Message from the Beacon

On behalf of the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee and the Honors Program, we are pleased to offer this third edition of Chesapeake College’s art and literary magazine. The abundance and quality of submissions testify to the creativity and varied talents of students in our campus community. Notably, the 2011 edition is the first to be compiled, edited and designed primarily by a team of student editors, making this edition of The Beacon an even clearer representation of student voice and vision. Any students who would like to participate in the production of the next edition of The Beacon are encouraged to register for the spring 2012 offering of ENG-140-Literary Journal Production.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the production process for this edition, including: the Chesapeake College English Faculty, members of the Chesapeake College Writing Across the Curriculum committee, Linda Earls’ Creative Writing students, Barbara Viniar, Kathy Barbour, Jamie Gunsallus and Rohry Flood. And special thanks to our student editors, the Spring 2011 ENG-140 Production Class.

To see the journal in full-color and to view previous editions, please find our website at this URL:
www.chesapeake.edu/peakehonors/community.html

Enjoy!

Marc Steinberg & Dave Harper
**Art**

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I was walking in the woods last weekend and came across a large patch of milkweed. It was late fall so the rough pods had burst and begun to release their charges to the mercy of the chill wind. These, nature’s tiny parachutes, will be buffeted along, far from the mother plant, by the indifferent wind. Some will come to rest in the water, their potential lost to its ceaseless flow. Others, lighting on unyielding rock, will likely be unable to permanently root. A few of the pods’ lucky children will land in a Goldilocks zone, where the soil is just right. The fertile earth will welcome these fortunate seeds and they will grow, producing new and tender leaves for a monarch caterpillar’s feast.

Since I have always loved the light, creamy fluff, I collected a pod to share with my class. It sits empty on my desk as I write this. The floss litters the floor of the classroom after being experimentally floated on enthusiastic puffs of young breath. Seeds and the pods which enfold them seem especially apt right now.

What is a seedpod? What defines it, gives it its seedpod-ness? The wizened outer coating that resists all manner of weather? The gift of life it embraces? Its fortitude or its potential? Its mother-ness or its child-ness?

This classroom is like a seedpod and the children napping round me are the seeds it encloses. Each little individual is plump with possibilities and the promise of new life. Safe in their naptime cots, I wonder if their dreams will take root after they have been swept along by the winds of experience. In this secure pod, I can nurture them and help give them the elements they need to bring their dreams to fruition, but I cannot control which way they will be carried by circumstance. Will they be resilient seeds, able to take root in a variety of soils?

All too soon the classroom door will open. The seedpod will burst and the little seeds will wend their way into the world on the winds of change. I hope the love I have given them provides a kernel of strength upon which to feed. I pray that the tools I have taught them to use offer a tough little seed coat of protection. In whatever soil they find themselves, may they take root and flourish, even in foul weather. For now I can only embrace the little seeds and know they are safe in their potential.

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Sleeping Seeds
by Dimitra Neonakis
Some Day
by Kimberly Taylor

Some days it’s easier
To let the past consume me alive
Where I’m drowning in an ocean
Full of dangerous nightmares
Hungry and insane
From the scent of my blood and fear
Where the water is black and thick
Willing to steal my last fighting breath
The undertow pulling me under
From the turmoil of daily life
The chill cuts me to the bone
Numbing my limbs
So I cannot move, cannot struggle
Cannot fight
Rendering me vulnerable and worthless
Facing a mountain of obstacles
All striving to make me fail
To make me crawl and plead
The past delights in breaking my soul and will
Some days it’s easier
To pick up the pieces
And to aim towards a brighter future
Where I will make my own accomplishments
Pursue my dreams
Impact others with my tears, my blood, and my pain
People will find me important
I will be of value
Some day

These Colors
by Ashley Houtz

Depths of oceans
In scarlet hues,
Where lightning strikes,
The fire spews.
A circle in
A teardrop’s gaze,
Make all souls ache
In violet haze.
The innocent
Are kept apart
From the wrath of Evil’s
Amber heart.
The rushing rivers
In a forest green
Make all unknown
By blind eyes seen.
When triumph falls,
The sparrow flies,
Seeking silver
In cloudy skies.
The mountains soar
As kings of Earth,
Defeating death
For gold rebirth.
If we could travel
Through blackest space,
Would we all go,
Or stay in place?
The butterfly’s wings
Shade clouds of gray,
Promising rain
Another day.
If sunsets break
Their hearts of stone,
These colors are meant
For them –
Alone.
Wrong Turn
by Emery Schultz

Chloe sat crying in her car. Sometimes, life just wasn’t what it was supposed to be. Today was one of those days. The world felt dark despite the sunlight shining through the trees on the clear, crisp October afternoon. Chloe wiped a tear away and blotted at her running make up, wondering how humanity could be so cruel. Today she hated everyone. She hated her teacher for belittling her until she felt less than human. She hated all boys at the moment because of one who broke his promises. She hated school, she hated life, but most of all she just wished that she could go back to the time before life became crazy. She wanted her innocence back. She wanted to go back to before she was scarred when she still believed in humanity and the beauty of life. Reaching into her purse for a tissue, her fingers brushed against something like soft, worn out paper. She pulled it out and saw it was a folded, five dollar bill. It was old, as if it had been carried around for years, and indeed, it had been. Chloe couldn’t help but smile through her tears when she saw it. She had carried it around with her for two years now since the summer when she had received it. She unfolded the crumpled bill and brushed her thumb over it in remembrance. She had forgotten all about the bill, and even about the fact that she had always kept it with her since that moment.

“It’s funny that I found it now,” she pondered, blinking away the residue of tears that still clouded her misty eyes. “I had almost forgotten about this.”

Chloe closed her eyes and leaned back in her seat, remembering that summer, two years earlier. She had been spending her summer as she always did, working part-time and spending her evenings and weekends at the Church Hill Theatre back home. This was where she belonged. She had been acting at the theatre for four years, but this was the first
year that she had been cast in a lead role. One evening, early in the rehearsal process, she and her scene partner, Jason, had decided to get away from the noise of the other actors and run lines together outside of the theatre. The evening was still in the little town. Few cars passed by, and even though the theatre was in the very center of the small town, little ever happened. Tonight was especially still; the only noticeable noise was that of a dog barking at the house across the street.

