

Eastern's Arts Society Presents
EAGLE'S NEST



Volume II

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Photographic Evidence

By Ryan Zirk

Days spent cataloging images,
memories in the database,
some sorrowful, others splendid,
and even lost ones,
thrown away in the first place.

Often at times,
too cowardly to look,
an empty page
in a closing book.

Or frightfully scribbling,
the etchings on a film strip,
the words like moving pictures,
taking escape routes on roundabout trips.

The script doctor
fixing pages in a comic book,
written with my own vernacular,
of catchphrases like rusty hooks.

Reporting all there is to see,
finding purpose in this life,
all these blemishes that make up me,
cut the doubters down with sardonic strife.

Compiling memories within this life,
Till the end comes,
“Tell me, there is a light.”

“Window” by Stacy Vance

Waking Up

By Christopher Brown

I woke to a slight tug on the blanket and a whisper from my side of the bed on the right. I opened my eyes slowly to find that I was being watched closely. My son, two-years-old, with his innocent gaze, stood at the bedside with his smile piercing through the early morning light. “Christopher,” I thought to myself, his bright blue eyes staring with a child’s innocence, with his bright blond hair waving in the mechanically created air. I looked at him and smiled and he smiled back. It was time to wake up.

I swung my feet to the floor slowly and rubbed the sleep from my eyes. My boy stepped closer and reached for my hand, his little fingers barely fitting into my palm. He navigated us to the bedroom door, past the land mines of small cars and trucks, and was careful not to step on any other invisible objects.

“Come now,” Christopher stated, “Bob Bob Pants.”

His words made me crack a smile as I groggily walked to the television. I picked up the remote and flipped through until I found the channel I was looking for. My son sat patiently on the edge of the sofa and waited for the search to come to a conclusion. I found the channel and watched his eyes light up as he spotted the familiar yellow square character that children know a little too well.

“BOB BOB PANTS!” he shouted out.

I felt a slight sense of accomplishment. My son seemed ecstatic as he stared into the screen of the television trying to sing along to the theme song. I left him to his own devices as I walked into the kitchen to try to find something at which he wouldn’t turn his nose up.

“Are you hungry, son?” I asked as I sat next to him trying to curb his attention, “Do you want to eat?”

“No, watch Bob Bob Pants, Daddy,” he said quickly.

I wasn’t surprised at all due to the fact that it was the same thing he always said when you asked him. I sat the bowl of his favorite cereal, Cookie Crisp, on his little round table. After the cartoon came to a close, he threw his legs over the edge of the couch and took fast but small steps to the kitchen. I turned and followed closely.



“Bob Bob No Pants” By Christopher Brown

“Eat Daddy,” he said as he pointed to the milk less cereal on his table, “Up, up.”

I reached down and picked him up to sit him in his seat. He got overexcited and squealed like he’d had his first taste of ice cream again.

After the cereal had vacated his Spider-Man bowl, he started to kick his chair signaling me to retrieve him from it. I picked him up and held him a second. I asked if he was ready for his bath. Surprisingly, he said yes which is a rare occurrence, since his favorite word seemed to be no. His small feet patted to the bathroom. I followed the trail of clothes he’d stripped off from the bathroom door to the tub. I turned the knobs to fill the tub as he finally settled down and patiently waited for his time. I poured his bubbles into the rushing water. His expression changed from “What’s that you’re pouring in my water?” to “Oh yea, I like that stuff,” as he watched the bubbles take over the surface. He looked at me as if to make sure it was OK to take his first step into the warm water. I poured a small bit of his shampoo onto his head and started to wash his sun-colored hair. He tilted his head back to get ready for the rinse. He helped as best he could with lifting his small feet and hands without direction to do so. After I got him clean, I emptied the bathtub, dried him off, and added his diaper. We went out to the living room afterwards.

He pointed to his mother’s direction without saying a word, as if he believed I could read his mind. I walked to the door and sat him down.

