stared wide eyed as the Lumberjack swung mercilessly at Rachel. The moon was gone, but the stars still provided some visibility and Becca used it to find something, anything, to help her friend. Her fingers closed around the other half of the spear and she ran toward the fight.

Rachel ducked a swing to her head and jabbed blindly. She didn't anticipate the Lumberjack to hack her weapon in two. The blow sent her stumbling and she gasped when she was kicked in the side, effectively putting her on the ground. "You could have lived," the Lumberjack said. He raised his ax, but before Rachel could think to roll out of the way, there was a dull sounding knock and the Lumberjack's eyes rolled into his head. Rachel jerked to the side just as he began to topple. The Lumberjack hit the ground, a dark liquid creeping down the back of his bald head.

Rachel looked over at Becca and grinned, chortling in disbelief. Becca grinned back weakly and dropped the piece of wood. Her knees buckled and she hit the ground. "How bad is your shoulder?" Rachel said, crawling on her hands and knees. Becca shrugged, grimaced, and then snorted. Her moment of mirth dissolved into tears. "Oh, no," Rachel went.

"Rachel, I want to go home," Becca squeaked.

"In a little bit, we will," Rachel said. "But first we have to get out of here."

"There is no way out of here," Becca said, trying to stifle a sob. She pushed herself to her feet without using her injured arm. "The ravine cuts us off."

Rachel went back to the Lumberjack and pulled the ax out of his hand. What had he meant she "could have" lived? Even if the Huntsman and Lumberjack weren't involved in every Run, no one ever survived. Did they?

"What are you going to do to him?" Becca said.

Rachel looked at the ax in her hand. It was heavy and she wondered how much force it would take on her part to Rachel shook her head. "Leave him. If we're lucky, the wolves will eat him instead of us."

"Yeah," Becca said. She wiped her nose on her sleeve, but continued to glare at the Lumberjack.

"Come on," Rachel said, leading Becca away. They started back the way they came, but a bark stopped them in their tracks. "Not again," Rachel said when a dark shape detached itself from the trees. She raised the ax, but Becca stepped forward. "What are you doing?" Rachel hissed.

"Rachel, I don't think the wolves want to hurt us," Becca said. "Maybe, maybe they want to help us, or something."

"Okay, you've officially lost it," Rachel said.

"No, think about it," Becca said. She couldn't see its eyes, but she wondered if it was the same one that had first approached her. "There have been so many times that they could have attacked us—" The wolf barked again and took off into the darkness. "But they didn't," she finished.

"And you trust them?" Rachel said.

"Well, why not?" Becca said, and then sighed. "I guess—" The wolf came back and barked. Becca blinked and it was gone. "What the?"

"Maybe—" A bark cut Rachel off and she started forward. "Maybe we should follow it."

"So, you trust a wolf now," Becca said and Rachel grinned.

They picked their way through the darkness, bloody, limping, and wounded. The single wolf guided them, barking and running ahead. On either side, the rest of the wolf pack guarded their human guests. "Maybe there was never a reason to fear the wolves," Becca panted.

"Maybe not," Rachel said. She scoffed. "Some Wolf Run, huh?"

Becca giggled as they climbed up a slight incline. "Yeah, it was," she said. The wolf barked one last time before disappearing into the brush. Rachel and Becca crested the ridge and stared out to the lights beyond the trees. Town lights. Becca was the first to move. She broke for the forest edge, tears streaming down her face.

"We made it, Grandma," Rachel said, then followed Becca toward town. She considered throwing the ax aside, but just as she came to the forest border, a large, dark shape jumped in front of her. She gasped and caught herself. Against the combined light of the stars and the town, Rachel could see the creature was wolf shaped. It had only one ear and despite the poor light, she could see its eyes.

And what eyes it had. One eye was like a wolf's: almond shaped and bright yellow. The other eye, however, was round and blue. As round and as blue as Michelle Reece's had been before she had gone into the forest for last year's Wolf Run.