Chloe and Jason were busy running their lines together when a stranger came walking up the sidewalk towards them. She was a slight, small woman of middle age. She had short, dark hair, and was dressed in clothing that looked as if it had come from a 1980’s Good Will. What was most noticeable about her was the haggard look of her face. Dark circles surrounded her eyes, and wrinkles crowded her eyes and mouth, almost prematurely. She looked tired, worn out, and beaten down by life. Chloe tried not to look at her as she walked by, but she didn’t continue on her way. Instead, she stopped in front of the two of them.

“Please,” she begged, “my friend’s car just broke down on the highway. She’s stranded and just needs some money for gas. I don’t have any money on me, I was wondering if you could spare five dollars so I can get her some gas.” She paused and looked at the two actors seated in front of the theatre. Jason was the first to speak.

“If you tell me where your friend is, I would be more than happy to go and pick her up for you and call for a tow truck.”

The haggard woman shook her head in distress. Looking on the verge of tears, she refused Jason’s help, even when he offered to call a tow truck for her friend. She continued to shake her head, and turned away, a look of misery and confusion on her face. “No, that’s alright. Don’t worry about it,” she said.

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Chloe watched silently as the woman walked away. She felt guilty that she had said nothing, done nothing. Something tugged at her heartstrings. It wasn’t the way the woman was dressed, the way she looked, or the way she spoke. It was something deeper than all of that. Chloe could ignore the clothes, her haggard appearance, and the tear-jerker story. What she couldn’t ignore was the deep feeling inside as if Someone greater was telling her to help this woman. As Chloe tried to shrug off the feeling and tell herself that the woman was probably a drug addict, bumming money to get her next high, the woman turned around and came back.

“Please,” she urged, folding her hands as if in prayer, “I just need five dollars. That is all, just five dollars.” Chloe glanced at Jason, who sat calmly and silently, unaware of the turmoil in Chloe’s soul at that moment.

“Wait here,” Chloe said. “I’ll be right back.” Getting up from the bench, she went into the theatre to get her purse. With a five dollar bill in her hand, she went back outside. “Here,” she said, holding the bill out toward the stranger.

The woman looked up at Chloe with eyes that glowed with gratitude. “Thank you so much. You are very kind,” she gushed. From the corner of Chloe’s eye she could see Jason’s face. He looked incredulously at her, disappointed as if she had been one of his own children. The look was almost too much for Chloe. She began to feel guilty again, but this time it was for following that gut feeling, not for ignoring it.

The woman clutched the five dollar bill as if her life depended on it, and continued to thank Chloe profusely. “I live just a few houses down,” she pointed down the sidewalk. “I promise that I will pay you back.”

Chloe nodded, doubtfully, “Sure.”

“I promise,” she looked Chloe in the eyes, “that I will come back to the theatre and I will find you to pay you back.” With that, she was gone.

Chloe took her seat next to Jason, ostentatiously picking up her script. “Where were we?”

Jason shook his head. “How could you do that?” he asked. “Do you realize that she’s a druggie and that you are just feeding her habit?”

Suddenly Chloe felt like one of Jason’s four little children, receiving a lecture. “But she said that she lives just down the road. I’m sure that her friend really does need the money for gas,” she said lamely, not believing her own words.

“Her friend?” Jason scolded. “How much gas is she going to get for five dollars, Chloe? Besides, if she did have a stranded friend, she would have taken me up on the offer to pick up her friend, or at least to call for help. She didn’t accept either. She just kept harping on the money. She’s probably hitting up other people on the street for more money, using the same story.”

“Well, five dollars isn’t going to break me,” she said quietly, feeling more ashamed than ever, wondering what had possibly come over her to make her want to give that woman money. She knew better than that. She had been raised to help the poor by providing them with food, clothing, or helping them to a church or a shelter that would be able to aid them. From a very young age she had been taught to never give money to a beggar.

“Five dollars may not break you,” Jason said in his stern, fatherly voice, “but it feeds her habit. You saw her. She was clearly a crack-head.”

Chloe never felt so ashamed of herself. Even she could see that the woman’s haggard look had to be the appearance of years of substance abuse. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t know what came over me. I just felt like I had to help her. It was as if someone was telling me to help her.”
“Well,” Jason softened, “we’ve all made mistakes like this. Next time you’ll be stronger.”

While Chloe had hoped that Jason would keep the embarrassing story between the two of them, he did not, and ended up telling the entire cast about how Chloe helped the “crackhead.” It became a big joke in the theatre and for two weeks she was picked on and teased for giving money to Church Hill’s druggie. Fortunately for Chloe, rehearsals got more serious as the months carried on, and by the time the show started, no one even remembered the situation. By the time the show began, even Chloe had forgotten that it had ever happened.

When the final weekend of shows came around in July, Chloe had been greeting friends in the lobby of the theatre when one of the musicians for the show approached her.

“Chloe, there is a woman outside looking for you. She says she owes you money.”

Chloe looked at the girl in confusion. “Owes me money?” The girl shrugged. “That’s what she said. She described someone that sounded like you, so I assumed she meant you. She’s waiting outside.”

Chloe made her way through the crowd that had gathered in the lobby and out to the front doors of the theatre. Standing outside among the throng of people that mingled there, was the same woman who had begged for the five dollars several months before. Chloe couldn’t believe that the woman had actually returned. Before she even had time to fully comprehend the situation, the woman held out her hand, and thrust a folded up piece of paper into Chloe’s fingers. It was a five dollar bill.

“Thank you so much for helping my friend and me,” the woman said. She still looked as haggard and worn out as she had the first time Chloe had met her. She still had dark circles under her eyes, and was still dressed in old, hand-me-down looking clothes, but there was a glow in her eyes that hadn’t been there before. Chloe felt as if all the thanks she would ever need was in that stranger’s eyes. Chloe managed to mumble something about being glad to help. But then, the woman was gone, lost in the crowd. Chloe looked down at the money that she still held in her hands, wondering if what had happened was really possible. Had a stranger, a possible drug addict, actually gone out of her way to track down another total stranger just to return a meager five dollars? Chloe smiled.