“Go get your Mommy,” I told him. His face lit up again as he ran into the room chanting the word “Mommy.” He crawled up on the bed and got a small grip on the blanket to tug. His mother was already wise to his game. She sprang up as fast as she could and scared him. I walked away from the giggles and into the living room to sit down, knowing that this morning had gone smoothly and relaxed. My shift was now over, and it was her turn to take up the rest of the morning’s chores until his attention would again be diverted back to me. I’d have to wait until the next morning for him to wake me up again.

Puzzled and Framed

By Alycia Dahmer

Wails from an orange cat greet the ears of Mrs. Coleman. She slowly moves towards the left edge of the bed and lets her feet dangle like a kid fishing on the end of a dock. Boxes piled upon boxes border a small pathway meandering through the cluttered bedroom. Jigsaw puzzles and picture frames are everywhere. Only the pathway offers a view of the cracking wooden floors; every other square inch is covered with cardboard boxes. Slowly lowering herself to the floor, Mrs. Coleman puts on her slippers and the jingle jangle of twenty-seven sterling silver bracelets echo through the cramped space.

“Alright, Gator, let’s get you some evaporated milk. You’re so grouchy in the morning if you don’t get your milk. Why can’t you give an old lady a bit of rest? Today’s a Monday, though, and I needed to get up early anyway. I’ll miss all the good stuff if I get started too late. Cone on down, Gator, you’re the first contestant on *The Milk is Right*.”

After dressing, Mrs. Coleman walks down the pathway and heads down the stairs. Gator follows and thumps his tail against the crates lining the stairwell. Mrs. Coleman opens the refrigerator and pours a small amount of milk on a chipped tea plate. Gator purrs while he licks the milk.

“I like that Bob Barker. I’m glad he stopped dying his hair. He’s more sophisticated with the white hair. I don’t know who he thought he was fooling. When Mr. Coleman was his age, he had no hair. Mr. Barker should just be happy he’s got hair instead of trying to dye it like some old blue haired lady. Ain’t that right Gator?”

Gator continues to lean over the plate and just licks. Every time Mrs. Crites moves her left arm, her bracelets jingle like a bell on a cat’s collar.

“See you later, Gatorade. Your bowl is full of food, and I won’t be back till after lunch. Don’t pee on Mr. Coleman’s robe again. I’ll lock you in the basement if you do.”

Gator jumps on the recliner and kneads a blanket as Mrs. Coleman turns on the television.

“I’ll leave the television on. The reception is bad; we can only get channel 3 now. Make sure you catch *The Price is Right*. See who wins the showcase showdown. Maybe if I’m back by two o’clock, I’ll fool with the antenna, so we can watch an old rerun of *Hee Haw*. That’s our favorite.”

Mrs. Coleman walks out the front door and down the sidewalk. The grass in the yard is knee high. Boxes of assorted knick knacks fill up the back seat of her station wagon. She pulls out of the driveway without looking for traffic and heads down Liberty Street.

“Now should I start on Dogwood or Chestnut today? We’ll go to Dogwood first. The Warners are always throwing away something good. Mrs. Warner is crazy. She doesn’t know what’s valuable. Every Monday there’s something in her trash that I wouldn’t throw away in a million years.”

Mrs. Coleman’s car pulls up to the curb in front of the Warner house. A young girl looks out the front window. Mrs. Coleman opens up the hatchback and grabs an empty box.

“Mom, she’s here! Hurry up. I want to see which one she takes. You know she’ll take the jigsaw puzzle. Did you put the puzzle and frames in a grocery bag like you did last Monday?”

“Yes, Cassidy. I did it last night before I went to bed. I don’t know if I can continue scrounging up these puzzles. You know I stopped at a couple yard sales this weekend just to check and see if they had anything I thought she might like. I think I’m going crazy. It’s been a couple months.”

“You can’t stop now. I love Mondays. Who would have thought that trash day would be my favorite day of the week? I’m just happy it happened over summer break or else I would have been in school and missed it.”

“Don’t say that, Cassidy.”

“I didn’t mean it like that. Let’s get out there before she leaves.”