The wolf creature was mangy, too. Patches of fur were missing from its body and it opened its long mouth, saliva pouring off its teeth. Rachel didn't know if this wolf was like the rest of them and she moved carefully, testing the weight of the ax. The wolf focused on the movement and lunged.

TEDDY: You miss?

RUSSELL: No. I didn't miss. I thought I killed both of them until my lawyer said I only got one murder charge.

TEDDY: Wait, so what got you in jail? You never got caught!

RUSSELL: I'm motherfuckin' caught NOW..

[Pause]

RUSSELL: Why did I fucking shoot! I didn't even care if I got caught that night. When I got out of the cab, I threw the gun and fell asleep in the park a block away from my apartment. When I woke up, I made my way towards my apartment. I was crossing the street and this little girl was crossing the street with me, she was at least 4 feet in front of me about to get hit by a dumb fuck not looking in the road. The mom was screaming from across the street. I ran and swooped that girl up and put her on the sidewalk. Her mother was still screaming. A cop, by himself, popped up from around the corner. He started running towards us. When he stopped, he started questioning the shit out of me. I didn't get a sentence out. The mother looked mexican and I figured it out that she didn't know any english. I punched the cop in the face and started running.

TEDDY:... the hell? What the fuck is wrong with you?

RUSSELL: Yeah, you don't even need to say shit about it.

TEDDY: What the fuck? A cop? C'mon man...

RUSSELL: I didn't know what okay, that's what.

TEDDY: So you did something STUPID?! ...Yeah no shit that'll get you in jail. I don't why you didn't just shut the hell up. You got away with shooting those two guys AND I bet you were still high! Tell me you didn't poke yourself in the park.

RUSSELL: Look, that shit always messed me up okay... I killed one of them! I didn't plan on killing nobody! If they weren't standing there that night, I would've shot at the air and probably cried myself back into the house.

TEDDY: No, you would've shot at the air and THEN went looking for someone to actually shoot at. I know how people get when they're high. Relentless, reckless, merciless.... You can't do anything about it now.

[Guards One and Two ENTER and stop in front of Teddy's cell to let him out]

GUARD ONE: Turn around and walk back towards the door. Your visitor is here.

RUSSELL:[Soft Laugh] I'd have to start it off with when my mother died.

TEDDY: [Sarcastically] Aw c'mon man... *Please* don't make me cry man..

[Both laugh]

RUSSELL: Shut up. She got everything to do with what I'm about to tell you alright.

TEDDY: [sigh] Go for it ... I'm all ears.

[Teddy lays back down on his bed]

RUSSELL: My moms house got robbed one night. Motherfuckers took everything.. Killed her. That's when I started drinking like a mad-fuck and shooting heroin.

TEDDY: [gesture] You shot up heroin?

RUSSELL: Yeah. I did.

[Short pause]

TEDDY: You get your dope on Sailor Drive?

RUSSELL: Sometimes.

TEDDY: Bet it was mine.

RUSSELL: Most of the time it probably *was* your shit. I did that shit for a while too, got crazy with it...

TEDDY: Most do... So 5 years ago your best friend was your needle huh,... wouldn't have guessed.

RUSSELL: After she died, I bought a smaller gun.

TEDDY: Well that shit don't fuckin' make sense. What could a *smaller* gun do for you?

RUSSELL: She left me some properties and I needed a small and quick pull in case someone tried to get fast with me. Alright... here I go dickhead, just for you. So I got drunk one night. I was high as a kite and ended up, curled up, on the floor, drunk and high at one of her empty houses. In the middle of the night I walked outside. I wasn't drunk anymore but I was sure as hell high. I knew because I couldn't feel anything. I grabbed my gun and pointed it at two guys on the street walking out of a convenience store that looked like they were up to no good. One was standing up from kneeling down. For all I know he was tying his shoe lace. I pulled the trigger until I was out of rounds. From Dickson Street...all the way to Meyer Drive... I was crying. Running hard and when I heard the sirens, I was already down the street, getting into a cab.