“Maybe,” she thought to herself, “Just maybe, she was more than just a stranger.” She had always believed in a higher power and angels, but was it possible that an angel had come to Earth, taken the form of a drug-addicted beggar, just to borrow five dollars and then return it? What was the point?

Chloe looked out the windows of her car at the students walking across campus, entering and exiting the buildings. “Yes, it’s possible,” she said to herself, answering her own question from so many years before. Maybe the woman was just a stranger out to do a good deed. If so, she had renewed Chloe’s faith in human nature on many occasions whenever she chanced to look back on the moment. But then she always returned to her original question. What if she had been more than just a stranger? What was the purpose?

“Perhaps,” she thought, still clutching the bill, “she was there for moments such as this. Perhaps she was there, not only to help me believe in people again, but to renew my faith in something, or Someone greater.”

~Beacon~
One Real Thing
by James P. Cutter IV

I feel ignored in all discussions
They are laughing about something
And I’m stuck with asking why
My life isn’t my own production

I fell into the black
I want to break out
I hate the waiting
A life like this is suffocating
I need a way out
Will I ever come back

Can my angels hear me
They seemed to disappear
Or have I driven them away too

No matter what the future brings
I need one real thing to hope for

Eastern Shore Girl
by Michelle Cappa

She’s an Eastern Shore Girl,
It ain’t hard to tell.
Just cross her once
She’ll give you hell.

She can transform a bushel
From blue to red
And bait up a trotline
Fore the kids leave bed.

She talks real slow
With a slight Twang.
It ain’t a southern drawl
Just an Eastern Shore thang.

An Eastern Shore Girl
Likes her truck lifted up.
Her heart always has room
For a new Lab pup.

Her body is tan
From the Eastern Shore sun,
But she doesn’t lay out,
Ain’t from having fun.

She doesn’t need a recipe
For making crab cakes,
And, yes, they’re pan fried
NEVER broiled or baked.

While working two jobs,
She runs soft crab floats,
And still manages the time
To go check on the boat.

She’ll make many a trip
Up and down the road
Taking crabs to market.
It never gets old.

Her eyes are sharp
And for very good reason:
Pointing out doublers
Or large bucks in deer season.

The Eastern Shore Girl
Always puts family first,
Finding a minute to relax.
Cold Bud’ll quench her thirst.

She knows where to find
A good crabbing spot
Or a place to skinny dip
When the summer gets hot.

The Eastern Shore Girl
Works hard her whole life.
Mother, daughter, sister, friend
An Eastern Shore Wife.
The cafeteria is as chaotic and rambunctious as ever,” Lana murmured to herself as she stopped to take a breath. She saw an empty table in a quiet corner across the room, and walked over to it, her cork flip flops smacking the floor and her long floral dress whipping around her legs. Once Lana reached the empty table, she sat down with a thump, dodging people and ducking to avoid being hit by basketballs being tossed across the room. If the room did not smell like last week’s fish tacos, Lana would have confused the ruckus for gym class. Lana grimaced in pain, but once she saw her friends walking across the cafeteria towards her, she smoothed out her face, and gripped a table leg.

Seth ruffled Lana’s hair as he rounded the table to sit across from her, with Drew right behind him and May sat down next to her, words spilling from her mouth before she even sat down.

“Geez girl! Did you lose more weight since last night?! You need to gain some weight before you wither away!” May said, poking Lana’s side.

“Yeah okay, I’ll stock up on butter and McDonald’s on my way home. And as I gain weight, you’ll have to stop hanging all over those boys!” Lana retorted with a laugh.

“I think that would be impossible for her to do!” Seth said with a knowing grin, which May returned with a glare.

“If looks could kill, you’d be six feet under by now,” Drew said, nudging Seth.

“All joking aside, you look really rough today. Is everything okay?” May asked Lana, concern shining in her eyes.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m perfectly fine. I’m just really tired, and had to dodge all sorts of things just walking across this room,” Lana said with a slight grin, her hands back in her lap.
“Okay, just don’t push yourself too hard,” Drew said. “Or else we’ll be even more worried about you,” Seth added.

“Oh, all of you, there’s nothing to worry about. The results will be in tomorrow, and I’m positive I’ll be able to do all sorts of normal things again.” Lana asserted with determination in her voice.

The loud bang of lunch trays hitting the floor and yelling reached the quiet corner. The four at the table turned around to see a large circle forming in the middle of the room.

“Not again! Seriously, what entertainment do they find in fighting or watching a fight? It’s absolutely primal!” Lana said, disgusted with the scene.

“Well, let’s go get a teacher to break it up,” May said after glancing around the cafeteria to see no authority in the room.

Lana, May, Seth and Drew got up from the table, Lana a little slower and clumsier than the rest to leave the room. As they were leaving, they walked past the circle, and Drew glanced at the fight to see who was involved.

“Holy crap! It’s Brock and Tyron against Mikey! That is totally unfair! They’ll pulverize him!” he exclaimed.

Lana whipped around, fury in her eyes. “What?! How could they do something like that?!” She marched over to the circle and pushed her way through. Once she reached the center, she squared herself in front of Mikey.

“What has gotten into you two?! Ganging up on a boy who wouldn’t hurt a fly? And you call yourself men; you two are nothing more than schoolyard bullies!” Lana shouted, frustrated and angry.

“Don’t involve yourself in this, Lana. This has nothing to do with you!” Brock claimed, spit flying out with his every word.

“Yeah Lana, this has nothing to do with you. Why don’t you go hug a tree or something?” Tyron snickered.

“My personal values and opinions have nothing to do with this. All that matters right now is that you are picking an unfair fight with Mikey!” Lana scolded.

“Aw man!” “Why did little Miss Goodie-goodie Hippie girl have to ruin the fight?” “This is worthless!” “It’s over anyway, here comes Mr. Garza.” Various disappointed comments floated around cafeteria from the students who were waiting for an exciting moment in the school day.

Mr. Garza, the school principal, grabbed Brock and Tyron and steered them towards his office after giving Lana a brief nod of thanks.