“Alright, but mind your manners, missy. If you ask any questions today, you’ll find yourself back inside looking out that window.”

“OK Mom. I just want to know why she wears all those bracelets.”

“It’s none of your business, Cassidy.”

Mrs. Warner grabs Cassidy’s hand, and they walk outside. Mrs. Coleman hears the door open and waves to the young girl. Cassidy giggles and pulls her mother down the sidewalk.

“Well, well, well. If it isn’t Miss Cassidy. Up early again I see. I hope you’re getting enough sleep. Young ladies need their sleep.”

“Mom makes me go to bed early on Sunday. She says if I’m going to be up early every Monday morning, I need to go to bed before I normally do.”

“Listen to your mother. She’s always right.”

“Hello, Mrs. Coleman. How are you feeling today?”

“I got nothing to complain about. It’s summer, and that’s better than winter. My joints don’t like the cold weather.”

“I don’t blame you. The older I get the more I hate the winter. Have any luck so far?”

“I usually stop here first. You always throw away the best stuff.”

“Check out the brown paper bag Mrs. Coleman! I think there might be something in there you’ll like.”

“Is that right, Miss Cassidy? I believe I’ll take your word for it.”

Mrs. Coleman reaches down and inspects the bag. There are a couple wooden frames she likes, and she puts them in her box. She reaches down to the bottom of the bag and pulls out a canister. Her eyes scan the label.

“An Evel Knievel jigsaw puzzle. Why on God’s green earth would you throw away a perfectly good puzzle?”

Evel Knievel is one of our favorites. You know he's broken over a hundred bones in his body. Is there a piece missing?"

"No. I think all the pieces are there."

"I've never seen anyone throw away so much valuable trash. Don't you like jigsaw puzzles, Miss Cassidy?"

"No, not really. They take too long."

"That's the beauty of it. If they didn't take awhile, it wouldn't be worth it. You feel like you've accomplished something when you're done. When we were young, me and Mr. Coleman used to stay up all night and see if we could finish two in a night."

"What do you do with all the junk you pick up?"

"Cassidy! What did I tell you about asking questions?"

"It's fine, Mrs. Warner. Kids are curious. She didn't mean any harm."

"It's time for you to go inside Cassidy. Say good-bye to Mrs. Coleman."

"Do I have to?"

"Yes you do. I'll be inside in a couple minutes."

"Bye, Mrs. Coleman. I'll see you next Monday."

"Bye bye, Miss Cassidy. I'll be looking forward to seeing you."

Cassidy walks slowly towards the front door. She opens the door and goes back to her lookout by the window.

"Sorry about that. She just can't help asking you questions."

"She's going to be a feisty one when she grows up. She reminds me of myself when I was her age."

"I know. I don't know what's going to happen when she's a teenager."

"It's best just to enjoy the moment. No need worrying about something that ain't going to happen for awhile. You never know what's going to happen anyway."

"I guess you're right."

"You better believe it. By the way, these are some nice frames you got here. I'm going to put some pictures of Mr. Coleman in them."

“Yeah, you mentioned that a couple of weeks ago when you found some frames that you liked. You know, looking at photographs always helps you remember the good times. Yesterday, Cassidy and I were looking at some old photos of my mother. She had a heart attack too, out of nowhere.”

Mrs. Crites looks away; she has nothing to say. Instead, she instinctively grabs another bag and roots through it. She sees an old mug at the bottom of one of the other bags. Her eyes quickly widen as she reads the inscription.

“This mug is from the 1982 World’s Fair in Knoxville. Mr. Coleman and me went there. We stayed at a nice hotel and ate lots of cotton candy. The smell of cotton candy always reminds me of that weekend. I’ll see you next week, Mrs. Warner. I’ve got to go.”

A queer look flashes across Mrs. Warner’s face; she scratches her ear repeatedly.

“Drive safely, Mrs. Coleman. I’ll see you soon.”

Mrs. Coleman puts the mug in the box and heads for her car. She puts the box in the front passenger seat and heads towards Wal-Mart. She bypasses Chestnut Street.