Rachel threw her arm up defensively and she screamed as teeth tore into her flesh. The wolf pulled back and Rachel used both hands to swing the ax. Blood squirted from the wolf's severed neck and sprayed across Rachel's face and into her bite wounds. Like acid, the blood sizzled as it mixed with her blood and she dropped the ax, doubling over for lack of ability to breath. The wolf gurgled out a sigh, the light fading from its eyes, and Rachel stared at the side of its head in horror.

"Rachel!" Rachel jumped at the shout and hurriedly rolled the dead animal over. Becca didn't need to know. Next, she pulled the skirt material from her pocket and began to tie it around her, fighting back the urge to cry aloud. "Rachel!" Becca said, closer this time.

"It's, I'm okay," Rachel said, turning as she fumbled with the makeshift bandage. She was crying silently, the tears pouring from her eyes.

"Rachel, what happened?" Becca said, skidding into view. Gray light was starting to brighten the sky. Becca didn't notice the dead wolf as she rushed over to Rachel. "What happened? Did you hurt yourself?"

"No, I'm fine," Rachel said, standing. She couldn't stop herself from looking at the body and Becca followed her gaze.

"What is that thing?!" she said.

"I don't know, but it's dead," Rachel said.

"Jeez, let's get out of here," Becca said and headed off again. Rachel followed her, but at a slower pace.

...all you have to do is survive the night without getting bitten...

You could have lived.

...do not fear the wolves.

Undergrowth rattled and Rachel stopped outside of the forest to turn around. The wolf pack had lined up at the edge of the tree line, their eyes just barely visible in the coming dawn. Rachel felt a chill run up her spine at the intelligence staring back at her and she turned away.

She had killed Michelle Reece tonight. A pendant earring had told her that. She closed her eyes against the sight of the human ear in all that wolf fur.

Whatever you do, don't come back.

Fantasy Trance

Stefanie Reyes



Mixed Media

TEDDY: C'mon, you've been in here just as long as I have. 5 years man, 5 *damned* years ago we rode the same bus to the same hellhole. It's an eye for an eye in here, you can tell me anything, and I still can get on with my god damned day man.

RUSSELL: What did *YOU* do Teddy? What wound your ass right next to mine? The whole hustling bit? Stealing and dealing? What's the shit you've done that got your ass right where you're standing..?

TEDDY: I've wronged allll the right ways my man. Yeah... I DID do the whole hustling bit. I stole more parts from cars than it would take to fill up this entire C block. I sold more heroin than there were feigns to shoot it up. I never dealt TO them... but I'd see them. Alright, I had turned this straight forward guy from the neighborhood onto some coke. Over a few months he got bored with it and started coming to me, asking to buy crack. I sold crack, but I never sold any to him. You're the only person I've said this to but I felt...*feel*, bad for getting that man on drugs It's MY fault that mans on drugs. Alright, so months go on and one day I see him talking to one of my guys, Bobby. I sold *shitloads*, of heroin to Bobby. I was sitting in my car when I looked up and there was an argument going on. My crack-head was arguing with Bobby about what looked like he was trying to get some crack from Bobby. My crack-head didn't know that Bobby only sold heroin. So Bobby started to walk away, that's when I turned my key in the ignition and heard a gunshot. *THAT* crack-head that I got on drugs months ago, decided to shoot Bobby in the back and check his pockets for his damn self. Believe me or not, that was the day I decided to stop the mad money.

RUSSELL: Damn... Shot him out in the open, just like that?

TEDDY: Out in the open... just like that. It was on Sailor Drive... So anyway, the next day my house got raided by the police and I'm talking to my lawyer in jail. Haven't fucking left since.

RUSSELL: ... didn't think you had it in ya! (Soft laugh.) Guess I'm the only one in here who quit trying to forgive himself and be a better person.