Lana stared at the retreating bodies, and blinked rapidly as she started to feel light-headed. Mikey lurched onto her arm, spouting praises worthy of a war hero; Lana did not hear... looks before they moved to join her. She heard brief shouts, and her name screamed in a female’s voice as she saw the floor and the ceiling become one.

~B~
**My Moon**
by Bette Lucas

Although it is actually possible, I do not wish to travel to my “home place,” which happens to be the moon. However, I love to look up at that happy face when it is full. My favorite spot from which to observe the magic radiance from Heaven is the beach, any beach as long as it hugs the Atlantic Ocean. My idea of a perfect moment is when I find myself on the beach just as the full harvest moon appears to rise from the deep depths of the dark sea. That particular moon is usually huge and lusciously orange in late September into October. Wherever I am, whether I am sitting, standing, or walking, I love how it playfully dances the quick step across the waves straight to me. I think of it as mine.

When I was a teenager growing up on the farm, we would get a substantial snowstorm nearly every year in January or February. By chance, or by God’s plan, the storm coincided within days of the full moon. I liked to ride my black horse, Ebony, across the open fields while it watched over us and lighted our way much like daylight. Ebony’s hooves would pack full of snow after a while and become dangerously round on the bottom, the snow compressing into ice. I would dismount often, pull out my hoof pick and pluck the ice carefully from each hoof in turn. Then our midnight walk would resume. Although it was always bitterly cold, I enjoyed the time as our breaths puffed out in ghostly mist before us. The only sounds in the night were Ebony’s crunching hooves in the snow and the jingle of her chin-strap chain as we walked along, her head bobbing.

Another poignantly memorable moment in my life was spent sitting in the car with my mom watching a cold winter moon rise from the sea. We had parked in the open ground-

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**Elephant in the Room**
by Abigail Schaffer

So different from each other,
That is who we are.
You make jokes and come off crass,
But they don’t know you like I do.
The first time I heard you speak,
Looking into your eyes,
I knew you were so much more than they would ever know.
They could never understand a soul like yours.
Then one day I realized that you are so much like my old friend.
And I cried,
Because he is dead,
But here you are with me.
You held back at first,
Wouldn’t talk about your past,
Didn’t want a hug or a caress.
But then, something changed.
In the darkness, you accepted my hand.
It started off small, but became much larger.
Your touch was no longer unfamiliar,
And mine was not unwelcome.
We walked arm-in-arm,
Just you and me.
It was beautiful,
No molds to pin us in.
Then one day, you asked.
It was the question I knew had to come.
I did not know the answer.
Suddenly, there was an elephant in the room,
And neither of us knew its name.
level garage of a beach-front condo complex. Mom passed away about eighteen months ago, but that time spent with her lives on vividly in my heart as she marveled at the beauty of the giant orb looming golden over the ocean. A few months later I repeated the moment with my sister. To this day, she still remarks about the glorious memory of that lunar lantern hanging over the ocean as if she had never seen it before that night. Perhaps she hadn’t.

During one of my rare summertime overnight trips to Ocean City, I walked down to the beach to watch the moonrise at around 9:30 p.m. Quietly and discreetly, I hid in the deep dark shadow of the beach trash receptacle for safety’s sake so that I might avoid getting mugged, or worse, since I was alone. I watched for what seemed like hours, hunkered down in the protective shadow. The sky was a deep rich teal blue and so was the ocean. As I was about to leave, my attention was again drawn to the bright face smiling down at me with its silvery light from high in the sky’s darkness. A few light clouds began to scuttle across, dimming the face from time to time. A slight breeze ruffled the sea just enough to scatter the reflection into firefly blinks. I stayed a little longer. Those watchful hours were so memorable that months later I painted the scene in oils on canvas from memory.

The first time I saw it after September 11, 2001 was also a mentionable time for me. Living on the farm while taking care of my mother as she was ill, I took the time to walk down to the dock after she was snugly tucked in bed. A silvery globe already hung in the sky just for me. As always, it danced its way straight to me across the Wye River as it rose above the old orchard to the east and followed me as I walked onto the dock. I stretched out on my belly, reached down with my hand and playfully flung water at the sparkling reflection. The dancing lights, deterred only for a moment, returned to flash and shine back at me with a staccato message, “All is well tonight,” making me laugh out loud. A mute swan silently paddled like a white sentinel gliding across the river from the small cove that was his home, curious to see what disturbed his night. I called him by name, “Fwanny. Hi Fwanny.” Recognizing my voice, he turned and swam back to his family, satisfied that the intruder in the night was not a threat. I rolled over onto my back and looked up at the millions of stars that blanketed the sky. Suddenly, I realized that many of those twinkling lights were not stars. They were planes and satellites. The sky was alive with them. As I watched, relaxed on the dock, the blinking aircraft made me wonder how many of them were friends to America and how many were enemies, a thought that would not have occurred to me a month or so earlier.

Living in town these days forces me to seek out the moon because the streetlights flood the darkness with light, obscuring the brightness from easy sight. Consequently, I do not see my radiant friend as often as I would like. Life changes over the years despite my efforts to maintain some sort of continuity, which is what that happy face in its dark sky offers to me, along with a sense of mental well-being. Although many changes have taken place over the years, it is always there, no matter what my frame of mind may be. The glow makes life better, a “constant” that never ages while life seems to slither away without my noticing. After all these years, I love the moon and how it makes me feel: safe and secure, as if all is well with the world...still.

~B~
Sweet Abandonment  
by Rachel Perro

I touch the sky and my thoughts become one with the rain.  
You have left again. There is no sign of you.  
You have vanished like the thick, gray clouds after a storm.  
I still feel your presence, however. When the sun’s rays kiss  
My face, I feel as though it is your lips kissing mine.

I looked for you the other day. I was walking on the beach  
And was hypnotized by the aggressive waves that were moving  
Toward the shore. I thought I saw your face several times,  
But each time it was a mere hallucination. Perhaps if I  
Melt with the rain or linger beside our secret place, maybe  
then you will become real to me.

I hope you miss me, wherever you are. I hope the  
Heavens show you the way home. If you have abandoned  
Your mortality, then I will see you in a little while.