“A 1982 World’s Fair mug. Who would have thought I would find something so great today? I’ll have plenty of time to catch *The Price is Right*.”

She finds a nice space in the parking lot and grabs her purse. She heads through the glass doors and makes her way to the photo lab. She waits in line, and finally it’s her turn.

“Hello, Mrs. Coleman. You’re early today. I’ve got your photos right here. All the negatives you brought in are in the first pack of pictures. Just like you like it.”

“Shed” by Stacy Vance



“Thanks, Tommy. I’m kinda in a rush today. I found something wonderful this morning.”

“What’s that?”

“A 1982 World’s Fair mug.”

“Well, I guess that’s great.”

“It is.”

She pays Tommy and waves good-bye. After she opens the car door and places the pictures in the box, she pulls out of the parking space without looking.

Mrs. Coleman goes upstairs and grabs one of the crates out of her bedroom. She comes back down and sits in the chair by the card table. She grabs the Evel Knievel jigsaw puzzle out of the box and dumps the pieces on the card table.

“Gator, each piece of this puzzle could represent one of Evel Knievel’s broken bones. I remember when me and Mr. Coleman watched him jump Snake River Canyon on television. He didn’t quite make it to the other side that time. I think I’ve got at least two puzzles in me today. Maybe I’ll stay up all night for good ol’ time’s sake. What do you think?”

Gator doesn’t listen. He just stretches his front paws and kneads Mr. Coleman’s recliner.

Never Seems as Deep

By Christopher Windley

You shoulder the weight of the world's warped lustful perfection,
trapped in forever exchanging definitions of another pseudo-you.
Blindly embracing the apprehension of the tale end of a wish,
filled with promises existing now within the arms of pleasure and bliss.

A dream, just short of a delusion created by the mind;
Incessantly arguing, bickering, questioning
how much of an action may be divine sense of direction--

or is it truly one of a kind?

Worlds of words collide and coalesce as unwanted chatter,
desperately diffusing to be absorbed as lethally injected gas.
No matter what happens: the accepted reflected reaction
Is to show your ass! It's easier said than done, especially
when the heart is severed--

from the act soon after to pass.

An ironically cruel joke to handle and or grasp.
What sense is there in trying not to laugh?
Although half-full, the glass is still exactly half.

Shallow bargains rise, floating atop perpetual wishing wells,
tempting clandestine curiosities with a far-fetched, limitless reach.
For inevitably paying for a personal plot in your own Hell,
the dream never seems as deep, compared to you: the sleeper lying beneath.

My Hair

By Dawn Wratchford

My hair
My make-up
Another tragic break-up
Those are my pants

That is my shirt
I need the phone
Leave me alone

I want, I need,
Give me this, give me that,
Can I go, can she stay
The constant cries of more

Stay out of my room
Slamming the door
We need another bathroom
This is like war

Three teenage girls in one house
This is like a job for Mighty Mouse
And oh, Poor momma
Is tired of all the drama.

“Girls” by Stacy Vance

Smiley Stickers

By Jane E. Bacilio

The helicopter is flying
Upside down
Piloted by
An eccentric clown
Mister and Mister
Man, she misses you, dude
Having their babies
In a plastic test tube

Justice is reeling
Her dull edge blade
She stumbles to the left
But she still gets paid
Her face resembles
Mohammad Ali
Caught in the corner
Bell rings
Round three

George Lopez
George Jefferson
Boy George, my son
George Washington
Criminals in black aprons
They have all the guns

Apple pickers
Welfare kids with
Smiley stickers
Uncle Sam's
Artificial ticker
No Dreamers left
Now that's the kicker

Why do you Roe your boat
In a wading pool?
Government paid you
To go back to school
Pocket the money
Join the circus for free
Take horticulture lessons
Learn to grow weeds

I go to the beach
And what do I see
Spic and Span
All over the TV
Politically right
Politically wrong
Lady Liberty
Wears a thong