TEDDY: [Soft chuckle] Gods the only one that's judging you man. We've all fucked up in here. You don't have to forgive yourself, just never forget any of it.

RUSSELL: Well you definitely are right about that Teddy.

TEDDY: It's easier *said*... than *done*. And you've already *done* it, so.... just say it to me.

The Wall

Gloria Kwon

Setting: “Wall” placed in the middle of the stage to represent the cement wall separating the two main characters. The two main characters are incarcerated in the federal penitentiary. They start to have a casual conversation about their past. After a visit and sharing stories, Teddy and Russell figure out Russell killed Teddy’s little brother.

Teddy is 34 yrs old. Incarcerated for 5 years. Ex- drug dealer.

Russell is 31 yrs old. Incarcerated for 5 years. A recovered drug addict
[Lights On]

[Teddy is lying on his bed. Russell is standing, facing the audience, leaning on his cell bars.]

RUSSELL: I’m getting another visit from my lawyer today. The last time he was here, he told me I got a murder added to my charges... The state connected me to a murder.

[Teddy sits up quickly]

TEDDY: WHAT? What murder charge man?! But you’ve been here for the last...

RUSSELL: Doesn’t matter how long I’ve been in here.

[Pause]

[Teddy stands up.]

TEDDY: 5 years man,... We’ve both been here 5 damned years, and you’re not worried ‘bout getting *life* for this murder charge?

[Pause]

RUSSELL: Look, I don’t really feel like talking about this now.

[Pause]

TEDDY: Well guess what man? My mom’s coming to see me today. Nobody has come to see me in this fuck hole for 5 years!

RUSSELL: Well they didn’t lock us in here to win the popularity crowd. I’ll tell you something though, it will be a lifetime before I get a visit from *my* mom, pop, or anyone who decided to stop giving a crap about me.

TEDDY: Oh yeah? What is it that you did that got you locked up in here man?

RUSSELL: Enough to get me here, that’s what.

Far Horizon

Amanda Coleman

I’m walking along the beach,
I see the setting sun in the distance but it’s too far for me to reach.
As the breezy air is blowing into my face and through my light brown hair,
I look at the beautiful sunset; it’s so hard not to stare.

The wind carries the smell of the ocean to my waiting nose.
This is my island and only one other knows.
I’m feeling the nice warm sand underneath my feet
And the ocean waves are covering them with a silky sheet.

Someone else is on this island
And who will makes this place so grand.
He came into my life with a surprise
By listening to all of my cries.

There’s a guy with dark brown hair in my mind,
His golden brown eyes are so well designed.
He tells me with his sweet voice that he’ll be there till the end.
He will be my ever-lasting friend.

He loves me for who I am.
He is my shepherd and I am his lamb.
Sometimes I want to cry about my past
I now know we will last.

He makes me feel like I have a purpose in life.
Someday, I will become his wife.
He puts a bright smile on my face every day.
My only wish is that it’s here to stay.

This perfect guy finally comes up behind me,
He wraps his arms around me as we look out at the sea.
And he leans down to whisper softly in my ear,
“You will always have a place in my heart. I love you, my dear.”

Life Acrostic

Curt Swalley

Life's lights are a circle, but broken or true?
If we could but know, if we only knew.

First light, the dawn of motherhood,
Eternal love, all that is good
and pure; things will be as they should.

Next light above the Mojave breaks.
"Doze I will not!" The boy a promise makes.
Dawn smiles slyly, the boy's heart aches.

Every light after that morning blurs
and dims, until something odd occurs:
The dawn is forgotten and a new light spurs

his wonder again, no rising sun this time;
a woman smiles shyly at him, youth in its prime.
Now blinded, they join in Love's primal rhyme.

Death waits a while longer, withholds its fury.
There's no need to rush, there's no need to hurry.
His hair will grey soon enough and her eyes will get blurry.

Every light fades, so live 'till you're late!
Nobody beats Death, Entropy or Fate.
?

Blue Bend

Amy Vasquez



Oil on Canvas