I will, however, embrace this life without you.  
I will swim in the deep blue sea and lick a thousand  
Ice cream cones. I will drink champagne on top of the  
Eiffel Tower. I will fall in love again and silently  
Put my thoughts of you to rest. I am, somehow;  
Alright now. Goodbye. May the angels lead you. Goodbye.

Horus’ Bride  
by Dimitra Neonakis

Sharon was glad to be standing in her steamy bathroom in Thebes after a long day of excavating deep in the shadowy recesses of the Valley of Kings. She peeled off her musty work clothes and climbed into the cleansing spray. She allowed the water to wash over her for a few minutes, sluicing away ancient dust. She had painstakingly cleaned a wealth of images of Horus, the hawk headed son of Osiris, and she felt suffused with thousands of years of grit and grime. The soil must have permeated every pore. Lathering a bar of coconut soap, she wondered if she’d ever be clean again.

The creamy suds smelled lovely and their scent lifted her spirits as she smoothed them over her skin. She was looking forward to her date tonight with a handsome young Egyptologist from the Cairo museum. Just thinking of Rakim’s sultry chocolate eyes made her feel dirty all over again, in a nice and raunchy way. She hoped that this time she would be able to balance a relationship with her hectic days in the field. Rakim had all of the qualities she was seeking in a man; he was kind, intelligent, conservative and, of course, there was the divine physique and mysterious Arabic allure. She tingled at the thought.

Wait a minute, that tingling was centered on her collarbone, which seemed anatomically incorrect for the lusty sentiment. Reflexively she reached up and brushed her clavicle with slender fingers. Something stiff and light met her inquiring touch. Damned if it didn’t feel like a quill. Odd, maybe a piece of down from her feather pillow had gotten into her denim work shirt and adhered itself to her skin as she sweated through her day. She tried to brush it away but it wouldn’t budge. She stepped out of the shower and toweled off, rubbing vigorously at the spot to which the stubborn feather was stuck. Still she
could not dislodge the offending fluff. Irritated that this might make her late for her rendezvous, she wiped the steam off the full length mirror and stared in horror at her chest. The feather was not stuck to her; it appeared to be growing from her skin. And it itched abominably.

Rational thought escaped her for a few moments. Had she awakened a curse? Would she become fully fledged and spend her life in the Middle Eastern equivalent of a roving freak show? No, this was crazy - this was not a Kafka novel - this was Thebes in the 21st century. There was no such thing as a mummy’s curse. People don’t suddenly sprout breast feathers. It had been a searing day in the desert; maybe she was having a heat induced hallucination. Sharon took a few deep breaths and decided on a black silk dress with wide straps which would cover the place she imagined the feather to be. If she didn’t think about the hallucination or expose the spot, perhaps it would cease to plague her.

Though the lamb dinner was delicious and the palm wine pleasantly intoxicating, Sharon found herself unable to lose herself in Rakim’s eyes as she usually did. She was having difficulty meeting his gaze at all. She couldn’t stop mentally surveying every inch of her skin for any sign of the tell-tale tingle.

“You seem distracted my little fennec fox,” Rakim said. “Whatever is the matter? I thought you found a treasure trove of rare statuary today, yet you are as jumpy as when your dig had been failing for years and your grant money was about to be cut off.”

“I’m sorry; it was just so damn hot today. I think I over-exerted myself excavating and have a touch of heat stroke. I’m not feeling too well to be honest with you.”

Sunflower
by Eugenia Fitzgerald
**Hot Air Balloon**
by Kari Grimlin

**Kites Around the World**
by Ashley Houtz
“It’s the mummy’s curse! The mummy’s curse always gets you when you finally stumble upon an invaluable cache!” Rakim teased.

“No, no, it’s the evil eye!” she countered.

“Oh yes, your new research assistant would do anything to get your job,” Rakim said.

“I’m not so sure she wouldn’t. Who could resist the glamour of digging in the mold and dust for years on end before finding anything of significance?”

“Ah, but this find is significant, is it not? Maybe now comes the glamour, the accolades, the book deals.”

“Yeah, and the chauffeured Rolls Royce. Your team hasn’t authenticated anything yet. I don’t want to count my chickens before they hatch.” Sharon winced at her choice of cliché; it cut a little too close to the bone right now. Sharon began to feel phantom tingling all over her scapulae and abdomen as Rakim swept her into an embrace and nearly carried her to the dance floor.

“You must celebrate your good fortune,” he said, twirling her until she felt giddy and just a little bit nauseous.

“I’m sorry Rakim. I just really feel sick, heat stroke. I don’t mean to spoil the lovely evening you planned, but I think I need to go home and lie down. Would you mind driving me?”

“Anything for the Queen of the Nile. I would bear you on a palanquin if you so desired.”

“Your car will be fine, but it’s a charming thought.”

“Your wish is my command. I’ll bring it around.”

After Rakim left the table Sharon indulged herself in a good long scratch. She hoped she was just drunk and exhausted, and those really weren’t more quills she was feeling.

After Rakim escorted her to her apartment, Sharon closed the door and leaned against it. Immediately she felt a very unwelcome and uncomfortable sensation in her shoulders.
She peeled off her dress and discovered flight feathers, not to mention the light dusting of downy feathers that had sprouted all over her chest and belly. She opened her mouth to scream but the sound that emerged was the cry of a raptor. Sharon stared in the mirror in disbelief for two hours before falling into an exhausted and uneasy sleep.

Her disappearance was reported a few days later, when her colleagues came to investigate her uncharacteristic absence from the field. Terrorists or art thieves were suspected. The report did not include the fact that a large hawk had flown free when they had opened the door to her flat. She had talked about getting a pet after all, and these scientists sometimes kept exotic ones.

~ B ~

View from the Natchez
by Erin Kelley
I write these lines
Then rewrite them,
Dozens and dozens of times
Try to make the pattern flow
Seems I’ve used every lyrical word I know
And anything I try to draw
Gets messy, and sloppy–
Not worth sharing at all
Even when I try to speak
My voice is quiet
My words are weak
Now, time is not on my side
I need to find something good,
I have to look inside
But now I’m facing the truth
I can’t create anything—Not one thing
As beautiful as you
I met Stella when I was sixteen years old. I’ll never forget the first time I saw her mangled face.