Fraudulent preachers
Breaking all the rules
Compromise, no lies
Thread off the spools
Bibles glued shut
What to believe
Judas Iscariot
Hypocrisy

No milk
No honey
America,
What's funny?
You might as well play
With monopoly money
The baby's nose
Is stuffy and runny

"Seneca Rocks" by Stacy Vance



The Crayon Box

By: Jane E Bacilio

Thud! Thud! Thud! The unrelenting steps of determination marched forward. Jimmy's long, lanky legs kept rhythm to the cadence he was repeating in his head, "Left; left; left; right, left." Over and over again his beat pushed him to complete his five mile hike to Gant's Orchard. A car sped by him and sent a kaleidoscope of autumn leaves his way. The September morning's pavement sizzled like the bacon his mama had made him for breakfast.

"Hey, Jimmy, what's up?" hollered his buddy, Bobby, from across the gravel lot where he had parked his ten year old '53 Chevy.

"Same old, same old, how about you?" Jimmy slightly raised his brow.

"Can't complain," Bobby answered running his hand across the hood of his ride and tapping it two times with his left hand.

"Do you know which lot we're in today?" asked Jimmy as he glanced around at the arriving workers.

"I think we're in the north lot. It looks nice and full," grinned Bobby as he twirled the keys to his car on his right index finger before shoving them into his blue jean's front pocket.

"Good," agreed Jimmy as he eyed his buddy's baby blue Bel Air.

The morning's dew had dampened the fruit trees with a wet kiss. The cool moisture soaked into Jimmy's long-sleeved flannel shirt. He picked with passion. One bucket, two buckets, three buckets full! He was singing, "Oh, Carol!" while he worked. That year the apples had come in good. The red, green and gold balls decorated the orchard trees like it was Christmas, and the sparkle of love in Jimmy's eyes was like the star on top of the tree.

"Gee-Wiz, can you give it a rest?" teased Bobby from the treetop across the row.

"Leave him alone! The boy's in love," interjected a nearby co-worker.

“You’re just jealous because nobody’s singing, ‘I want to be Bobby’s Girl!’” laughed Jimmy almost slipping off the wet ladder.

Thump! Thump! Thump-thump! The picking crew laughed so hard the apples started falling out of the trees. “Watch out below,” hollered the chuckling workers.

“Well, we’ll see who’s singing the loudest when her sister, Janet, is riding shot-gun in my coupe,” swayed Bobby’s head from side to side. It looked like a hurricane had just hit his tree.

Jimmy and Bobby had been friends ever since Mrs. Brown made them stand in opposite corners in first-grade for fighting over the crayon box. Bobby was a year older, but Jimmy towered over him by a good four inches. Theirs was always a love-hate relationship. Jimmy liked the Orioles; Bobby liked the Yankees. Bobby thought that Jerry Lee Lewis was the King of Rock; Jimmy was a devoted Elvis fan. They hadn’t really ever fought since the “crayon” incident, but now Bobby had something that Jimmy wanted: a car.

They worked in silence for the remainder of the day.

October 20, 1963 was the date on the sales receipt from Dillow’s Deals. Jimmy strut to the driver’s side door of his brand “new used” 1950 black Chevy with the white top. Today was his seventeenth birthday. He had worked really hard to earn the \$200 for the car and was so excited that he wouldn’t have to walk the long, uneven country road anymore.

The next day at work was a normal day. He climbed his ladder, picked his apples, and carried his bushels to the big bin over and over again. Work had been fairly boring since Bobby had quit several weeks ago to go to a better job. The hot sun sapped him of his strength. Finally 5 PM arrived and Jimmy was finished for the day. As he was climbing the stairs to his house on 4th Avenue, he reached into his pocket and felt the cold steel key graze his hand. Unbelievable, he had worked all day and was so tired that he forgot that he had his new car in the parking lot. He was going to have to walk the five miles back to pick it up.



“Dandelion” by Laura Mongold

“Seven-Two-Eight-Five-Five-Five,” he recited the number aloud as his trembling hand marked each one. He hesitated with his index finger in the last digit before closing his eyes and dialing.

“Hello” answered a familiar voice. “Hello, is there anyone there?”

“Oh, oh yeah, hi,” replied Jimmy. “Are you busy?”

“No, not really. Why?” Bobby inquired.

“Can you give me a ride? I left my car at the parking lot at work,” was his red-faced reply.

“Cool, you got a new car? What model is it? Where are you at?” asked Bobby.

“I’m home,” shrieked Jimmy’s voice with embarrassment, “I forgot that I had it!” Laughter warped the phone lines and penetrated Jimmy’s house. Jimmy shook his head from side to side, but he couldn’t contain himself and cracked up laughing, too. Jimmy and Bobby had been friends ever since Mrs. Brown made them stand in opposite corners in first-grade for fighting over the crayon box.

PAINTEERS'



"Gravitas" by
Rachael Hubbard.
Acrylic and Oil on Board



"As I Lay Dying" by Rachael Hubbard. Acrylic and Oil on Board

PORTFOLIO



“On My Mind” by Rachael Hubbard. Oil on Canvas



“Untitled” by Serenity Gavette. Acrylic, Oil and Watercolor on Canvas



“You Don't Know Me” by Rachael Hubbard. Acrylic and Oil on Board.

The Artist as a Man

By Ryan Zirk

The artist as a man was at best a stray, an outcast. After the Great Depression had descended upon the U.S., he was forced back across the churning sea to his country of origin. He found himself holed up in the depths of his mind. Often at times he would gaze out over the drifting waters as the fishing boats and barges sounded their horns, departing the harbor. The stars that lit the darkening sky overhead were reflected in the trembling waves like a floating, worried fire. The wind reached deep down into the nearby wheat fields and carried their aromas over the hillsides in pleasant waves. The distant chatter of the townsfolk in the cafes, skittering in droves throughout the streets, set the man's mind at ease, quietly comforting his loneliness vicariously. He sat on a hillside, pen in hand, sketching out the countryside in a blueprint for a future canvas. He sketched by candlelight, huddled near a small flame, and as he intermittently looked up at the dancing flame, he took notice of its energy and gained something from it. His hands worked steadily, delicately connecting each line to its counterpart, each one just as important as the next. With great scrutiny and precise placement, everything began to align itself with one another until finally, he could rest. His sketch was complete.

In a small café near the man's rooming house, they served oily mud in stained mugs and passed it off as coffee. The warmth of the drink slid down into his belly and blanketed his soul. He thought about the packs of wild-eyed wanderers cackling in the streets with nowhere to go, and he was glad he had the murky water. He spooned sugar into his cup and supped its warmth slowly, feeling its presence and knowing that even if it emptied too soon, he still had a few small coins in his pocket for more. After the second cup, he pulled up his collar and pushed open the door of the café to greet the early morning air with fresh, rejuvenated eyes blinking under the lamplight of the street.

The streets had emptied, leaving only the lost and tired ones with no place warm to skulk off to. They lounged in dank alleys and sipped pints of cheap bourbon to warm their tired bones. Making his way to the small rooming house where he stayed, he staggered, wavering, and nearly tripped over a small man sleeping under a pile of broken down boxes in the side street.



"Old Man" by Stacy Vance

"Pardon," the man said, brushing the dust from his trousers.

There was no reply from the sleeping man. It occurred suddenly to the artist that the man was either dead or passed out drunk. Now, he hurriedly made his way up the front courtyard steps, through the thickly cut oak door, and up the creaking stairs that had seen the bottom of many hobnailed boots. The old woman at the end of the hall poked her head out of her doorway, inquiringly and inquisitive. Her eyes were a dull faded blue, almost gray. The light that had once held her gaze was frazzled, no longer filled and incandescent.

"I'll not have any trouble tonight! I won't think twice about throwing you out on your head into the street. There are plenty of good, god-fearing tenants who would just love a room. They wouldn't stay out all hours of the night either!"

"I beg pardon, mom; I'll be off to bed now."