I was awakened by an orderly around 2 am. He said, “Let me have your arm, I’m here to get some blood.” I replied with a sarcastic comment, something involving his mother, and I felt the fluorescent lights burning through my eyelids as soon as he flicked on the switch. Before I had a chance to realize what was going on, he said, “Give me your arm so you can go back to sleep.”

I gave him my right arm and he asked for the left. In my fugue state, I handed over my left arm. He grinned a little too widely when he snapped the tourniquet around my arm. I looked just in time to see a 10 gauge needle heading straight for my already exposed vein. I screamed and pushed his arm away. The next thing I knew, he was on top of me with a pillow over my face.

He plunged the needle hard into the clotting mass of open flesh on my inner elbow. I saw my life in the stars when I passed out from the pain. When I opened my eyes, he was gone.

My arm was left interrupted and seething, a pulsating vein beneath masking tape and a gauze square folded into quarters. All I could think was, “asshole.”

I gained vertical stance and decided to find him. I knew it would end with a needle in my ass but at that point, I didn’t really care. A mind full of tranquilizers was preferable over the tiny, yellowing room. It smelled like piss in the corner and the closet didn’t have doors or a bar.

I imagined someone probably had hung themselves from a clothing bar in a place like this, maybe a few people. I bet they...
used hoody-strings or shoelaces. Maybe they used a bandanna... I couldn’t figure out why mine had been confiscated.

I was allowed to have a hot steaming drink but not my bandanna. I could have burned the skin off of someone if I’d wanted too. I didn’t though because I knew that when I did, I wouldn’t see another cup of coffee for weeks.

I ran fast down the hall, but the orderly was nowhere in sight. I decided to go check on the suicide watch people, the new ones. Tomorrow, one of them would be my roommate. The empty bed across the room beckoned to one of these newly imprisoned victims of their own mortality, sleeping on a vomit stained floor.

I walked soft on the cold, eggshell colored tile for fear of drawing great attention to myself. Something didn’t feel quite right.

At the end of the hallway, I peered to the right. Normally I would see three or four new people sleeping with a pancake shaped pillow and an old hospital blanket. Nothing could have prepared me for what happened next.

I met a pair of amber colored eyes. They had been waiting for me; I was sure of this. My blood ran cold upon meeting the gaze. The hopelessness I saw in the tiny pupils was overwhelming. I turned my back to run and she was already there, in my face.

Her cheeks were covered in scars that I assumed to be from a knife fight long ago. Her hair was scarce, hanging in thin blond patches over a scabbed, pale scalp. Her mouth was twisted into a sinister grin, and I could see that the few teeth she had were rotted.

The sockets where her eyes should be were disfigured at best, no eyelashes I could see, and it looked like someone had removed part of the left eyelid. I gagged reflexively and she sniffed me... hard. From my fingers to my shoulders and up my neck. She smelled my hair and my nose and my mouth. I was terrified but all I could do was stand still.

She took my hand in hers and all I could feel were scabs; her cold skin was the minority among the regenerating flesh. For this, I had to give her some credit. I looked down at the hand holding mine and gagged again when I realized she had no fingernails.

Suddenly, I was calm. I felt like someone had once again given me an extra dose of Thorazine to silence me.

When I closed my eyes, I saw the most beautiful girl. She had long blonde hair and a perfect smile. Her slender figure was perfectly proportioned, and she sat in a shiny wooden chair made of cherry wood. She spoke my name, “Rayne,” and I took a step toward her. She told me that she’d been waiting for me and that I smelled so good.

A shadowy man came from somewhere behind her holding a large knife. As he raised it behind her head, all I could do was open my mouth. The scream caught in my lungs when I saw him plunge the knife straight into the back of her head. When she fell forward, there was no blood but she was no longer beautiful.

Her hair had turned gray and her face was the color of ash. Her eyes were the same brilliant amber, and I still couldn’t figure out why they looked so familiar. She told me not to worry, that she would never leave me and no one would hurt me. The wind howled and she said, “so long for now.” Her body turned to dust and as I took the first breath in that place, her remnants filled my lungs. I sputtered and snapped back into reality.

I took my hand back from her and ran as fast as I could to my room. I slammed the door and jumped onto the plastic covered mattress like it was home. I put my face under my pillow and thought about what I had just seen. I decided to blame the seemingly extraordinary amount of drugs I had been given the night before and called it a nightmare. Before I knew it, I was back to sleep.

~B~
To Discriminate is to create Hate
Whether it be over religion or over weight.
To expose the differences to hurt someone else,
Only to cover up something in the true self.
So different, yet so one and the same.
If there’s one thing in this world I wish I could tame,
It’s the cruelty in the heart, soul, and the mind.
In this world today it’s the blind leadin’ the blind.
Equality and rights, they were all a dream.
Brought together by the people to mend the seam.
To Bridge the gap, between white and black.
To get rid of the stereotypes that held us back.

Discrimination is truly a scar,
But to look at a scar is to know who you are.
An open wound, infected and bad,
It hurts my heart and makes me mad.
When I see all these groups standing at the door,
Holding bats, telling me who to vote for,
Then is that really Fair?
One of me, against that big-muscled pair
Trying to promote peace without using it.
To me it sounds like you’re bein’ a hypocrit.
If you do what you say, and say what you do,
Like Dr. King, others will follow you.
So I leave you with this, just one bit of advice,
Whoever you meet in this world
Don’t discriminate, be nice.
winter wind wildly whips
through untanned skin and loveless lips
that ration ice cold sips
of the tasteless gas which fuels us.

statuesque bodies silently stand
feet perched softly on broken land
eyes and ears are made of sand
so they do not understand
their hourglass has no bottom.

he who moves must wear a suit
to reach the branch with bitter fruit
their electronic brains compute
dollar signs that must dilute
their forced and colorless pursuit
to dig up power.

he who sees must change his view
to disregard and see right through
what is beautiful and strange and new
to see only what he must do
search for what he thinks is true
by lying.

I tell you now you can be free
by allowing what you hear and see
remain untouched by them and her
and he
who lead their lives so bitterly
do not predict what will be
it is unknown by you and them and me
you cannot be bound by society
if you do not live life silently
but in this moment.

clerk or nurse or king or bum
it matters not where you are from
still tomorrow may not come

echoes merely resonate
the passing hour does not wait
you cannot guess your doom or fate
find love before it is too late
passion does not hesitate
let it fill you.
Where do you turn
In the colorless haze,
When you’ve been lost
For endless days?
The stench, the grief,
The guilt and pain;
All to lose,
And naught to gain.
A starless night
Where darkness thrives,
To steal the joy
In all our lives.
With no escape
Your soul is chained,
And on your hands
The blood is stained.
Final surrender,
Utter despair;
Your cries are carried
Through cloudless air.

And suddenly,
With weary eyes,
You gaze up to
The starless skies…
And high above,
There is great light –
It pierces darkness,
Kills the night.
Forgiveness washes
All the sin,
The hopelessness
So deep within.
The wounds are healed,
The guilt is gone,
For all the shadows
Fade in the dawn.
For Love has come,
Your soul is free
To live in peace
Eternally.

Redemption
by Ashley Houtz

Skull
by John Whaley
Shifting Tides
by James P. Cutter IV

Throughout the phases of life there will be many obstacles,
Some that will challenge our hearts and souls to the core,
And it is our choice that will lead us along our different ways;
But there will be a time when all of us are lured back to the Shore
Where we all rejoice and are gently pulled into the sea floor
By reassuring waves that are under the command of the loving Bay.

Untitled
by Falynn Jones
Let me start out by saying, I am a resilient person. That is to say that, in fact, I am a moron. I am a stubborn woman who allows the same negative garbage in my life to continue to walk all over me. At least that is until I find my proverbial “nuts” and I am finally able to gather the strength to crawl out of my newest mess. Sounds crazy, doesn’t it? Insanity is described as doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result. I can truly say that I have a firm grip on this insanity. I completely understand it, and revert to it on an almost casual basis.

I say all that to say this; Tank and I were a pair in insanity. We fit together like a moth and a porch light. He was the attractive one, and I was simply banging my head into him again and again without much more result than a splitting headache. I walked out on Tank three times, and I can tell you, I was a professional packer. Truly I had a team of family members, trucks, and boxes, and was out of the house in less than two hours. You wouldn’t find a stray sock to remember me by, I swear. However, leaving was painful, not only in the physical sense of the fact that I experienced serious back pain from all the heavy box lifting, but more so in the way that my life was never quite the same again. Those very same boxes, packed with all the same belongings, were heavy with the sludgy residue of grief and regrets. We were certainly filled with grief. Tank was my best friend, and I was his. We had made each other our “everything,” which meant that when all was said and done, we left with nothing.

Our “everything” began in a completely destructive nature. We were two relative strangers who rushed into a relationship with one another and who fell rather hard into that black hole called “Love.” Naturally, the next step in any relationship of this caliber was to have a child, and the first time I left was after we saw that adorable blue plus sign. This isn’t to say that our son wasn’t wanted, or even talked about, but just another point to show our moronic and hormone-induced decision-making processes. Since we were already making such wonderful decisions, we quickly decided to come back together and find a place of our own to call home. We moved into a tiny, run-down trailer a few months later. I remember it fondly. The carpet was brown shag, and my daughter’s room was the size of a closet, literally. It was our first home and we were so excited to bring our new son into it. In June of 2008, our son was born. He was beautiful, healthy, and completely exhausting. The fact that I was the one who had been hurt so badly. Yet I still braced myself for more pain and held him up once more.

That whole moving home thing lasted about three weeks, but the betrayal and pain had a firm foothold in us then. Before I knew it we were making more insane decisions, and signed a lease on a much bigger house, making ourselves busy doing renovations. You see, the house wasn’t quite ready to live in, not with the wooden shelves in the fridge and the large gaping holes in the ceilings. I will say that the mice were very creative in the places they chose to die, as it was always an enjoyable moment to have one randomly fall onto my feet from the swinging cabinet door. The colorful children’s graffiti added a
metal ornaments clanking together in the box in my hands. My feet were lead blocks on the creaking steps, and my stomach was in my throat. I had left Tank many times, but that was the first time I ever walked away from him.

For weeks my phone rang, and I knew on the other end was a drunk voice, clogged with anger, regrets and grief. Sometimes I answered it and tried to be the woman he needed me to be. I tried once again to be the friend, the companion. I tried to take the blame and to listen to him as he spilled his grief over me, except that grief poured over me like sour milk. I couldn’t be that girl anymore. Perhaps we were both resilient, too much so. Both of us were moronic little moths, slamming into the light again and again.

I know now that sometimes having someone in my life involves holding that person up when he or she is down. However, if I am the only one doing the holding, eventually my arms get tired. Things happened in life that brought me to my knees, but the important thing is to know that I have someone there who can lift me back up. I remembered all this with pain and with hope. I moved on, slowly, but steadily. I enrolled in college, got a job, or two, or three. I met someone amazing, whose arms seemed to never tire and who reached out for me just as often as I did him. As for Tank, I couldn’t begin to tell you. That friendship was lost in the rubble of the relationship, which in all aspects was probably for the best. It was past time for someone to turn out the light.

~B~
Inspired
by Bette Lucas

It was a tree unlike any I had ever seen
With its boas of feathery leaves of green.
Its branches hung low, barely touching the ground.
The still breeze waved them with nary a sound.

I was six years old when she drew that tree.
It opened a portal, and I began to see
That I could get lost and yet be found
In an artist’s world of colors ’round.

To paint pictures with oils and words alike,
To be creative makes happiness spike.
When I am finished and the day is done,
I lie back on my pillow and sigh, “Thanks, Mom.”

Motherly Love
by Christine Engel
From my sanctuary I can hear the muted sounds of the world around me. During her parties, I can faintly hear the music and phony laughter of her company. I can practically smell their designer perfume through the thin wooden walls. The two small windows on the front and side of the shed are covered, probably by tastefully color-coordinated boards or Picasso sketches or something. I have been trying to keep track of the days, but I don’t have a calendar, so it’s difficult. I know I have been here for about three years, which would make me 18. I can’t wait to get out of here so I can smoke a cigarette and buy some porn and vote for President. Sometimes I think that the world outside of my box is more fucked up than my predicament.