The old woman pierced his soul with the fervor of her needlepoint gaze as she looked on intently.

"Did you forget? The rent's overdue, and I need it for the shop. I've got to eat! I've got a boarding house to run! You expect I ought to let you live here for free while all my other tenants pay promptly and treat me with respect? Every day that passes is a direct insult to my kindness!"

"I'm sorry. Please, I'll have it for you tomorrow. Please calm down, you'll wake the others. Goodnight."

He shut the door. The man took off his dingy woolen pea coat and draped it on the hook that hung from the wall. Soon, the old woman beat on the door, shuddering its frame and latch.

"You're a bum!" She screamed, "Either you pay or you leave!"

The artist as a man was a coward. He put his weary head in his hands and wept. The old woman continued to beat on the door with an incessant knocking that pounded like a hammer in his head. Upon opening the door, the woman's sour breath blew his hair back in a big puff, as white spittle flew from the corners of her mouth and intermingled with the tears streaming down his face.

"Madam, please! Please!" He cried, "Just give me one more day to get the rent. I have an art dealer that is interested in one of my paintings. It's sure to fetch more than the rent's worth!" He pleaded with the old woman.

"You, a painter," the old woman scoffed. "The infantile doodling of a social miscreant, a bum who sits in the wheat fields daydreaming instead of contributing to society! I should have known the moment you landed on my stoop begging for a handout that you'd be nothing but trouble. But I seen to it as my Christian duty to help, but no more! One more day and I'll change the locks and call for the authorities. One more day and you're some other poor soul's problem!"

The old woman scowled, sucking in her lips, and bounded off down the dimly lit hall, in a blazing fury of disheveled lunacy. The door to her room slammed shut as the walls wavered, shuttering.

"Cantankerous old whore," the man muttered to himself with an anxiety in his lips that made his soul uneasy in its uncertain ambivalence.

"How will I ever sell this painting?"

The man's heart was unable to grant him rest as he broke into a sticky, permeating sweat that wrapped his thin, wool blanket around his restless legs like a serpent squeezing the life out of its prey before consuming it.

The sun had yet to ascend the hillsides of the country as the icy morning air cut the man's throat with tiny crystal knives. He pulled up the collar of his coat and greeted the day with heavy, sandbagged eyes that stung dully and a yellowed, coffee-stained smile. His passing shadow was mirrored in the frozen pools of dumped bath water as the streets were outlined in silver glass. He had clutched in his slender, rigid fingers the only real canvas he owned, since he hadn't any coins for supplies proper. Most of his work was scrawled on thrown out items, discarded window panes, bits of wood, and whatever else he pilfered from the rubbish heaps at the ends of every back alley in the salty harbor town.

Since most of the art collectors were well-to-do Frenchman, he sauntered across the wharf to the historic district. The sun had slowly climbed the foothills and now lit the terrace and the breath from under the man's mustache. Presently his stomach had sucked in on itself, for it had been the day before when he'd last eaten. The artist as a man was quite poor; when turning out his trouser pockets he produced the equivalent of forty cents American and two lint balls.

The artist as a man was not at all sure of himself. He was always second guessing his current place in life, never quite sure where he belonged among all the dime store hustlers and disease-ridden prostitutes. A lingering notion inside his subconscious told him that he belonged not in the taverns and brothels that lined the grey streets, or with the aristocrats that frequented the upscale establishments, far out of the alleys and ditches. Certainly, a serf such as the artist as a man, belonged not in the art galleries, each proprietor stating, "It just doesn't fit in the gallery. There is no color!" Nay, he could not give his painting away.

His natural instinct of self-preservation kept him from making the lonely trek back to the landlady and her weathered yet warm rooming house. The sun had long since descended the mountains and covered the rolling foothills in a thick blanket of darkness. The sky, much the same as the spark of light in the man's eyes, had darkened. As he lingered in the side alley next to the familiar café, he sent the canvas flying up onto a festering rubbish heap in the corner. His painting now lay among discarded meat pies, blackened coffee grounds, and waited on the scurrying steps of rats hidden in the depths of its stench.