“Ben, honey! It’s almost time to leave for your recital!”

Cracks. I see them everywhere, in the wall in the corner of my bedroom, in the sidewalk in front of my house, in the earth on the land before the park. The world is falling apart; I can feel it getting lighter. It’s going to blow away in pieces like the ashes of a smoldering log. The world is falling apart and she is worried about my piano recital. It’s a windy day, we are all in danger, I can feel everything shifting, moving, changing, anticipating the moment when the wind slithers under all the cracks and whisks us all into oblivion.

“I, I know mom... I’m getting my stuff; I’ll be out in a minute,”

But I can’t. I can’t go out there. The more we move, the looser it gets. We need to stay in one place, we need to prepare, migrate to stable ground or perhaps go to the ocean...

“We are going to be late! Do you have any idea how angry your grandmother will be if you walk on that stage a moment
behind schedule? Do you understand how dreadful that will make me look? Ben!”

I grab my music and suit coat and run to the car. I take my seat beside hers, and ride to the concert hall in silence. She looks straight ahead, lips pursed, angry. I know better than to speak to her. Time melts as I walk hazily through the wind to the ancient building. Everyone says it is “beautiful,” “historic,” but I think it’s an old dinosaur that’s full of cracks.

“And now ladies and gentlemen, Benjamin Morrissey Richards!”

The applause pieced together to produce an irritating, held-out rattle as I walked to the stage. I sat, trying not to look down. There are thirty-seven cracks on the old stage. Thirty-seven. I begin to play ‘Valse Romantique’ by Debussy, and the light music emanates from the insides of the instrument to fill the theatre. To fill the cracks. The sound is filling the cracks, pushing them apart slowly, creating bigger gaps, bigger spaces, loosening the stability, loosening the grip, pulling, pushing, forcing, filling. I can feel it. I can feel the stage being lifted, very slightly, as I play. There is nothing I can do. The cracks begin to laugh at me, they are hungry and I am feeding them. The notes on the paper go to my brain to my nerves to my finger to the big, ivory key to the hammer in the piano to make a noise that rises and falls and fills them. I’m helping them to destroy the Earth, and they’re laughing about it.

“Go ahead and play, you stupid boy. We’re listening.”

Laughing, chuckling, howling... how does the audience not hear them? My fingers move carelessly, the piece is easy, I can’t stop. She will never forgive me. But she won’t be able to punish me when we are all thrust into nothingness.

They laugh, the music swells, the cracks widen, I close my eyes...

“Stop! I know what you’re doing; you’re not going to take me or any other goddamn person in here with you! I’m not going to let you; I’m not going to help you! So shut up, shut up, SHUT UP!”

I stand by the piano, breathing heavily, waiting for the audience to applaud, to thank me for saving them. They stare, bewildered, the air. Filling the cracks.

“Don’t you see? You all need to leave, it’s not safe here! We need to find stable ground, we need to sail to solid land... we cannot stay here! Can’t you see?”

They begin to laugh, they laugh with the cracks. They are the cracks. All of them, they don’t care if I blow away. They don’t care about me. I begin to scream. I curse them, I stomp on the cracks, I beg them to stop. Their laughter only grows. I have only one choice.

“I don’t know how else to convince you,” I shakily pull out a 9mm Parabellum and direct it into the crowd, invisible to me by the blinding stage lights.

I hear gasps, screams, shouting. They won’t be quiet! Why won’t they be quiet? I’ve told them the circumstances and still they won’t shut up! I put the pistol to my head. It ... by a layer of fresh sweat. The noise reverberates as I apply pressure, my head begins to throb and lighten. I am terrified. My hands shake as the tip of the gun slides up and down the side of my skull. Is that what it will take? The sound and light blur together before my strained eyes, I tense my index finger, gently, gently pressing against the clammy metal trigger...

Beep beep beep...

“He’s in critical condition, ma’am. You can’t see him right now, we are doing everything...”

Beep beep beep...
“His eyes are moving! Ben? Ben! Can you hear me? Shit, we’re losing him! Ben! Stay with us, Ben…”

I hear words and voices, but they don’t mean anything. They might as well be speaking Japanese. I don’t feel any pain, I don’t feel anything. I am sitting in a school desk inside my brain, surrounded by nothing but a small TV screen that’s producing ambiguous words and indistinct images. Someone keeps flipping through the channels, alternating between a hectic reality show, a Lifetime movie, and static. Finally it stops. It’s my mother.

“They’re taking you to a goddamn psych ward,” she pauses, paces between a hospital bed and a large window. It’s dark outside. “My name is ruined; I’m the woman with the insane son. Where did I go wrong? I did everything for you! Everything! And this is how you repay me?”

I sit. I know better than to speak.

“I’m not letting them. You don’t deserve that.”

I see the shadows of two large men drift through the door. She turns to them.

“Just go.”

I hear the door softly close, I feel needles being torn out of my arm. One of them puts something in my mouth, but I wasn’t going to speak anyway. One of them lifts me out of the bed, and the other opens the window. I feel the cold of the night, and the darkness flows out of the TV screen to flood my head.

Silence.

I woke up here, in the shed in my backyard. I never knew what it was there for, but now I feel like it’s been waiting for me my entire life. There is a metal door in the back, where I am given food every other day. Occasionally I will get a hot meal, whenever she feels a pang of guilt. Not often. I haven’t really tried to escape; I’ve just learned to live like this. I have everything I need, a small refrigerator, a toilet, a sink, a hose, a cot. I don’t know when she will let me out, but it doesn’t matter. People outside of these walls don’t listen to me. I might as well not exist. I like it in here, anyway.

There isn’t a single crack.

~J~
Delilah Dog - My Four-legged Beastie
by Bridget Miller (photo & poem)

Not a close of bond as between a child and their mother,
Not the same lack of respect as between master and animal,
So often do they bear the beast of burden of loving us
even when we have let their bowl go empty;
there needs to be a new language to explain
the relationship between man & our four-legged beasties.