Around the corner and into the warmth of the café he walked. The café where he often drank his muddied coffee water was empty with the exception of a lonely man in the corner table watching his breath in the warm vapors of his drink. His sunken and hollowed eyes peered out from the darkness; the years of the lengthy lingering days were etched in the tiny wrinkles of his face. His hair had grayed long ago and now he looked tired, aimless. The old man appeared faintly familiar to the artist, arising interest in the lingering notion that somehow he knew him.

The artist, as a man, had never been good at presenting himself. The old Dutchwoman who stood behind the bar looked at him from behind her beady, glazed over blue eyes and spoke. Above her moving mouth, a blond patch of facial hair that was slightly noticeable danced up and down to the sound of her voice.

"What will you have sir?"

"I was wondering if you had any work. I need a job, madam. The rent's due, and my landlady won't stop hollering. If I can't find a job, I will lose my room. Is there anything available?"

"I don't know. Your beard is awfully dirty. You look a bit frightful. Could you clean yourself up? What can you do?" Her blue eyes now appeared kind and surprisingly sympathetic.



"Well," said the artist as a man timidly, "I used to wash dishes in a café quite like this one. Have you got any thing like that?"

The woman peered down at the man with a comforting look on her face that made him uncomfortable, as he finally realized just how much of a mess he appeared to be. Then, he looked down at the bar, noticed his dirty finger nails, and quickly shoved them into his pockets.

"Old Truck" by Stacy Vance

The artist as a man carried home the dingy discarded windowpane and wiped it down with an old rag he kept near his workspace. He went over to the foot of his bed where the bottle of wine sat and pulled the bottle close to his lips; its contents were nearly empty. He sucked at the bottle desperately and in irritation rolled it to the corner of his room where it remained spinning and then stopped.

* * * * *

All about the floor empty tubes of oil paint and a mess of sketches and etchings littered the space, their dismally closed eyes no longer exchanged energetic inquiries as to their exact use. The paint, like the bottle of wine, had diminished, as had the flicker of light in the artist's eyes, and the room held much darkness in its absence. He sat at the foot of the bed and held his left shoe in his hands, taking an interest in the holes, where once they were whole. Once, they had kept his feet warm and never let the rigid shrapnel of cold air into their confines. At one time his shoes were whole, in the same fashion as his soul. Never had they met the unrelenting cocortex of the streets; their rough exterior never penetrated in its strategically stitched stiffness. It wasn't until the wear of the road and the hard bitten cold had weakened their state that they began to unfurl, their woven wonders succumbing to the harsh realities of this world; a man simply cannot live in broken shoes. It was then that the artist as a man had a revelation of sorts and he thought, "Just as a man cannot live in broken shoes, so too can he not live in a broken drea, trampled under hoof and foot, beaten in exasperation, the cries of tired eyes never fall upon ears."

The artist as a man felt defeat in his heart. He reached for a cup of muddled paint-water and kicked it disdainfully. All over the pale blue walls of his tiny room hung the paintings that no French art dealer could ever appreciate. He took one down off its respectable hook and held it there, in his rigid fingers until the sheer force he used crumpled the hammered frame, splintering into a hundred different fragments. It laid there at his feet like a deteriorated vessel at the bottom of the sea, completely destroyed.

The artist pulled another painting from the wall and smashed it to bits in a furious rage; his anger and desperation seeped from his pores, from the depths of his writhing and discontent soul. Soon, the blue walls of his room were barren, his floor now an encumbrance upon his painting and productivity. He piled the debris high into an empty barrel outside the rooming house, doused the remnants of each labor of love in turpentine, and struck a match. The artist watched the iresome endeavors of his truest art, the baring of his tortured soul, now enveloped in flames, an expression of creativity in ritualistic reverberation.

"Now, they are truly beautiful," he said to himself as the flames danced, kicked, and hissed.

"Now they're beautiful."



"Creek" by Stacy Vance



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Photo By Stacy Vance

